

Mme de Staël Prize: Lisbon 23 April 2015

Professor Dame Helen Wallace, DBE, CMG, FBA

Foreign Secretary, British Academy

President Aires-Barros, Commissioner Moedas, Professor Stock, Colleagues,
Ladies and Gentlemen

What a wonderful occasion for revisiting this beautiful city of Lisbon – and to be in this marvellous building!

I am overwhelmed – and very honoured – to receive a prize in the name of the remarkable Germaine de Staël. She was quite a lady: manifestly a transnational European – of Swiss parentage, deeply immersed in the French enlightenment, an intelligent woman connected to almost everyone you could imagine from the literary and political generations of her period across the countries of Europe. Networking – a modern concept – was her thing, and she has left a remarkable trail of correspondence which provides hard evidence of just how closely she engaged with the movers and shakers across Europe of her generation. She excelled in three domains. She was a literary giant. She was immersed in the complex and conflictual politics of her period. And – my goodness – she had a quite remarkable social life as well. I cannot quite imagine how she fitted all of these activities into her life, while also continually on the move between countries. Her exploits present quite some lessons to modern day European travellers faced with the tests of passport controls at this or that border – her record of navigating contested borders for herself, for her family, for her favoured friends and fellow travellers present quite an example – she deserves a serious detailed case study of those achievements. It is truly hard to imagine anyone these days – let alone a woman – navigating Europe transnationally as she did in a period of European political ferment!

My own life has been much more modest and much less adventurous. I do regard myself as a transnational – both British and European – and with a regional identity from my county of Yorkshire. Multiple identities have always

seemed to me self-evidently achievable and beneficial. I started out academically as a student of classics, ancient European studies so to speak, and then jumped a couple of millennia to contemporary European studies and the European integration process. I was fortunate to start my professional career in a period of dynamism and optimism about three dimensions of contemporary Europe: first, the integration process being built around the then European Communities; second, the projection of the European model and European values to the wider world; and, third, the welcome if delayed engagement of my country, the United Kingdom, in the European integration process. Professionally I was on a roll and was able to benefit from the boom in European studies in my country and elsewhere in Europe. We academics had many opportunities to develop teaching programmes for plurinational cohorts of students and to develop transnational research projects. I have former students involved in the world of practice as well as in the academic community across Europe. I have collaborators – and very good friends – across Europe – and thankfully in central and eastern Europe as well as the old western Europe.

Commissioner Moedas – here I must pay tribute to the role played by the European Commission in helping my generation to develop such vigorous trans-European connections and to establish a vibrant body of expertise on the social, political, economic and legal dimensions of the integration process. The old DGX was instrumental in promoting the development of professional associations of European specialists – and these have gone from strength to strength. The British Association, UACES, of which I was an early member, is world class. And of course the DG responsible for research has over the years supported state-of-the art research by scholars from the social sciences and humanities who have contributed to our understanding of the dynamics of integration.

I am an optimist by nature. Sadly, however, in recent times it has become rather harder to remain optimistic as regards the three dimensions of contemporary Europe that have preoccupied me throughout my career.

My first concern is the integration process itself here in Europe. In the years since the global financial crisis European values and European practice have been tested to the limits and are still under test. The gap between the ‘can-do-OK’ Europeans and the ‘can’t do well enough’ Europeans is staring us in the face. You here in Portugal have been struggling to find your way through. Greece, one of the first countries that I got to know well as a classicist, is still locked in deep trauma. The European Union was already marked by fissures between those inside the Eurozone and those outside. It is now marked by deep fissures within the Eurozone. We face a much more diverse scenario with different categories of EU members with different levels of commitment. This scenario runs counter to the core understanding of integration that I thought that I was in the business of studying.

The values of solidarity and cohesion, so much propounded as ***European values***, are increasingly hard to turn from the abstract to the concrete. This inequality between countries is disturbing enough in itself. But just as shocking is the evidence of growing inequality within countries between the winners and losers in our societies, a pattern of inequality in which the European integration process is – alas – also a factor. Those same European values of solidarity and cohesion are thus also vulnerable within our countries, as our societies and economies fall victim to the stresses of the contemporary world. And we can see the footprints of these divisions in the rise of protest movements and parties across Europe, many of them with an ugly anti-European and xenophobic character.

One conclusion that I draw from this situation is the absolute need for us to put our heads together in order better to understand these patterns of inequality, their causes and their consequences. The research community needs to step up to the mark on this – and on a transnational basis since our countries are so deeply interconnected. Here, Commissioner, I look at you for the support of the Horizon 2020 programme for this vital task.

My second concern is Europe as a model for the world. I guess that most of us here wish to believe that we in Europe present a successful and effective model to the rest of the world, both by the examples of European best practice and by the values that we pursue in engaging with other countries and regions across the world. We have much to be proud of from our past record. But can we be quite so proud of our current performance? To be sure Europe is now a much less important continent than it was, as we can observe from the changing patterns of economic and political relationships in the international system. So we have to work harder these days to make a difference to what happens elsewhere in the world.

This is a big subject. Let me highlight just three elements: first, the way we engage with non-EU Europe and our neighbourhood; second, the way we interact with other troubled regions; and, third, our responses to the tragedies in the Mediterranean Sea – so a word or two on each of these.

First, then, as regards non-EU Europe: I have always been adamant that the EU should not monopolise or hijack the label of ***European***. Germaine de Staël was both quintessentially European – and Swiss. Her Europe included Russia and Ukraine – she wrote about the grain fields that she traversed in Ukraine. We have a lot of unfinished business as regards those non-EU parts of Europe, whether in the western Balkans or in Russia, Belarus and Ukraine. The EU in its various policies and actions does of course make some contributions to the development trajectories in these countries. But we need to do much better as colleagues here from non-EU Europe will attest. In a modest way ALLEA itself of course plays a part. Contacts at the human level among people from the different countries do have a part to play in anchoring positive transformation. Again the example of Germaine de Staël and her colleagues from across Europe shows us just how important a transnational intellectual community can be as a contribution to promoting shared values.

Secondly, as regards other troubled regions: it is only with pain that we observe that there are far too many failed or failing states and in particular in the Middle East and Africa. The old cold war world seems with hindsight simple and clear to understand despite the dangers of the confrontation. It turns out that it was too easy in 1989 to believe that *west* European values had triumphed. Yes – and thank goodness – we have recovered much of central Europe as an integral part of the European family and within the EU. One of my greatest pleasures as an academic has been the opportunity to teach and then to collaborate with colleagues from central and eastern Europe. Those of us who were involved can derive a good deal of pride in what together we achieved. But as we look beyond Europe we can see just how tough the contest is between the European and indeed wider western values that we promote and alternative world views in regions of conflict. At the British Academy we see some of this from the frontline through our overseas institutes in Amman, East Jerusalem, Nairobi, as we work with Turkish colleagues through our Institute in Ankara, and as we support the efforts of our colleagues in the British Society for Libyan Studies and in the British Institute of Persian Studies. We are waiting impatiently to be able to reopen our base in Tehran. Indeed our hope is that we can expand our practice of science diplomacy.

Thirdly, as regards the tragedies in the Mediterranean Sea. We have seen appalling evidence this week, but cumulatively over recent weeks, of the price that is paid by the attractive example of European values. On the one hand, our values and our societal practice of course make Europe a magnet for desperate people from troubled and unstable countries. We surely would not wish it otherwise – of course we want Europe to be a beacon of aspiration. Yet on the other hand we find it a real test to accept the consequences of our magnetism. So our moral values are under test. I pay tribute to the decency of all those Italians who are dealing with the immediate consequences of the boat traffic, both in rescue work and in humanitarian work. I have lived in Italy and know from firsthand the strength of Italian civil society. Spanish and Greek societies because of their geography are also in this front line. Those of us further away geographically can be a bit more detached – alas. We as

Europeans need to do much better by way of both burden-sharing and contributions to stabilisation – if only we knew how to do so and could reach effective agreements. I am less than pleased with the way in which my own compatriots are responding to this crisis.

This brings me to my third concern: the engagement of the United Kingdom in the European process. I wrote my doctoral thesis on the accession negotiations between the UK and the then European Communities in the early 1970s. I embarked upon a career as a European specialist able to follow the insertion of the UK into the European integration process. I researched and published on areas of EU policy to which British practitioners made enormous and valuable contributions: the development of the regional development policy including the concept of cohesion; the development of the single European market, ironically one of Mrs Thatcher’s important contributions to the European house; and the early and definitive support of British governments for the Eftan and then eastern expansion of the EU, a commitment driven by the belief that these other countries were defined by their attachments to shared European values. It was easy then to feel positive about both British policy and EU achievements as part of the same story.

However, as you will all know, the British political system has failed to find itself at ease with deep European engagement. Politicians have not carried the citizens. British membership of the EU is fiercely contested and our presence within the European family is at risk. Well – we await the outcome of a general election on 7 May, with widely differing scenarios ahead as regards British politics, as regards the integrity of the United Kingdom, and as regards the British relationship with other European countries. These days it is very tough and very frustrating to be a British European!

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By way of conclusion: my heartfelt thanks go to you, Professor Stock, and to you, Commissioner Moedas, for your generous words – and to the jury that recommended me for this prize. Nothing of what I have done across the years could have been done without the wide circle of colleagues across Europe with whom it has been my privilege to work – colleagues in the academic community but also colleagues in the practitioner communities. It has also been a pleasure to have taught so many students from across Europe who went on to careers in European political practice – there was a young student from Portugal whom I first met on a summer school in Florence in 1981 – he went on to become President of the European Commission! I am one of those who firmly believe in the importance of continuous connection and debate between the world of research and the world of practice.

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