

Aristotle 2400 Years World Congress

Aristotle University of Thessaloniki

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Speech delivered by

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Chair of the Committee on Culture and Education

European Parliament

Dear Prof. Mitkas, Dear Rector,

Dear Prof. Sfendoni,

Dear guests,

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is both an honor and a pleasure for me to be here today as the Chair of the Committee on Culture and Education of the European Parliament.

It is impressive to notice how the birth of someone who was born two thousands and four hundred years ago is being celebrated with such grandiosity, and how the organizers have brought together participants from five continents!

Aristotle represents, perhaps more than any other thinker or philosopher, a tradition of thought which we recognize as being the foundation of European philosophy even before the notion of Europe itself existed.

Aristotle laid the foundations, from a systematic point of view, for something that we perceive as "European" even before the dawn of the events and developments frequently associated with "Europe": before the advent of Christianity or the spreading of Latin culture in the Mediterranean and its encounter with Hellenism, to mention but two examples.

We could say, to a certain extent, that Aristotelian thought deeply contributes to the sense of being "European" and has accompanied European consciousness for over two millennia.

Even today, also, we are still experiencing Aristotle's legacy! He left us with important contributions to logics, metaphysics, mathematics, physics, biology, botany, ethics, politics, agriculture, medicine, the arts, poetry, dance and the theatre.

However the antiquity of the thought and of the author that we celebrate require us to recognize that a certain

amount of his heritage has been lost during the years and in the course of Western philosophical history.

Some of his inheritance, on the other hand, has been rejected or modified intentionally.

For example, *Aristotle as a metaphysics teacher*. Even when in the Latin Middle Ages Aristotle was considered the philosopher for excellence, read and commented in all the universities on the continent, his *Metaphysics* were often transformed into a theology compatible with that of Christianity; and a part of classical metaphysics was lost.

Or, just to recall another example, *Aristotle as an investigator of nature and the realm of "sensitive" things*. At the same time during the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries when modern science was born, something of Aristotle's was lost: the technical and experimental character of modern physics did not find any relationship with the Aristotelian natural philosophy.

Or again, let's consider *Aristotle's theory of government*. Even today when we reflect about democracy and the creation of political systems, sometimes we find it hard to entirely accept Aristotelian teaching: both because the direct democracy of the Greek *polis* is far from our modern experiences of representative democracies, and

because sometimes the social organization proposed by Aristotle - society in part based on "castes" which he describes - is far from our achievements in terms of equality and rights. Even in politics, we have abandoned some of the assumptions of Aristotelian thought.

But then what do we recognize as European, indispensable, deeply ours, in Aristotle?

Besides the single contents of Aristotelian thought, probably - and perhaps the most important thing - from Aristotle that we recognize and guard precious, is his overall logical, argumentative and rational structure; the dialectic architectural structure of his thought that supports all research and investigation for any given subject.

Logic as basis and principal instrument for human research.

This is Aristotle's greatest discovery and legacy.

So-called Aristotelian logic is in fact a search for the right quality, the right route through which men seek and express truth.

The "word of truth", which consists in attributing to a subject its authentic properties, becomes, for Aristotle, a choice between opposites, between different pairs of possible routes or actions.

In this way, through specific methodology, logical thinking becomes dia-logical thought, the evaluation and research, among other properties, of the most "real" one.

What Plato represented "outwardly", namely the search for truth through dialogue between the characters that he staged, Aristotle "internalized" to a certain extent. It is in human and individual reason, in the logos of each thinking subject, that the relationship with the truth is realized in a dia-logical shape.

It is unsurpassed teaching, an intellectual legacy from which even today we cannot be separated.

We recognize that the introduction of Aristotelian philosophy and science into Western culture was an event that was transformative for the intellectual life of Western Europe. Yet, more particularly, it transformed our understanding of education.

Aristotle was indeed an exceptional scholar, a teacher who inspired - and continues to inspire - generations of pupils and teachers.

As part of his outstanding legacy, Aristotle leaves us the concept of education as being central for the development of a person. He believed in an education that should be universal and compulsory. Two thousands and four hundred years later, this is still recognized as

one of the United Nations Millennium Development Goals!

Moreover, we can say that Aristotle's thought is at the basis of the theories of lifelong learning, non formal and informal learning.

In fact he – preceded by Socrates and Plato – pioneered the analysis of intellectual development and in stressing the importance of using the mind throughout one's life span.

He believed that learning should accompany our entire life - although with a different emphasis at different ages.

He placed a strong emphasis on all-round 'balanced' development - playing, physical training, music, debate and the study of science and philosophy, all have their place in the forming of body, mind and soul.

Similarly, Aristotle, like his teacher Plato, emphasized the importance of early 'molding' for children and the importance of stories as well as music and gymnastics for growth and development.

Let us consider that one of the European educational targets today is still that at least 95 percent of pre-school children of four years or older should participate in early childhood education by the year 2020.

What is impressive is the holistic view he had of the individual, encompassing physical, emotional, mental and spiritual levels together with an holistic approach to knowledge. The Peripatetic school, created in Athens at the middle of the 4th century before Christ, was conceived as a philosophical way of life for generations of pupils and teachers.

In the same way, Aristotle had a holistic approach to knowledge, divided into theory, whose objective is the truth, practice which guides us in political and social action, and technical/productive knowledge, which shows us how to manage.

Aristotle connected his research to teaching. Many of his works that have reached us are in the form of dissertations and were initially prepared to be lecture aids for his students, a lasting example of the rule of a good teacher.

Another lesson coming from him, in the present time, is the crucial role of the humanities that must not be considered separately from, or inferior to, hard sciences, to which they are intrinsically connected.

Today, unfortunately, the humanities and sciences are often considered distinct from each other, without any natural link between the two.

That's why in the European Parliament, above all with some colleagues such as my dear friend Giorgos Grammatikakis, we are very committed to defending the centrality of culture, education and science within the EU strategy, dedicating adequate space to humanities and philosophical research in Horizon 2020 alongside the sciences.

So this Conference in Thessaloniki, aimed at re-launching and deepening the role and analysis of Aristotelian thought, is a rare and essential occasion to remind us not only that here in Greece are to be found the Roots and identity of Europe, but also that Greece belongs profoundly to Europe and that the entire European Union needs the Greek culture and soul that risk being lost.

Thank you