Klaus Hänsch

Former President of the European Parliament

**Memorial 2019**

Madam Vice-president,

Dear colleagues,

Ladies and Gentlemen!

Today we honour the members of our Parliament who passed away last year while serving or after serving. While listening in respectful silence to the roll call of their names, we remembered the faces and figures, the personalities and projects of our colleagues.

They came from different roots and by different roads. They carried with them different aims and ambitions. They inspired us and they irritated us with their different views and visions of our political groups and our parties, of our Parliament and of Europe.

While constructing Europe, propelling democracy and promoting peace, we developed amongst us that inspiring spirit of solidarity and friendship for which our Parliament stands.

Each of them has left their mark. Each one has made a difference: To their families and friends at home. And to us in our Parliament.

We are mourning our deceased colleagues in the presence of the families of Nicole Fontaine, Gerardo Fernandez Albor, Sean Treacy, Gerardo Gaibisso and Raffale Baldassarre. You all will understand that as a former President - and in the presence of Paul Aubert, her Husband, and Romain Lussiez, her Grandson - I keep a special remembrance of Nicole Fontaine, our President from1999 to 2002 and for many years our Vice-President who indeed has made an important difference in our Parliament.

To her and all our deceased colleagues who were with us for a part of the now 40-years-history of our Parliament paving the way for that daring experiment of a Parliament unique anywhere in the world let me pay tribute by seven reflections.

1. This Parliament is unique. Do we know that and do we think highly enough about that? It developed within one generation from debating resolutions to deciding on legislation, and from controlling the Commission to electing and co-forming it.

This Parliament should not seek to be or to become like the national parliaments. It should not match itself nor accept to be matched against the competences and procedures of National Parliaments.

It is different and it must remain different. It is the world’s first and unique project towards a Trans-state Democracy.

2. In eight weeks’ time, the citizens in the 27 Member States will vote in the ninth European Parliament elections. The way they vote will determine whether there will be more or less Europe – that is already important enough. But even more important is that they decide also whether the Union survives or starts to fall apart.

It is a 70 years history in Europe of peace, of co-operation, of mutual trust and reliability that is on stake. The European Parliament must continue to reject weariness, apathy and resignation. It must be a beacon of courage and hope – shining its light on our peoples, on Europe and on the world.

3. Our Union does not stem from another planet. It was created by very Earth-bound nation states. It is not opposed to national identities and interests, which are integral to its own identity. But it certainly must be opposed to that systemic neo-nationalism.

It must hold fast against that new, craven refusal to engage in the troubles of negotiation and to carry the burden of compromise. It must stand up against that cowardly retreat into the old blind alleys of national “superiority” and “singularity”. It must denounce those phoney masks of Euroscepticism hiding the smirking phiz of resentment and racism.

4. The more global the world becomes, the more European our continent must become. Self-appointed World leaders - I avoid naming them here - do not see in today’s Europe a partner but rather a collection of individual Member States from among which they can each choose their allies.

This is how they fuel neo-nationalist ambitions in our Union. It was here; in this Parliament that Francois Mitterrand in his great farewell speech issued the warning: “Le nationalisme, c’est la guerre”. Moving European integration forward and preventing Europe from becoming the playground of foreign powers is our new rationale for peace.

5. In the middle of the last century, Europe’s peoples started to unite *against* their self-destruction on our continent. And in this they succeeded – up to now. Today, they must stand resolutely united *for* the greater good of all Europeans and as an example for the world of freedom and the rule of law, of democracy and justice.

6. We refuse to heed the prophets of downfall – all those princes of dusk and dust.We draw courage from almost 70 years of European integration,from that road to freedom, the rule of law and democracy in Europe - unprecedented in history and freely undertaken in peace.

By this the Union has become more European and - yes - that means more difficult. The more our first and principal task at this time is to keep the Union together and to defend the rule of law and democracy.

7. Our peoples, and we, ourselves, having been mandated by them, can always find reasons to criticise the Union: That it does too much or too little. That it is too distant from citizens or too close to them.

That it is not united enough or too much united. That it demands more solidarity and showing so little.

We must answer to those critics either by changing our policies or reforming our institutions. But we must be absolutely clear about one thing: There is no mistake, no failure, and no shortcoming which can justify abandoning the Union, leaving it to collapse or even taking decisions which help to destroy it. The answer to anti-European populism is not pro- European perfectionism but steadfastness and - love.

That is in the 40. year of European elections how we honour our late colleagues: We are standing up; we continue going strong; we stay holding fast.