

DOCUMENTS ON DEMOCRACY

Europe

On March 25, the fiftieth anniversary of the Treaties of Rome establishing the European Economic Community, the European Union released the Berlin Declaration. Excerpts appear below:

For centuries Europe has been an idea, holding out hope of peace and understanding. That hope has been fulfilled. European unification has made peace and prosperity possible. It has brought about a sense of community and overcome differences. Each Member State has helped to unite Europe and to strengthen democracy and the rule of law. Thanks to the yearning for freedom of the peoples of Central and Eastern Europe the unnatural division of Europe is now consigned to the past. European integration shows that we have learnt the painful lessons of a history marked by bloody conflict. Today we live together as was never possible before.

We, the citizens of the European Union, have united for the better. In the European Union, we are turning our common ideals into reality: for us, the individual is paramount. His dignity is inviolable. His rights are inalienable. Women and men enjoy equal rights. We are striving for peace and freedom, for democracy and the rule of law, for mutual respect and shared responsibility, for prosperity and security, for tolerance and participation, for justice and solidarity. . . .

The European Union will continue to thrive both on openness and on the will of its Member States to consolidate the Union's internal development. The European Union will continue to promote democracy, stability and prosperity beyond its borders. With European unification a dream of earlier generations has become a reality. Our history reminds us that we must protect this for the good of future generations. For that reason we must always renew the political shape of Europe in keeping with the times. That is why today, 50 years after the signing of the Treaties of Rome, we are united in our aim of placing the European Union on a renewed common basis before the European Parliament elections in 2009. For we know, Europe is our common future.

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Vietnam

The Venerable Thich Quang Do was awarded the 2006 Thorolf Rafto Memorial Prize for Human Rights Defenders, but was prevented by the Vietnamese government from traveling to Norway to receive the prize. On March 15, Therese Jebsen of the Rafto Foundation visited Thanh Minh Monastery in Saigon to hand him the award certificate, but was arrested immediately upon arrival at the monastery. In an interview broadcast on March 16 by Radio Free Asia's Vietnamese Service, Thich Quang Do responded to Jebsen's arrest. Excerpts appear below:

When you see how Security Police treat a visitor from overseas, you understand under what kind of regime the 80 million Vietnamese are living today. That is why democracy and freedom are absolutely vital. They are the medicine that we need to save our lives.

Today, many people around the world care only about economy and trade. They pour money and investment into our country and help to consolidate the power [of the communist regime]. They don't care about the plight of 80 million people who are living in this vast prison we call Vietnam. It's terrible. Oh, I am deeply, deeply ashamed. There is no culture left here. Not even the very minimal trace of culture. I am sad, outraged and ashamed for my country and my people. I think of this foreign guest who traveled so far to visit our country, and was subjected to such abominable treatment. What impressions will she take home of the Vietnamese Communist regime?

Therefore, I call upon people from around the world, especially those who are investing or giving development aid to Vietnam, to draw lessons from today's events. Instead of helping to strengthen the communist regime and prolong its survival, try to use your economic aid to save 80 million Vietnamese, and liberate them from the great prison in which they languish today.

If the [authorities] treat overseas guests in such a barbaric and cruel way, how do you think they treat their own people? That is what makes me so sad and ashamed. I am ashamed for the culture, the customs, traditions, ethics and thinking of Vietnam. They have been reduced to nothing!

Romania

In April 2006, a Presidential Commission for the Analysis of the Communist Dictatorship in Romania was established. On 18 December 2006, President Traian Băsescu delivered a speech, excerpted below, on the occasion of the presentation of its report:

We are gathered here today in order to close, in full responsibility, a grim chapter in our country's past. I have read with great attention the

Final Report of the Presidential Commission for the Analysis of the Communist Dictatorship in Romania. In this document, I have found the reasons whereby I can condemn the communist regime. . . .

As Head of the Romanian State, I expressly and categorically condemn the communist system in Romania, from its foundation, on the basis of dictate, during the years 1944 to 1947, to its collapse in December 1989. Taking cognizance of the realities presented in the Report, I affirm with full responsibility [that] the communist regime in Romania was illegitimate and criminal. In condemning the communist system in Romania, I affirm my admiration for the heroism of those who opposed the dictatorship, from the resistance fighters and militants of the political parties annihilated by the communists to the dissidents and opponents of the Ceaușescu period. . . .

In the name of the Romanian State, I express my regret and compassion for the victims of the communist dictatorship. In the name of the Romanian State, I ask the forgiveness of those who suffered, of their families, of all those who, in one way or another, saw their lives ruined by the abuses of dictatorship. . . .

There are many who, overcome by the hardships of today, seem to have lost faith in the virtues of the democracy upon which we have embarked. They end up looking nostalgically to a past which, in the hard moments of this prolonged transition, suddenly begins to appear luminous. I shall answer them that it is worth reactivating their memory. Let them remember the cold, hunger, darkness and humiliation that had taken control of our lives. Unfortunately, in the houses of many Romanians, these things still exist today. We must not forget that no genuine society can be built upon the expropriation of its citizens' liberties. No well-being is possible in a society of people who are not free. Perhaps the greatest evil done by communism was to ignore the meaning of freedom for human beings. Except that the institutions of democratic freedom do not function of themselves. In order to function, any administrative mechanism needs people who are qualified not only professionally but also qualified in democracy and freedom.

We have seen how the communist totalitarian system simultaneously degraded the behavior of institutions and of people. We must recognize that communist mentalities continue to influence Romanian society. We believed that we could forget communism, but it did not want to forget us. Therefore, the condemnation of this past arises as a priority for the present, without which we shall behave in the future too in a way which resembles the burden of an unhealed illness.

The memory of the crimes committed by the communist regime in Romania helps us to go forward with a more decisive step, to achieve the changes so necessary, but it also helps us to appreciate the democratic framework in which we live. The condemnation of communism will encourage us to be more circumspect towards utopian and extremist projects which want to bring into question the constitutional and democratic order.