

## CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Opening Remarks by Günter Stock

### **All European Academies Madame de Staël Prize for Cultural Values**

in the context of the ALLEA General Assembly 2016

18 April 2016 | Austrian Academy of Sciences, Vienna

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Dear Commissioner Hahn,

Lieber Herr Zeilinger,

Lieber Herr Brague, Frau Brague

Dear delegates of the ALLEA Academies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Distinguished Guests,

A warm welcome back to all of you who attended today's scientific symposium and an equally warm welcome to those who only joined us for this event. I am convinced that the symposium was fruitful and enriching for all of us. Thanks again to our host, the Austrian Academy of Sciences, who have been outstandingly generous, hospitable and facilitated an extraordinary event.

We are gathered here today to celebrate a truly European scholar, Professor Rémi Brague, whose unparalleled expertise in medieval philosophy and religion is arguably as relevant today as it has ever been.

His scholarly work, which has led him to teach in many different

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European countries, as well as his keen eye for analysis makes him a more than worthy recipient of this year's All European Academies Mme de Staël Prize for Cultural Values.

Before we begin, let me contextualise tonight's ceremony as a part of the 17<sup>th</sup> ALLEA General Assembly. At ALLEA, we are proud to assemble a multitude of European knowledge producers, our member academies, who have traditionally shaped and enabled European intellectual productivity. Our heritage of prudent and precise intellectual endeavours has yielded many of Europe's finest academic work. But at the same time, academies very much remain ready for the future. In an increasingly uncertain world, a truly interdisciplinary approach of academia is the only way to observe developments and formulate solutions to problems, independent of the influence of ideological, political or commercial interests. It is for this reason that the European Commission decided to bring in ALLEA, as part of a consortium of European academy networks, to provide evidence-based science for policy advice to the European Institutions. By the way, the first time the European Commission directly reached out to academies for their expertise.

However, the world of academies is as complex as Europe itself. Combining 57 academies from more than 40 countries requires a lot

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of cooperation and exchange of knowledge in order to work towards a common Europe of shared values and norms. It is essential to ALLEA's work to combine these modern challenges with the traditional understanding of academies as the searchers of truth. To achieve these targets, ALLEA works diligently towards a comprehensive cultural understanding of Europe through a wide variety of activities. And there is no doubt that we have – we probably always had – a real need for European scientists and scholars to actively engage in finding, describing and creating common roots for our truly European community, which offers so many benefits for all of us. Just last year, we published our first book “The Boundaries of Europe” by Professor Pietro Rossi in our book series on “Discourses in intellectual Europe”. The series is an attempt to counteract rising scepticism towards the idea of European integration and underlines the enduring cultural and intellectual position of Europe. The second part of the series on the role of music in European integration, by Professor Albrecht Riethmüller, is set to be released later this year.

Additionally, ALLEA actively seeks to bring together European scientists and policymakers to encourage open debate about the future of scientific research in Europe. To give an example, one such event took place last September in Brussels, where ALLEA participated in the European Commission's and Parliament's “Science meets Parliament” session.

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Another main stay of ALLEA's work to promote a common understanding of European cultural values is the reason we are all here tonight; the ALLEA Mme de Staël Prize for cultural values. This Prize has been awarded for three years now and in the past two years two exceptional scholars, Professor Luisa Passerini in 2014 and Professor Dame Helen Wallace last year have been honoured.

We decided to award this prize to scholars whose scientific contributions address and investigate, but also maintain, preserve and develop European cultural values, which all too often come under unwarranted criticism. All too often we get caught up in solving the complexity of day-to-day problems that we forget to take a moment to fundamentally reflect on "European society" and who we want to be herein. In order for Europe to develop an inclusive and forward-looking cultural understanding of itself, it is absolutely vital that the continent understands where it came from, to remind ourselves of the struggles its people lived through and what a peaceful Europe can and should look like. The laureates of the Mme de Staël Prize for cultural values are selected to remind us of this necessary self-reflection. Their extensive work has helped create a better understanding of the origin and application of European values, the European identity and the idea of European integration.

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It is now time for me to introduce my fellow speakers of the night, my dear friend and colleague Ed Noort, Vice-President of ALLEA and Professor at the Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies at the University of Groningen, who will kindly be giving the laudatory speech tonight. European Commissioner Johannes Hahn will thereafter hand over the prize to Professor Brague. Commissioner Hahn is deeply rooted in Vienna, where he studied philosophy at the University of Vienna. After several high-ranking positions in the Austrian government, including 3 years as Minister for Science and Research, Johannes Hahn was appointed European Commissioner in 2010. Under President Barroso, Mr. Hahn was responsible for regional policy. An area where he had shown great expertise and which subsequently led to his appointment as Commissioner for European Neighbourhood Policy & Enlargement Negotiations by current President Jean-Claude Juncker.

We are exceptionally honoured that Mr Hahn will be presenting the Mme de Staël Prize for cultural values to Professor Rémi Brague tonight.

Please welcome to the stage now Professor Ed Noort.

\*\*\*\*\* End of speech\*\*\*\*\*