

**Opening address by Frank-Walter Steinmeier,  
Minister of Foreign Affairs of Germany**

**"In search of lost universalism"  
Berlin, 28-29 October 2015**

Ms Nemirowskaja,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I'm happy to be here with you this morning!

"In search of lost universalism" – that's what you've called your conference. And I think this title is very timely indeed. Today, we are threatened not only by crises and conflicts but by fragmentation, by misperception and deep-seated misunderstandings. And we urgently need to work against these tendencies.

When your network's first School of Political Studies was created some twenty years ago, we were full of optimism that Europe would become whole, united and free. We were hopeful that all societies on this continent would move towards democracy, the rule of law and prosperity.

And this optimism was not unfounded or simply naïve. The bloc confrontation was over, the Berlin Wall had fallen, and the Charter of Paris manifested our shared, our universal values.

And despite the horrors of the Balkan wars, for many years we continued to be optimistic that Europe was on the right track. The enlargement of the European Union, the accession of new members to the Council of Europe, and the establishment of dialogue formats between NATO and Russia, between the EU and Russia – all these developments seemed to confirm our hopes.

Today, however, the European peace order has been called into question: The annexation of Crimea was more than a political crisis. It was and

remains a breach of international law. It also set a dangerous precedent, in Europe and beyond.

It's an important, a hopeful sign that our diplomatic efforts have led to a ceasefire in Eastern Ukraine, which has more or less been holding for nine weeks. But a durable solution is still a long way off. It will require serious efforts from all sides involved.

What we need now more than ever are people committed to identifying common ground, despite all differences of policy and perception. We need people who are able to build on this common ground to move our debate beyond stale recriminations and monologues. And we need people who are prepared to defend reason as a benchmark for political action.

The goal of your conference is to create a spirit of mutual understanding, of tolerance and solidarity among young leaders across Europe.

I wholeheartedly support your efforts. The more we try to understand each other's realities, our fears and aspirations, the more we strive to reduce prejudice and reflexes from an era long gone. The more we try to overcome the alienation besetting us – the better for us all. You are doing critically important groundwork that will allow us politicians to better negotiate cooperative solutions.

I speak from my own experience when I wish you a healthy dose of optimism and persistence. You will need both to accomplish what you have set out to do. In my very own interest I wish you every success.

Thank you.