

Radoslaw Sikorski - Honorary Doctorate

Universidade Nova de Lisboa

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In our days Europe is so concerned with acquiring and preserving rights that is at risk of forgetting how to maintain values. Universities were, in part, a creation of European civilization to defend and maintain values.

The Honoris Causa ceremony is a unique moment for universities to remember and praise these values. The ceremony which we have just witnessed is part of our way to defend and praise European values of culture, freedom, tolerance and, above all, knowledge. Not just discovery knowledge but also shared knowledge and public knowledge, far beyond the information society.

Europe has done more for developing knowledge acquisition, globally, than any other Continent although is not, presently, the main beneficiary.

Portugal, like Poland is a nation of emigrants, temporary or permanent, that spread, even sometimes without noticing, European values. Perhaps the most important set of values were those cherished by emigrant families in distant lands.

It is interesting to note that Portugal, throughout history, was always facing the dilemma of having to choose between moving to Europe by land, and facing Spain, or moving to the Atlantic Ocean and face the unknown. In that respect the Portuguese were front runners and disseminators of Europeans values in the new worlds without a direct involvement in developing in the territorial organization of Europe. On the contrary, we are the European country with the oldest borders.

The dilemma of Poland was always different and clearly territorial: the reality of being situated between two powerful nations, Germany and Russia changed the

dilemma into a threat. And yet the Polish nation survived and thrived because, like Portugal, praised values in its deep roots.

In a metaphoric way it is possible to admit that as Portuguese sailors navigated in stormy oceans, Polish citizens navigated in equally stormy conditions in land. But now we are all in a common global territory called Europe that we must defend based on values.

Today we are here to pay tribute to a Polish citizen who believes, and defends, European values in an Atlantic perspective. The relations between Europe and the United States and the role played by the later in Central Europe were recently addressed by him in a brilliant conference given at Harvard University, last November.

In that conference, entitled “What can we do to help Ukraine follow Poland’s example?” His Excellency Marshall Sikorski submits that Eastern Europe needs a new Marshall Plan since it did not benefit from the first. And he begins by quoting US Secretary of State George Marshall who, also in a conference given in Harvard, but in 1947, stated the rules of the Marshall plan to financially sustain the reconstruction of Western Europe. This proposal to return to the past to save the future puts our Laureate in the role not just of an inspired speaker but also as influential statesman.

Let’s have no doubts: Europe needs to be rebuilt economically, and socially. If we, the Europeans, aspire to play a role in the global world we must return to our traditional allies and preserve our values of culture, freedom and, above all, knowledge.

This is the first time that Universidade Nova de Lisboa awards a Honoris Causa degree to a Polish Citizen and it is with great pleasure and, obviously, honor, that we add him to our list of outstanding laureates, reaching today the figure of 92, in 42 years of existence, from all continents, and knowledge domains. The previous one was the Peruvian Nobel Prize winner Mario Vargas Llosa, to whom we paid tribute last Summer.

Let me also pay tribute also to the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities for bringing such outstanding personalities for the Honoris Causa awards in line with other chosen in the past such as Kofi Annan and Mary Robinson to name just a few of public figures and not just outstanding academics, as we usually choose.

Let me also thank the Speaker, Professor Nuno Severiano Teixeira, for his excellent presentation of the Laureate.

This is a ceremony of celebration of values and commitments and, for that reason, it gives me also special pleasure, and honor, to greet the President of the Polish Rectors Conference (CRASP), my good friend Professor Wieslaw Banys, who came especially from Poland to attend this ceremony. I thank him deeply for this generous gesture. May I remember the Speaker that the representative members of European Countries sit alphabetically not only in Councils of Ministers but also in other European Councils.

So, for more than four years, I add the pleasure to sit in the Council of the European University Association side by side with my Polish colleagues and developed close and friendly relations with the Polish delegation. I sincerely hope and wish that this visit of Professor Wieslaw Banys will also reinforce the links between Polish and Portuguese Universities and contribute to the planning of the important joint event between CRUP and CRASP scheduled to take place at NOVA in 2016.

We have a lot to do to rebuild Europe together but I believe that steps like the one we made today are in the right direction to place universities on top of the rebuilding agenda. We just have to hope that European politicians accept universities as major partners in the process. My concern is that there is not much time left to preserve European values.

Thank you very much for your attention

António Rendas