It is a great honor to have been asked to deliver the **Laudatio** on the occasion of the bestowal of the Abraham Geiger Award on Dr. Angela Merkel, chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany. But my feeling of deep gratitude is tempered by a deeper sense of responsibility for an honor I know I do not deserve.

I was sitting down to begin writing this speech when the shocking news of the heinous crimes committed in Paris on the evening of Friday November 13, stunned and horrified me. It was not only an act of war directed against the French people, but a monstrous attack on the liberties and values of all Europeans, and a barbaric and evil deed that tried to undermine the peace of global humanity. It is obvious that the scourge of global terrorism demands the most firm and concerted international response within the frame of international legal conventions. Yet, in the face of such an inhuman act of mass murder perpetrated once again in the name of God, how can one dare to speak of the virtues of religious pluralism as one of the necessary foundations for the construction of post-national European democracies?

But the tragedy, in my view, only reinforces the need to reflect upon the enormity of the challenge of building post-national democracies in Europe based on religious pluralism. In the face of the many serious problems confronting the European Union lately—the present refugee crisis; the ongoing difficulties with the integration of new generations of immigrants, many of them Muslims, in European
societies; the annexation of Crimea and the war in Ukraine in flagrant violation of the European international legal order; the weakening of European solidarity provoked by the economic crisis in Greece and other Southern European countries—we cannot even entertain two possible temptations, one external the other internal, which would surely prove self-defeating.

Externally, we must avoid the unrealistic dream of thinking that we could possibly build a fortress Europe in order to protect and isolate ourselves from the threats and problems emanating from Europe’s eastern borders or from its southern flank in Africa and the Middle East. In our global age such a policy would prove both geopolitically unviable and morally self-defeating.

Internally, we cannot afford to go back to a Europe of mutually suspicious and unsolidaristic peoples and nations, separated by borders, new walls or barbed wire. What is happening in my own country, Spain, offers a sad illustration of a dynamic of mutual recriminations, which in the absence of the will for political dialogue in order to find solutions within the constitutional order can easily spiral out of control. We, all across Europe, could easily once again spend more effort constructing the national boundaries that divide “us” from “them”, rather than cultivating the civic bonds that unite us as Europeans.

We must focus our attention upon the great achievements of the European Union in overcoming the tragic legacies of the two barbaric European world wars, and in creating the constitutional conditions to ensure that the “blood lands” and the genocides of the first half of the twentieth century, caused by inhuman racist, ethno-religious, and nationalist ideologies, never happen again. We must renew our commitment to continue building a peaceful, prosperous, democratic, and solidaristic common home for all Europeans who desire to live and to work peacefully within the European constitutional and legal order, irrespective of their origins and their religious or secular beliefs and worldviews. We owe it to the millions and millions of victims of the fratricidal European conflicts. But particularly in the context of this ceremony at the Jewish Museum of Berlin, honoring the memory of the great European Rabbi Abraham Geiger, we owe it to the millions of victims of the Shoa who were murdered because they were not
recognized as fellow Europeans, despite having lived peacefully for centuries and generations on European soil.

We Europeans have an onerous moral obligation to reflect upon the meaning of “the Jewish question” in modern European history and how it is inextricably intertwined with the dynamics of European state formation and nation building. It is in this context that I want to reflect upon the Westphalian settlement of 1648, which while bringing an end to the religious wars in Europe proved a problematic solution to the challenge of religious pluralism.

There is a frequently heard secular European narrative, usually offered as a genealogical explanation and as a normative justification for the secular character of European democracy, which has the following schematic structure: Once upon a time in medieval Europe, there was, as is typical of pre-modern societies, a fusion of religion and politics. But this fusion, under the new conditions of religious diversity, extreme sectarianism, and conflict created by the Protestant Reformation, led to the nasty, brutish, and long-lasting religious wars of the early modern era that left European societies in ruin. The secularization of the state was the felicitous response to this catastrophic experience. The Enlightenment did the rest. Modern Europeans learned to separate religion and politics. Most importantly, they learned to tame the religious passions and to dissipate obscurantist fanaticism by banishing religion to a protected private sphere, while establishing an open, liberal, secular public sphere where freedom of expression and public reason dominate. Those are the favorable secular foundations upon which democracy grows and thrives.

Such a narrative, one may say, serves as one of the foundational myths of the contemporary European identity. It is indeed rather striking to observe how widespread the view is throughout Europe that religion is “intolerant” and “creates conflict.” According to the 1998 International Social Survey Program, a majority of the population in practically every European country holds both views. This was already the case before September 11, 2001, or before any other major act of terror perpetrated by Muslims in Europe. Most striking is the view of "religion" in the abstract as the primary source of violent conflict, given the actual historical experience of most European societies in the recent past. The violent conflicts and
massacres of the first half of the twentieth century were much more the product of modern secular ideologies than of religious fanaticism and intolerance.

Yet contemporary Europeans seemingly prefer to selectively forget the more inconvenient recent memories of secular ideological and nationalist conflict, and instead retrieve the long-forgotten memories of the religious wars of early modern Europe to make sense of the religious conflicts they see today proliferating around the world and increasingly threatening them.

I call the narrative a “myth” because it is a rather inaccurate depiction of European historical developments and it is not even a fair characterization of "real democracies" in Europe today. The religious wars of Early Modern Europe did not lead, at least not immediately, into the secular state but rather into the confessional one. The principle *cuius regio eius religio*, established first at the Peace of Augsburg, is not the formative principle of the modern secular democratic state, but rather that of the modern confessional territorial absolutist state. Nowhere in Europe did religious conflict lead to secularization, but rather to the confessionalization of the state and to the territorialization of religions and peoples. There emerged a homogeneous Protestant northern Europe, a homogeneous Catholic southern Europe, and three bi-confessional societies in between—Holland, Germany and Switzerland—with their own territorial confessional segregation into “pillars” (*zuilen*), *Länder*, or cantons.

Moreover, this early modern dual pattern of confessionalization and territorialization had already been established before the Protestant Reformation by the formation of the Spanish Catholic state under the Catholic kings in the late fifteenth century. The expulsion of Spanish Jews and Muslims who refused to convert to Catholicism was the logical consequence of such a dynamic of state formation, bringing to an end the long period of *convivencia* between Christians, Muslims, and Jews in medieval Spain in both Christian and Muslim kingdoms. Ethno-religious cleansing, in this respect, stands at the very origin of the early modern European state. From such a perspective, the so-called "religious wars" could also more appropriately be called the wars of early modern European state formation. Religious minorities caught in the wrong confessional territory were not offered secular toleration, much less freedom of religion, but the "freedom" to emigrate.
This was the time when religious minorities and Jews from all over Europe found temporary refuge in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, in what would eventually become the “pale of settlement,” before finding a more secure home in the more religiously pluralistic societies of North and South America. The Westphalian settlement implemented throughout continental Europe solved the problem of religious conflict by eliminating religious pluralism through the enforcement of religious homogenization.

The secularization and the democratization of the state only emerged much later. But it is striking to observe that nowhere in Europe was the transfer of sovereignty from the monarch to the nation or the people accompanied by the emergence of religious pluralism. In Europe the model of religious homogeneous uniformity was transferred to the modern secular nation. Modern European nationalism is grounded in the same logic of uniform homogenization as if the imagined community of the nation were a secular translation of the imagined community of the national Christian church.

Not surprisingly the Jewish question has reemerged again and again throughout continental Europe with every transformation of sovereignty and with every modern nationalist mobilization. We know the Napoleonic formula of Jewish emancipation following the famous saying of Clermont-Tonnerre: “We must refuse everything to the Jews as a nation and accord everything to the Jews as individuals.” While problematic from the perspective of maintaining some form of Jewish ethical community, the French secular national model of individual egalitarian assimilation was certainly more benevolent than anti-Semitic formulas of ethnic nationalism that rejected the very possibility of Jewish assimilation—individual or communal—into the national community.

This became most tragically evident not only in Germany but also in the “blood lands” of the former Polish Lithuanian commonwealth. Those regions may have avoided the early modern confessional religious wars but suffered the most brutal forms of ethno-religious cleansing when confessionalization came in the form of modern nationalist conflicts between Poles, Ukrainians, Lithuanians, and Byelorussians in the 1930s and 1940s. Jews once again became tragically caught in the middle.
In Western Europe, the arrival of “guest workers” from Southern Europe, Turkey, and North Africa reopened the question of the transformation of post-national European democracies under new conditions of religious pluralism. We Europeans must learn the right lessons from our past failures to accommodate religious pluralist societies. The solution can no longer be based on the Westphalian model of a homogeneous religious or secular national state. It will need to be based on some form of post-national and post-secular democratic state that offers equal rights and liberties to all citizens—secular as well as religious—and on some model of diverse and pluralist societies that offer free and equitable exercise to all their religious communities, be they Christian, Jewish, Muslim, or other.

With those reflections I wanted to honor both the courageous political leadership of today’s Laureate, Chancellor Angela Merkel, on this most crucial European issue and the memory of Rabbi Abraham Geiger who did so much to open our eyes to the common roots of the three religions of Europe, Christianity, Judaism and Islam. Let’s hope and pray that the three religious communities, Christian, Jewish and Muslim, will learn to work closely together building a common and solidaristic European home, one that may serve as model for the rest of the world.

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