

Dear representatives and the consular corps,
co-organiser,
dear ladies and gentlemen,

I am pleased to welcome you to Cologne, and bid you a warm welcome in the Cathedral City! Representatives from four international cities have gathered here today. The cities' representatives are bound together as well as linked to Cologne by a common vision which they have followed in recent years.

This is a unique European cultural project – the European Sculpture “Equilibrio” by the German sculptor Rolf Schaffner.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Since last year, five stone stelae, sculpted by Rolf Schaffner, have been erected in different parts of Europe. They form, when viewed from space, Crosses connecting the Continent, from Trondheim in Norway, to Santanyi, Schaffner's adopted home in Majorca, and from our twin town Cork in Ireland, to Volgograd, our twin town in Russia, putting Bensberg and Cologne right in the middle of it.

It has taken fifteen years to realise this project, and it is tragic that the artist did not live to see its completion. He died in 2008 at the age of 81.

Strictly speaking, this is his legacy. His message to us all in the truest sense of the word is written in stone: namely “thoughts in stone”, which is what the artist called his stelae. I've been told he was not a man of big, loud words.

It is the silent words that bring about the storm. Thoughts that come on the wings of a dove guide the world “a quote by the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche.

Five nations have been brought together here today and in the thoughts of Rolf Schaffner: ladies and gentlemen, his appeal to us humans is to know the measure of all things and strive for equilibrium, and balance. He transferred his thoughts to the enormous boulders, forming a balanced unity of power and allowed them to speak to us without words: Equilibrio means balance.

In his adopted home, Santanyi in Majorca, the stela “Equilibrio South” looks out over the sea and bids its residents as well as us visitors to pause and savour the natural use of existing resources.

As the result of its Bensberg Art meeting place at the Thomas-Morus-Akademie, the stele “Equilibrio Centre” came to Bensberg in 1997. The Kardinal-Schulte-Haus of the Archdiocese of Cologne is considered to be the spiritual centre of the co-ordinated Crosses.

Overlooking the town of Trondheim for exactly 10 years and situated on a former German Army Munitions' bunker, the Stele warns against the mistakes of the past when Trondheim suffered under the German occupation in the Second World War.

It was the same situation for Volgograd, the former Stalingrad, twinned with Cologne and again for Cork. The artist chose Volgograd because the city was the turning point in World War II. The stele was inaugurated on 8 May 2005 to commemorate the 60th Anniversary of the end of World War II.

With the “Stelae West” in our sister city Cork, the project was completed. This stele represents, in contrast to the other pillars in a very special way, a balance of opposites: round and angular, heavy and light, light and dark. As the only stele with an opening to the sky and as the “head of the symbolic Cross across the borders of Europe, this stele points us in the direction of the Universe.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The opposite of equilibrium, excess, has always been considered a danger, an evil and a sin. In the sculptures by Rolf Schaffner these are ethical notions in an aesthetic turn: His totems are, every single one, joined in such a way that they form a harmonious whole where nothing can be moved without endangering the whole of it.

At the same time, the stelae are as unique as each individual is unique. They form a network of individuals as they represent the Europe of today, and we all represent the involved cities, institutions and persons.

Rolf Schaffner completed his first Stele in Majorca in 1995. Since then friends have helped him to realise his idea of a Europe-wide sculpture. Cologne also recognised that this wonderful project fits into the City of Art and Culture, enhancing its reputation beyond the city walls. Consequently, all city employees naturally seek to convince other cities of becoming a location for this project. This was especially true of two partner cities to the far west of Cologne and to the far east of Europe, namely Cork and Volgograd. They helped to span the “meridians of peace” across the continent. This is what Rolf Schaffner called them.

Ladies and Gentlemen.

This international meeting is also an expression of a spiritual community. Two towns know this particularly well and it is, therefore, not self-evident: Trondheim and Volgograd suffered greatly during World War II under the aggression of Germany. Against this historical background, today’s peace, today’s balance in Europe is a precious commodity. Rolf Schaffner’s work asks us constantly to be conscious of its value.

Consider just the first few months of this year alone, with all the events: the natural disasters, humanitarian, political, military, economic and financial crises that are happening worldwide, that make us realise that it is time “to be moderate” and “balanced”, to think about the fatal consequences of overindulgence in every aspect, for humankind and for all the nations, and for our world.

This ladies and gentlemen, as head of the City of Cologne, this is my contribution towards responsibility.

In 1958, Cologne formed a ring Partnership with five cities from the former states of the European Economic Community (EEC), Lille in France, Liege in Belgium, Rotterdam in the Netherlands, Esch-sur-Alzette in Luxembourg and Turin in Italy, thus establishing a stable bond in the heart of Europe.

After the devastating war, this was to be a sign of reconciliation towards former enemies. And that is how Rolf Schaffner saw his work, as a sign, a symbol. The pillars symbolize the human will to find a balance between things, as balance in the world.

Ladies and Gentlemen

Cologne is an active member in around twenty different European and global networks, thus forming a stable building stone in the overall European network. The ensuing political and educational responsibility is also our common responsibility for a stable and peaceful future. For generations to come, culture plays a meaningful, connecting educational and advocacy role.

The willingness of the cities of Trondheim, Volgograd, Cork, Santanyi, Bensberg and Cologne to say “yes to the Euro-sculpture” “Equilibrio”, shows us that together we are ready to take on this responsibility. I thank you very much and can assure you that Cologne is proud to be part of this “Cross-project partnership” “Equilibrio”.

Ladies and Gentlemen

In this sense, I wish you a fruitful exchange of ideas, an intense getting to know one another, visionary ideas for a future in balance and thus an interesting stay in Cologne.

May I thank each and everyone of you, who has contributed to the success of the European sculpture.

That we can celebrate together this European sculpture “Equilibrio” here and commemorate the sculptor Rolf Schaffner, we owe to his mentor Ms Nora Brown, the Archbishopric of Cologne, the Thomas-Morus-Akademie Bensberg, Cologne, the Catholic Education Association and the philosophy art e.V”, an association of individuals in terms of “Equilibrio”.