

Address by
Federal Chancellor Angela Merkel
at
The Concert Marking the 100th Anniversary of
The Birth of Helmuth James Graf von Moltke

Berlin, Sunday, March 11, 2007

Professor Geremek,
Archbishop,
Friends and Sponsors of New Kreisau,
Ladies and Gentlemen,
Gräfin von Moltke,

I am pleased – and very moved – that I was able to meet you personally, briefly before the start of today's event. It is a great honor for me to be able to participate in this ceremony today on the 100th anniversary of the birth of your husband, Helmuth James Graf von Moltke.

We have gathered here today to commemorate with you a man who, like few others, stood up for his convictions in resisting the Nazi regime. His resolve, his willingness to pay a sacrifice in the fight against the National-Socialist terror will never be forgotten.

What's more, Helmuth James Graf von Moltke's free democratic ideals and vision for Europe are still relevant today, on March 11, 2007 – as President of the European Council, I would say, *especially* relevant today, 100 years after his birth on March 11, 1907. They continue to serve as a warning and, above all, are a mission for us.

Helmuth James Graf von Moltke grew up in Kreisau as the eldest of five siblings. As a rising lawyer, he had many contacts to politicians and intellectuals. He voiced criticism of Hitler's rise – his courage in doing so cannot be overestimated, when we recall the period of the dictatorship. He passed up a career as a judge so as not to have to join the NSDAP.

From 1940 onward, resolute opponents of the NS regime gathered around him and his friend Peter Graf Yorck von Wartenburg and – one has to imagine this –in a time of social darkness they developed concrete plans for a democratic Germany after the end of the National Socialist dictatorship.

The Kreisau Circle, as this resistance group later became known, was among the first to think consistently in European terms. They went beyond Germany in their thinking; they thought in terms of Europe. Their idea was that Germany would be part of federative European state, a united Europe, in which Christian morals and social reform should determine politics.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

When I, as President of the European Council – having just returned from a Council meeting – when I now reflect on the fact that these ideas had already taken very concrete shape between 1940 and 1945, that these men had a vision, and when we then consider how much of that vision became a reality and how small we think today by comparison, then I think what I previously referred to as a mission should continue to be our guide when it comes to finding compromises.

Professor Geremek, you know from the perspective of the European parliament and I know from the perspective of the Council that this Europe is our future. Helmuth James Graf von Moltke knew that already then. That is the grand vision that will also continue to engage us.

In Berlin, von Moltke used his position as an expert in international law and the laws of war at the Wehrmacht High Command to practice individual resistance against the Nazi regime. Your husband, Gräfin von Moltke, prevented the shooting of hostages and the ill treatment of prisoners of war.

In January 1944, he warned a friend of that friend's imminent arrest and was consequently taken into custody himself. On January 23, 1945, Helmuth James Graf von Moltke was executed at Berlin-Plötzensee, when he was only 37 years old. In a final letter to you, Gräfin von Moltke, he wrote from prison, and I quote: "My life is complete. I can say of myself, 'He died old and sated.'" That does not change anything in the fact that I would still like to live, that I would still like to accompany you on this Earth a bit longer. But that would then require a new mission from God. The mission for which God has made me has been accomplished."

Yes, ladies and gentlemen, his mission was accomplished. But this mission was a mission that endured and continues to endure until today and – I say this quite consciously – will endure into the future. That it continues to be so actively pursued by you, Gräfin von Moltke, in the New Kreisau, demonstrates that these are not just words but words that have been turned into deeds. That is why, as you all know, the Kreisau Foundation for European Understanding was formed in 1989/1990.

Here, too, I want to say again: we know – particularly these days, over these years — how important it is, time and again, to regain European understanding. We know how quickly prejudices can regain importance and how vital it is to do everything possible to prevent these prejudices from taking hold. Encounters offer the best possibility for dispelling prejudices. It is always easiest to portray another in a specified way when we have never stood face-to-face with him. That is why it is so wonderful that Poles and Germans, as well as many members of other nations, have built this international youth center and let the European Academy reside in Kreisau.

What could better mark such an occasion – as has also already been said – than today's concert by the "*Jugend Klangforum Mitte Europa*"? In pursuing its art, this extraordinary youth orchestra is practicing exactly that on which today's Europe is based: reconciliation, understanding, and promotion of mutual cooperation beyond borders. These are precisely the bridges that lead to a peaceful and prosperous future on our continent.

When we are here in this house, which for a long time was located on the eastern side of Berlin, in a city that has overcome division when we wrestle with each other today over compromises in a Europe of 27 member states, we know what it means to build bridges. I know that we still have many bridges to build in Europe. Our continent has achieved a great deal, but whenever we look to Southeastern Europe, in the direction of the Western Balkans, we know how many bridges have yet to be built. That is why the legacy of Helmuth James Graf von Moltke is so important for us today, for those who bear responsibility and for those who contribute to this society – it is a legacy of peace, of freedom, of tolerance, of respect for human rights, and a legacy of personal courage.

Thank you very much for allowing me to be here today.