ACHTUNG: UNVOLLSTÄNDIG!!!

Statement of the Board of Directors of the Society for the Conferring of the International Charlemagne Prize of Aachen honouring the President of the European Parliament Dr. h.c. Martin Schulz

The decision taken in 2014 regarding the new Commission and the role of the European Parliament was a historic milestone in the democratization of the EU. The foremost question, extending far beyond the person of the Commission President or other members, was whether and to what extent the vote of the electorate would influence EU decisions on posts and appointments – this in turn raising the fundamental question: What form of democracy do we want in and for the European Union? And while to this day legal experts and commentators discuss the interpretation of the Treaty of Lisbon, according to which the Council in its nomination for the President of the Commission shall "take into account" the results of the European elections, the European Parliament, actively and vocally urged by its President, has long decided this question. The Parliament has only accepted a candidate with a mandate legitimized by the people.

In tribute to his significant services on behalf of strengthening parliamentization and democratic legitimation in the European Union and in recognition of his role as an important intellectual guide for the EU, the Board of Directors of the Society for the Conferring of the International Charlemagne Prize of Aachen honours in the year 2015 the President of the European Parliament, Dr. h.c. Martin Schulz.

"Democracy needs dispute. Visibility needs dispute. Not for its own sake but in order to arrive at the best possible results. For dispute reveals alternatives….Yes, I am trying in my term of office to make the European Parliament more a locus of dispute – I'm doing this deliberately so that the gains benefit the institution as a whole, as well as European democracy." When Martin Schulz refers to his understanding of his office, it very quickly becomes clear that he intended from the outset to be a President "who, if necessary, fights to gain the executive branch's respect for the Parliament, who gets into the arena when the interests of the people are at risk", and who takes on anyone and everyone who "believes that more Europe can be achieved by less parliamentarianism". Martin Schulz is strengthening representative democracy; by taking seriously the concerns of European citizens he is reinforcing the people's identification with Europe.

Martin Schulz was born on 20 December 1955 in Hehlrath (now Eschweiler) near the German-Dutch-Belgian border. After secondary school in Würselen he completed an apprenticeship in the book trade (1975-1977), working thereafter in various bookshops and publishing houses. From 1982 to 1994 he ran his own bookshop in Würselen.

A member of the SPD since 1974, Schulz joined the Würselen City Council in 1984, winning a seat on the Social Democratic ticket. In 1987, by Council election, the 31-year-old Schulz became the youngest mayor in North-Rhine-Westphalia (up to 1988). "That time," recollects Schulz, "moulded my enthusiasm for Europe and strengthened me in my conviction to help shape and advance 'Project Europe'". In this spirit the young mayor developed the town-twinning with Morlaix, France. That the multilingual Parliament President of today is fluent in French as well as speaking English and Dutch undoubtedly stood him in good stead back then.

In 1994 Schulz won his first seat in the European Parliament, where he was initially the Socialist coordinator on the Subcommittee on Human Rights (1994-96), later coordinator on the Committee for Civil Liberties, Justice and Interior Affairs (1996-2000).

In 1999 Schulz, having stepped down as mayor, managed the SPD's European election campaign. In the same year he was elected to the Executive Committee and the Presidium of the Social Democrats. In 2000 he became chair of the 35-member SPD delegation in the European Parliament, additionally becoming in 2002 the vice-chair of the Socialist Group.

The self-image – and self-confidence – that Schulz joined to his new office became evident only a few months later when the Barroso Commission was appointed. In the parliamentary committee hearings on the Commission's Interior and Justice post, the Italian Conservative candidate Rocco Buttiglione did not secure a majority, and other candidates also failed to make a convincing showing. Despite this, Barroso initially stuck to his choice, risking a power struggle with the Parliament. Schulz together with his Green and Liberal colleagues thereupon organized a campaign of resistance and threatened to refuse approval of the entire Commission. Only a few hours before the impending vote, Barroso backed down, requesting time for a new proposal. For the first time in EU history, the Parliament had blocked a designated Commission's assumption of office and had forced a reshuffle. In the judgement of the media this was "a shift in the European balance of power", but Schulz simply called it a "victory for democracy"; and ultimately even Barroso had to acknowledge "that this Parliament… plays a vital role in the government of Europe".

After the European elections of 2009, when the man from Würselen stood again as the SPD's leading candidate, he was re-elected chair of the (renamed) Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament (S&D). On the national level he gained additional authority by virtue of his appointment as the SPD Executive Committee's representative for EU affairs. The pinnacle to date of his political career was reached on 17 January 2012 when the European Parliament elected Schulz on the first ballot to succeed Jerzy Buzek as its president. In his inaugural speech, the "powerfully eloquent European" (Jürgen Habermas on Schulz) made it clear that he would oppose "the persistent trend towards summit- fixation and renationalization" and intended to boost "negotiations on equal terms with the Council" and "to make the Parliament more visible and audible as a locus of democracy and of debate including controversy".

In his inaugural speech before the European Council, he urged that "the Parliament [should] participate in all euro summits and European summits", also broaching his ideas on introducing a transaction tax, a European rating agency and a European growth initiative.

The growing importance of the European Parliament became evident thereafter in the consultations and decisions on the 2014-2020 financial framework, bank supervision and the unified settlement mechanism, the financial transaction tax and – perhaps the most prominent example – in July 2012 the rejection by a large majority of the anti-piracy agreement (ACTA), whose wording, in the opinion of many observers, would have been an open invitation to abuse.

Schulz himself was meanwhile making his mark as one of the best-known leaders in the EU: in the awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize to the European Union, which he used for a symbolically significant visit to the island of Utoya in order to commemorate the young victims of a radical-right mass murderer a year before; in the Greek parliament which he visited only a few weeks after his election to pay tribute to the representatives of the Greek people; in addressing the Knesset where he issued a clear commitment – the EU would always stand by Israel – while by no means evading thorny issues; and repeatedly in the sessions of the European Council where he represented the interests of the only directly elected institution of the EU. Time after time he included the European people's representatives in the major EU decisions: the euro stability crises, the conflicts about the eastern European bridge-states, the wars and hostilities in the Middle East, the refugee problems – and also the peace initiatives of the Pope, the OSCE, inter alia, as well as the efforts to improve EU relations with other continents.

In all this, pitting the three major Brussels institutions against one another is by no means what Schulz has in mind: “With the persisting debates on institutions, we are merely putting ourselves at the mercy of those whose declared aim is the destruction of the EU in its present form….So I say: Even without a new European treaty or a constitutional convention and without getting into a ratification process lasting for years we can begin, within the existing framework, a relaunch of European democracy.”

In a speech at the Humboldt University in Berlin in May 2012 –elaborated in his book Der gefesselte Riese (The Shackled Giant) published a year later – Schulz described an important building-block for such a relaunch. “The crucial thing is for the European parties each to put up for the 2014 European election their leading Europe-wide candidate to stand for the post of Commission President. After the election the person with a majority in Parliament will become Commission President.”

Schulz today outstandingly represents the invigoration of European democracy.

Earlier European elections – in the polemic judgement of Jürgen Habermas – were “distorted, owing to cowardice in the face of unpopular issues, into exhibition fights about national issues, and about persons who were not even up for election”. Schulz by contrast saw the leading Europe-wide candidates as a means of advancing the European debate on European topics – a debate in which clear options for EU policy would crystallize for the voters.

“Instead of invoking the supposed ‘Europe without alternatives’ and getting deadlocked in outdated pro-and-con rituals, we should begin a debate entitled, ‘What kind of Europe do we want?’ Such a debate is future-focused rather than persisting in an attitude of mute reverence before Europe’s fateful past.”

By the time that the European Social Democratic parties jointly and officially nominated Schulz (on 1 March 2014) as their first leading candidate in EU history, he had long put the other party alliances in a tight spot pressing them to agree likewise on a European election candidate for the office of Commission President.

The German word Spitzenkandidat (top or leading candidate) spread thereafter to many European languages; and in 2014 – unlike the previous European election campaigns conducted almost exclusively on the national level – political leaders who for the first time jointly represented the European party alliances publicly debated Europe’s political direction and vied for a majority to form a Commission.

Following the victory of the EPP, Jean-Claude Juncker was accordingly elected the new Commission President. And although Martin Schulz did not achieve his personal election goal – becoming instead the first Parliament President in EU history to be elected to a second term – he was able to claim that “this has brought to a good conclusion that which we began with the process of the Spitzenkandidaten….The European Council and the European Parliament have managed together to initiate a historic and democratic turning-point in the European Union. This we did by instituting a new constitutional practice – without having to amend the European Treaties.” This constitutional practice makes the parliamentary election of the Commission President a real political election, thus giving the European executive branch a strong mandate, coming not only from the heads of state and government but also and primarily from the people and their directly elected representatives – a democratic achievement that the Parliament will not relinquish.

In the person of the President of the European Parliament, Dr. h.c. Martin Schulz, the Board of Directors of the Society for the Conferring of the International Prize of Aachen honours in the year 2015 an outstanding intellectual guide for United Europe, who has made a significant and enduring contribution to the strengthening of the Parliament, of parliamentarianism and of democratic

legitimation in the EU. President Schulz has given important impetus to the European Idea. The task before us is to strengthen this idea for the future.