

24 May 2018
Mainz, Germany

Opening speech

CEC Congress 2018

By Ludger Ramme, President of CEC European Managers

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Welcome to the CEC Congress, welcome to Mainz, a city in the heart of Europe.

I am very pleased that so many delegates have come here to assist to the statutory meetings of our umbrella organisation.

We have also come here to address a very crucial topic in our societies: The impact of Artificial Intelligence on our future working conditions. It is a topic that needs to be discussed by the managers in particular. This is why I am grateful we have the opportunity to work on it together tomorrow morning.

For all of us it is important not only to focus on our internal debates about the organization as such. To remain relevant, it is of crucial importance to address trends and evolutions in Europe and to try to bring things forward from a managerial perspective and thus help society to develop in the good direction.

We cannot avoid seeing the reality of the European project today: we are in a crisis. But let's not forget that the perspective we look at things can make a change: Are we pessimistic or do we make our analysis out of a spirit of hope and optimism? Is the glass rather half empty or half full?

It is my conviction that Europe is much more successful than we believe in this moment. The achievements since the 1950's are huge and we should not allow the "negative" voices to take our project away from us. Let us as managers be at the frontline in defending the European Union. Our previous generations have created it and they have rooted it with wise foundations. All we need to do now is to be faithful and not wait any longer with a relaunch of the European project. In my eyes it is not surprising that there is a similarity between the crisis of the union and the state of CEC, in fact it is rather logical.

The globe is turning so much faster than before. Why? Because digitalisation, globalisation and mobility have created so much more dynamism. Digitalisation means that information and communication take place in real time for everybody at any place.

But what does that mean to us as managers? Well, the answer is not so very new: to give orientation and to take responsibility.

A good manager will act according to these simple principles. And he or she will create a common vision for and with his or her team.

Ladies and gentlemen, at the beginning of this month the French President Emanuel Macron received the Prize of Charles the Great in Aachen. In his remarkable speech on the future of Europe he did exactly that: giving orientation and taking responsibility. He based his intervention mainly on four principles: And please consider that his 4 principles might even be a guideline for us in today's meeting and for the future of CEC as a whole:

1. Ne soyons pas faibles. Choisissons. Let us not be weak. Let us make a choice.
2. Ne soyons pas divisés. Unissons-nous. Let us not be divided. Let us be united.
3. N'ayons pas peur. Osons faire. Let us not be afraid. Let us be courageous.
4. N'attendons pas. Agissons maintenant. Let us not wait. Let us act now.

President Macron for me is a new type of politician. We do not need to share everything he stands for but I really admire his European spirit. It is this kind of spirit and ambition that we need in Europe to leave the crisis behind and move together towards a brighter future.

And leaders like Macron deserve the support of the European managers.

What Macron is asking for is more strength and more action.

I do believe that there are some urgent decisions to take in the EU now:

- We need common foreign policy and speak with one voice
- We need a European single military defence system
- We need to start a common EU-budget focused on new technologies and infrastructure
- We need a digital single market
- We need more free trade policy
- We must be united in our fight against terrorism
- We have to find common answers for the refugees

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- We should have a united power grid and environmental policy
- We want to set common standards for education and support lifelong learning
- We should establish a European monetary fund that strengthens each country's financial responsibility and also strengthens the solidarity between us.
- We should make our structures efficient; why not limit the number of commissioners to 15?

In all these topics managers will have to make a point. They will have to claim that things go on. The managers and their political voice: the CEC.

Ladies and gentlemen,

If we want to be part of a sustainable future we will have to be successful in three areas: the ecology, the economy, the social.

CEC being a recognised Social Partner will of course focus on the social implications of the European Union. But we know: without an ecological and economical foundation no social pillar will be sustainable.

So we are serving our members best if we consider that the ecology, the economy and the Social are linked to and are interdependent from each other.

And let us be proud of the fact that CEC has set standards in the European Social dialogue for more than 20 years. If you consider the size, the budget and the capacity of the CEC, our existence on European level is a surprising success story.

Put aside scepticism and pessimism. It is not relevant. Do not believe those who want to make CEC look weak. The opposite is true. In the last three years the performance of CEC has been quite satisfying. Look for instance at the boost in our outreach. The visibility of CEC has increased in the digital media and here in Brussels.

We are firmly rooted in the two pillar strategy. We are at the same time an umbrella of unions for managers and a think tank on responsible and sustainable leadership. There is nothing like the CEC. We are more than a union. We are more than an interest group. We are more than the sum of our parts!

Another reason to be satisfied is that CEC is still growing. Later today we will welcome a new member association from Serbia. Of course we are also losing some members mainly due to developments on national level. This is unavoidable and together we will try keep CEC as attractive and provide for ways to return to us.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I want to express my gratitude to those member organisations, who give support, ideas and sometimes even a constructive and positive criticism to us. We need this kind of input and we can take benefit out of it. It is not enough to exchange important words in our statutory meetings. The real work is done in between those meetings. And there the deeds say so much more about the individual backing for CEC. The spirit of being together has therefore become this year's congress slogan. Being together strengthens CEC and makes it a success.

Let me conclude: CEC is an organization with large potential. Together we can continue to make it a success. But we need to listen more and better to each other.

To our differences, to our dreams and to our ambitions. Our diversity is not a threat. It is a source of the solutions for the future instead.

I will end my speech with another sentence of Emanuel Macron:

"In Europe we will continue to have interpreters, there will also be expressions that cannot be translated properly and there will always be misunderstandings."