



**Der Internationale  
Karlspreis zu Aachen**  
Für die Einheit Europas

**Citation by the Board of Directors of the Society  
for the Conferring of the International Charlemagne Prize of Aachen  
to the British historian and author  
Professor Timothy Garton Ash**

In recognition of his outstanding scientific and journalistic work, the Board of Directors of the Society for the Conferring of the International Charlemagne Prize of Aachen are honoured to present the award in 2017 to the historian Prof. Timothy Garton Ash, a convincing and influential English European and European Englishman who sees the United Kingdom as belonging to the European community of values and who makes valuable contributions to Europe's conception of itself; a man who argued against Brexit, who now suffers under the result, but who will continue to argue the case for a strong bond between the United Kingdom and the EU.

As a historian, Timothy Garton Ash does not evaluate the process of European integration on the basis of short-term or day-to-day political events. He sees the crisis against a background of complex interrelationships and points out that our world is going through huge transformations due to the digital revolution and digital networking, as a consequence of which the familiar order of things is being displaced. He argues for the preservation of democracy and its principles, of a liberal and open culture of debate, and for defence of the truth against lies in communication. Timothy Garton Ash stands up to the populists and simplifiers of our times and formulates ideas of how we should conduct ourselves in this globalised world. In doing so, he provides crucial impetus for the preservation of our values, like freedom, peace and democracy as well as truthfulness, tolerance, rights and self-determination.

When Timothy Garton Ash reflects on united Europe, he writes as a European who – in a mixed tone of irony and admiration – thinks that "the European Union is the worst possible Europe – apart from all the other Europes that have been tried from time to time". And he also writes "as an Englishman with a deep if often frustrated affection for our curious, mixed-up country, at once England and Britain". In short, he writes with the requisite distance of a critical observer and analyst who, nevertheless, cannot – and will not – conceal his love for a Europe united in freedom and diversity. A passionate advocate for the UK remaining in the EU, he experienced the day of the referendum on 23rd June 2016 as 'the biggest defeat of his political life'. He is an Englishman who "legally speaking [...] will cease to be [...] a European citizen in 2018 or 2019" but who "just as Britain will always remain a European country [...] will, come what may, remain a European".

"Europe has lost the plot," he was already asserting a decade ago. "As we approach the 50th anniversary of the treaty of Rome on 25th March 2007—the 50th birthday of the European economic community that became the European Union—Europe no longer knows what story it wants to tell. A shared political narrative sustained the postwar project of (west) European integration for three generations, but it has fallen apart since the end of the cold war. Most Europeans now have little idea where we're coming from; far less do we share a vision of where we want to go to. We don't know why we have an EU or what it's good for. So we urgently need a new narrative."

Not that he was in any way proposing the construction of a single shared mythology about Europe's common past. On the contrary, Europe has to face up to its own previous self, the "self-destructive, at times downright barbaric chapters in the history of European civilisation". After all, "historical knowledge and consciousness play a vital role here, but it must be honest history, showing all the wrinkles, and not mythistoire".

However, Timothy Garton Ash would not be the outstanding commuter between historiography, journalism and precise political analysis that he is if he restricted himself exclusively to history. And in fact, at that time he also proposed how Europe's new history could be told – as an honest and self-critical account of the progress that leads us from our respective pasts to the common goals of our shared future: our legacy of European values. For it is quite clear that "we cannot stay where we are. If we don't go forwards we will go backwards. Forwards not, I emphasise, to some idealised United States of Europe, but to a practical construction strong enough to weather the storm."

In a later conversation, Timothy Garton Ash names the role of the EU in the world as a further key argument that could motivate us 'for Europe'. He postulates that we are living through one of the greatest international transformations, and that the 21<sup>st</sup> century will be dominated by emerging powers like China, India and Brazil, powers that will bring their own respective historical experience and their own respective cultural heritage into the discussion of values. Here we have a clear indication of the issue on which the historian has been focusing in recent years – from his own unique angle: our interactions in a world that is becoming more and more closely connected and more and more deeply networked; a world in which we are all next-door neighbours, in which there are more telephones than people; a world that is not a "global village" but "a global city, a cosmopolis" in which practically everyone can be an author, journalist and publisher and can theoretically reach billions of people at top speed; a world in which there are more opportunities than ever before to express our own opinions – in a positive and negative sense.

Timothy Garton Ash is exploring the question of how future society will function. In this context, he initiated a broad debate on free speech (<http://freespeechdebate.com>) as a research project of the "Dahrendorf Programme for the Study of Freedom" at St Antony's College in Oxford. Ever since, scientific institutes and journalists, NGOs and private individuals – participants from all over the world – have been discussing the conflicts which arise when different beliefs collide.

This debate provided the historian with the material for the book he published in 2016 under the deceptively modest title "Free Speech", in which he translates the liberal idea of freedom of speech and freedom of opinion into the 21<sup>st</sup> century and proposes 10 principles for communication in a connected world – so to speak the answer of an eminent scientist and author to 'fake news' and 'hate speeches', to populism and simplification. The book is a passionate plea for freedom of expression, for open discourse and for a strengthening of civic society.

Timothy Garton Ash is convinced that freedom of opinion helps us to cope with diversity, with an increasingly diverse world in which everyone is connected to everyone. After all, how are we supposed to make sound political decisions if we don't know all the facts? And there's another important argument. freedom of speech helps us to search and strive for the truth.

For this pursuit of the truth, his principles offer guidelines by means of which he hopes to civilise worldwide communication. And he explains in great detail why – in spite of the increasingly toxic atmosphere on the net – he is against too strict regulation through laws or measures implemented by governments or corporations. Of course, it must be possible to legally prosecute those who endanger the lives of others through their words. But incitement should not be prosecuted by law, because this has little effect. What he is pushing for primarily is social sanctioning: robust objection in civic society and in the media. After all, without us there is no Facebook and no Google. Without us there is no business to be made with advertising. So we have to be clear about what we want. We have the capability, because we are just as important – if not even more important – than the respective governments. And if there is a core

statement in his latest publication, then it's probably Principle No. 5: "We express ourselves openly and with robust civility about all kinds of human difference."

We don't have to agree unconditionally with Timothy Garton Ash on this or other points – and, in fact, as a scientist, he quite consciously puts his principles up for further discussion – but in any event his book offers impetus and an outstanding contribution to a debate that urgently needs to be conducted in Europe and far beyond: a debate on how we are to deal with our norms and values – particularly regarding the right to freedom of speech – in a connected world. This is a debate that concerns us all if we don't want to leave the field open to populists and preachers of hate.

For himself, the incorrigible "English European", Timothy Garton Ash sees two tasks ahead in the near future which stand in a certain tension with each other. Now that the British people have decided for Brexit, he wants to do everything he can "to limit the damage to this country. Since we have predicted, in entirely good faith, that the consequences of Brexit will be disastrous, this means we have to work to prove ourselves wrong. I would be so happy if we were proved wrong. As Europeans, on the other hand, we must do everything we can to ensure the European Union learns the lessons of this stinging reverse [...]. For if the EU and the eurozone do not change, they will be engulfed too, by a thousand continental versions [of opponents of the EU]. And with all its faults, the union is still worth saving."

Today, more than ever before, shaping a common European future calls for open dialogue, and for the active participation of the many – of citizens, of people in politics and business, in culture and science. For only if the aims and expectations, the weaknesses and limitations of common policy are defined in open discourse can the people of Europe begin to believe in – and trust in – the European Union.

In the person of the historian and author Prof. Timothy Garton Ash, the Board of Directors of the Society for the Conferring of the International Charlemagne Prize of Aachen in 2017 are honouring an outstanding English scientist who, with passion and intellectual acuity, accompanies and comments the path of the European Union and gives profound thought to the community. Through his scientific and journalistic work, Timothy Garton Ash provides much-needed inspiration to meet the challenges of a global and connected world with principles that are based on profoundly European values.

## Biography:

Timothy Garton Ash was born in London on 12th July, 1955. After reading Modern History at Oxford University, his research on German resistance to Hitler led the post-graduate to the Free University of Berlin in the late 1970s – with excursions to the Humboldt University on the other side of the Iron Curtain. After studying the Third Reich at Oxford, he was fascinated by the question of what it was that made one person become a resistance fighter and the other person a collaborator. "As it happens, I didn't end up writing about the German resistance to Hitler. I discovered that, just across the Berlin Wall, living people were facing the same dilemmas of resistance or collaboration, albeit in a milder form, in communist East Germany. So instead of writing a thesis about Berlin under Hitler I wrote book about Berlin under Honecker. I went on to study the dissidents in communist-ruled central Europe, and to accompany them along the rocky path to liberation."

Torn back and forth between the hot spots Warsaw, Prague, Budapest and Berlin, the Englishman had discussions with intellectuals and influential politicians and became one of the leading chroniclers and journalistic escorts of the liberation years 1989/90. After publishing "'Und willst Du nicht mein Bruder sein...'" Die DDR heute" in 1981 and "The Polish Revolution: Solidarity" in 1983, he became famous overnight in Germany with the publication of his book "Ein Jahrhundert wird abgewählt" in 1990. Three years later, his monumental work "In Europe's Name" made him world famous. For this portrayal of half a century of German politics in the context of the East-West conflict, Timothy Garton Ash conducted extensive interviews with almost all of the players at that time, reviewed personal records and correspondence – for example of Chancellors Brandt, Schmidt and Kohl, but also of Brezhnev and Gorbachev – and made use of all accessible material right through to Stasi intelligence files.

"The Romeo File", which the Stasi opened on the young researcher himself in Berlin in the 1980s, is the subject matter of the reportage "The File: A Personal History", published by the historian in 1997. His "History of the Present", published at the millennium, in which he draws a balance of the post-communist years following 1989, and his passionate plea for a "Free World", published in 2004, both brought him widespread acclaim. In 2010, a book in German titled "Jahrhundertwende" ("Turn of the Century") was published, a collection of geopolitical reflections in which he analyses the major, often contradictory movements in the first decade of the still young 21st century.

After living for several years in Berlin - at that time still a divided city – Timothy Garton Ash took up a scientific post in 1986 at the Woodrow Wilson International Center in Washington DC (until 1987). Since 1990, the expert for Contemporary European History has been teaching at St. Antony's College in Oxford, where he directed the European Studies Centre. In 2000, he became a Senior Fellow of the Hoover Institution at renowned Stanford University in the USA. In addition to his scientific work, his other activities also include involvement in the Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences and writing regular columns for the "Guardian" – which are also published in leading European newspapers – as well as contributions for the New York Review of Books.