

Christine von Kohl

STATEMENT ON REALISM³²⁰

To paraphrase what journalists tend to say to each other “I didn’t have the time to be short”, I have no time to be long! So let me add briefly to what I heard until now about “realism”.

I for sure think that more realism is not only needed, but it is absolutely necessary to find more realism in the context of the task we have taken over. When talking to the populations and politicians in countries of the SEE, we gave the promise that the EU, one day, will be ready to include them as members, and we have also given the impression that being a member of the EU will be the way to solve most of the problems these countries have now.

Of course the timing we are giving for this membership is changing between 5, 10 and 20 years from time to time and we are always saying that “you will not be able to reach our level before that or that time, etc.” We are considering them and treating them as if they were still elementary school children, while we are already at university level, even finished studying.

This attitude is not realistic because it would be much more useful and normal to first of all try to look at these societies we are having to deal with without always looking first at our own values as we are offering them to others. We should analyze what kind of values these different societies have. All of them have values of their own. They have developed them in the course of *their* experience and *their* traditions, but what they have not developed is a sense of what we are asking them to develop, that is, to be a citizen of a State, and to develop a State which is there for the citizens.

³²⁰ This is a transcript from audio tape of Mrs. von Kohl’s presentation.

We told them about human rights, about democracy, and these are elements, these are claims on the basis of *our* development. And it took centuries to develop the consciousness of democrats and human rights. And I may in between mention how far the attitude of the West is now shown by U.S. soldiers in Iraq. And I would continue this side remark by saying that in The Hague, similar crimes are before the Court, but the United States do not accept the International Court for the crimes their soldiers have committed. This should be taken in consideration when the attitude from other countries toward our Western values in considered and, so to speak “evaluated”.

The realistic point of view is that these countries have had many years of Communism behind them and I think we have overlooked the heritage and implications of their having been under this rulership. This means that they were not ruled by a State, but by a Party. The authority in Communist countries was not the State, but the Party. In spite of having, so to say, the “outer form” of the State, justice was not to be trusted by the citizens. The State was not allowed to be criticized, to be controlled. That means again that there was no relationship between this construct and the citizens.

And as long as this relation between the citizen and the State is established and accepted by both sides, as long as it is used to build up the police, it is useless to talk about human rights, when nobody was ever treated under aspects of human rights. So nobody is able to treat others under these pre-ferences.

So this is, from my point of view, where the lack of realism stands: when we are addressing people with not only a different culture, but a different tradition, a different development in the intellectual and moral sense. I will not go into detail because the countries in SEE have somehow the different situations and traditions. The only thing they have in common is what I mentioned before.

Only to take a few examples, Albania has already been mentioned in a very interesting context. In Albania one of the greatest problems is water supply.

All over the country, they still have water available for a few hours only. When I was in Tirana half a year ago, I talked to some housewives who spoke English and asked “what is your greatest challenge?”

- Water supply!
- And who is responsible? I asked.
- The Government is responsible!
- What should the Government do?
- They should use the money that exists for this purpose to repair the pipelines!
- And why don't they do it?
- Well, you must understand that all our Ministers were poor only a few short years ago and when they see money, they take it.

I consider this to be a human attitude towards responsible politicians, and not from the political point of view, and we too show this attitude from time to time when we mention for instance corruption in these countries.

Corruption has been an old tradition in these regions in all political situations, and corruption depends upon everybody knowing that the one who is doing his work is very badly paid. It was always expected that he will get extra money by those for whom he is working.

Besides, it could also probably make sense to think what corruption means in our countries. We have huge corruption, as we all know, not because people are hungry, not because people are poor, but because they want to be much richer than it really matters to be.

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