**Elmar Kuhn, keynote for Alma Mater Europaea – European Campus Maribor, 7.12.2018**

*Is Europe on the right way or has it lost its internal compass and orientation? Is a university the right place to change Europe’s future? After 10 successful years of Alma Mater Maribor we have to look back and to look forward. An intercultural attempt to understand the mechanism of contemporary societies.*

Excellency President Toblak, dear Ludvig, Excellences and Representatives of Government and Parliament, public life and arts. Esteemed colleagues and especially HELLO to you, the students of Alma Mater Europaea – European Campus Maribor: You are the hope for a peaceful and free Europe and its future.

I speak about “Education is the key for a prosperous Europe in peace and freedom”. But that’s only half of what I want to speak about. The other half is “the inevitable role of ethics and religions for the future of Europe’s development”.

Slovenia is so rich by its traditions and culture. Especially I myself remember on the kranjska klobasa, this wonderful sausage you can find everywhere in Slovenia. But like all sausages the klobasa has 2 dead ends. And I know nobody who would love to eat the ends instead of the sausage.

It’s the same with societies. The well tasting part of society is the good and tolerant mixture of politics, economics and religions. Neglecting this triangle of interdependences causes a lot of troubles. As we see in the middle east and also in huge parts of Asia like Pakistan or Myanmar, picking out politics and religions, especially one religion only, brings struggles, intolerance and bad economic development. That leads to extremism and poverty. It doesn’t matter which religion politics choose for to marry with, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism…. When this happens we see the fall down of economy, the end of a free public dialogue, the persecution of Christians, Hindi or Muslims by the major religion in the state. So this is one of the dead ends of the sausage, a dead end for the development of civil society.

The other dead end of the sausage is a society, where politic is mainly interested in economy, and where economical and financial necessities rule the society. In Europe we had 70 years of peace – in the European union. The rest of Europe felt into wars and poverty. The welfare of the European union was built up by the equidistance of politics, economics and religions in plural. In this climate of freedom, solidarity and tolerance a society grew up with economic welfare, cultural and social activities and visionary concepts for a better future.

In 2007 the world financial crises ended a lot of these dreams and showed to us, that this equidistance of politics, economy and religions was destroyed. One player was kicked off from the civil society playground: The religions.

What happened: More and more our society was set into freedom with no limits. Everything was allowed, a process which started with the sexual revolution in the 1970th. It was a process determined by the scripts of Wilhelm Reich *“Sexuality in the clash of cultures. The socialist restructuring of men”* from 1936[[1]](#footnote-1). This book was rediscovered and implemented by the student revolt of 1968. Reich´s main idea is that one must destroy the family in order to destroy the capitalist social order, that is, the social order with the right of freedom and property.

More and more the part of the religions failed to become an equal part in society. And the growing Muslim population in Europe after 1970 was not helpful. In contrary: Because Islam promotes religious laws (the Sharia) as unchangeable part of the political system, Muslims couldn´t arrange with the secular politics in Europe. They failed to understand the role of religions as integral but not dominating part in the European society. Instead of bringing Muslim spiritual traditions and values into the European context, with tolerance and respect towards secular and Christian ways of life, they organized their own parallel society inside Europe and urged ultimately politics to respect everywhere their halal dietary laws. In Vienna of today the secular and Christian pupils in school and kindergarten have to eat only halal school meals: pasta asciutta, Wiener Schnitzel or klobasa were no longer allowed. By this example of urging the own religious standard to everybody but at the same time rejecting the political system, the role of religions in the European civil society system was minimized. No longer religious and ethical expertise’s were asked for their advice, politics and economy joined to lead Europe by themselves. But this brought us to the other dead end of the sausage.

In society we lost ethical standards, because an unquestioned libertinism is the general rule in society. Allowed is what you want and what you can pay for. Euthanasia? If you pay you get it in Europe. Sexual orientation? Do, what you want. Well there is nothing bad with respect for homosexuals or transgender. But do we really need 60 different gender identities[[2]](#footnote-2), which are offered by Facebook to its users? There is no longer an ethical standard worthwhile for everybody’s general orientation.

Exemptions are a question of tolerance, but no obligation to offer all possibilities to society as a normal way of life. Another example are the genetic manipulations which go on in the UK and other states, so that the creation of a child according to your own wishes will be reachable within a decade – if you can pay for!

But about all this we could discuss. Out of the question are two things:

The **freedom of will** and the **value-orientated** **education**

**First question: the freedom of will:**

I remember a British medical doctor. As catholic he didn’t accept to assist in the abortion of a child. Because of this he was not allowed to hold surgery hours any longer. That happens, if a society without religious values loses all orientation about fundamental human rights.

This example shows that the freedom of believe comes into troubles in Europe today. If only the wishes of economic driven hospital agenda count, the free will and faith of the doctors are eradicated.

**Second question: the value-orientated** **education:**

1. Religious education is getting to be debatable today in European states, and the direction is clear: Exclude religions from school and university! Instead of this politics initiates: nothing. No cultural ethics, no tolerance education, no value orientated lectures. So pupils go through their school career without ethics and discussion to form a proper personal identity with values and believes. So these pupils are open for anybody who gives them orientation. This might be an event culture with no content or even fundamentalist religious believes. Young Muslims like young Christians are let alone with the main questions of her life: What I am, what’s the meaning of my life? Whereto I go? Moreover, all questions to which ethics alone is not able to give satisfactory final answers. Disorientation instead of self-confidence is the result. The inability to call sth. into question makes young people vulnerable for fundamentalists who offer seemingly “easy ways” for a meaningful life.
2. Reducing pupils and students to working robots: This means, if the financial and industrial sector (the economy) urges politics to change the curricula of schools and universities to the direct needs of companies, all general educational matters get lost. In schools this means no humanistic education, no value education, no creative lectures and no training of free intellectual spirit and emotional competence.

This sounds dangerous to our civil society, but in educational systems in Asia this is getting reality. Our European welfare is directly connected to free will, rational discussion and different believes. This necessarily leads to the main principles of tolerance and respect. I fear the day when politics or companies dictate what they believe what should be tolerated and what not. As Böckenförde, the German high-judge and professor of law, always told: *“The liberal, secularized state lives from conditions which it cannot guarantee itself. ... As a liberal state it can only exist on the one hand if the freedom it grants to its citizens is regulated from within, by the moral substance of the individual and the homogeneity of society. On the other hand he cannot guarantee it with the means of legal constraint and authoritative commandment, without giving up its freedom and - on a secularized level - to fall back into the claim to totality from which it led in the confessional civil wars.”[[3]](#footnote-3)*

**But who is able to guarantee this moral substance of the individual if not the state?**

Sure it’s not religion out of its social structure. The errors of confessional persecutions and war in our past tells us that religions and confessions are not able to guarantee this freedom. The state himself depends to decisions of majorities. And we know, how intolerant the state can act as he showed us in communism and fascism. And we see the intolerance growing in European politics of today.

**Who then can guarantee the value of life and individual believes?**

**First** we have international organisms like the United Nation with, for example, the human rights declaration. But this declaration is not accepted by major parts of the world, not by the Muslim world and not by the Chinese.

**Second** we have the arts: artists were always under the warners for an open and tolerate society. But also they failed if the political power was to strong.

**Third** we have the academic life: the elite of a society should be able to warn against violations of individual rights. But often the academics failed to do so.

**So who is left?**

As I believe: the **religions in Plural**, their revelations and their theologies all together are able to identify and guarantee an education to freedom. Therefor they would have to come together, not as church structures, but as theologians and spiritual leaders. Together and as common partners of politics and economy they could advice wisely. So I hope that the world religions will be able to find a common language for peace. Pope John Paul II. began such a process with the peace talks in Assisi. If religions dare to speak with one tongue to fundamental aspects of civil society, then they would be able to fulfil their role in a fruitful equidistance of politics, economics and religions for a peaceful and prosperous society.

And now we stand here at the beginning of the celebrations for the 10th anniversary of the foundation of Alma Mater Europaea – ECM. What has all this to do with this university?

The answer is easy: Campus Maribor is an excellent example of how strong the impact of a campus could be for society. What President Toplak and is team started 10 years ago, what had been enlarged year for year, that is a proof of excellency for the whole staff and a visionary concept for students and the Slovenian society. If it is true – like I tried to point out – that the lack of ethical education produces workers but no critical civil society members. In contrary, the European Campus Maribor understands education as a chance to change society. Young students get the smell of visionary cooperation for a better, stronger and more solidary society. For to ensure this, the interdisciplinary approach of the Alma Mater was realized in the cooperation of the different departments, interreligious and intercultural efforts were made, actors of civil society were invited, international connections were initiated and last but not least arts and artists were integrated. Whoever is studying here at this Campus, breaths the air of a new und strong civil society. Education is the key for a peaceful and welfare, a free and visionary Europe. Campus Maribor lives this idea. In the name of our President Felix Unger, as Dean of class World Religion and as Secretary General of Christian Solidarity International - Austria let me congratulate to this successful story of education as best practice example about how an academic campus should be organized. You bring to life the value-orientated vision of late Cardinal König, the Co-founder of our European Academy. And you represent and teach the main principles of our Academy: Tolerance and Respect as keywords for a strong society.

10 years of hard work lay behind you. And more work lays in front of you. President Toplak, Professors and staff, and you, the students with all your abilities and your curiosity: You form the outstanding and powerful team of this European Campus Maribor with the flame of tolerance and peace in your hands. Go ahead. Our European society urgently needs ambassador for value and knowledge like You. God bless you all.

Elmar Kuhn, 7.12.2018, Maribor

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1. W. Reich, Sexualität im Kulturkampf. Zur sozialistischen Umstrukturierung des Menschen, (1936) Kopenhagen [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Vgl. http://de.wikimannia.org/60\_Geschlechtsidentitäten [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Böckenförde, Ernst-Wolfgang (1976): Staat, Gesellschaft, Freiheit. S. 60 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)