



**Landeshauptstadt  
Potsdam**

Der Oberbürgermeister

**Speech at the conference „From the Sea to the City“ in Palermo  
Lord Mayor Potsdam, Mike Schubert**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Dear guests,

Dear Leoluca,

Dear fellow-campaigners, dear friends of the consortium “From the Sea to the City”,

Also from me, a cordial and warm welcome to the impressive setting of the city of Palermo! It is clear to all of us by now why Palermo was Italy’s cultural capital 2018! A city – and please allow me to use this comparison – which is a reflection of its mayor: diverse, cosmopolitan, and with character. Without a doubt, the island capital emanates diversity and openness towards different European cultures while maintaining a dialogue with the Arab world. It thus teaches its citizens to look at the world from different cultural and political perspectives - a basic prerequisite for a tolerant life together.

Its cultural complexity and its historic footprint make this city an outstanding setting for our conference. For getting the opportunity to experience Palermo in this way, I would like to thank you, Leoluca, very much.

Already at the time of the Arab rule from the 9th-11th century, Palermo was a centre of different and often opposing cultures, which, however, coexisted in harmony and affection. I also associate Leoluca with this openness and this idea of international understanding. They say that when you have been to Palermo once, you always come again because it is a versatile city. It inspires and shows character.

My friend, mayor Orlando, has been as inspiring to people all over Europe as his city – first with his extraordinarily brave and successful fight against corruption and against the mafia, and then with his passion for defending the human rights of all those who cannot fight for themselves -

refugees and migrants. But for him – and we all know this by now – they are still no migrants but Palermitani because as he says, “Those who are in Palermo are Palermitani”.

The old seaport of Palermo has always been cosmopolitan. People are used to many migrants here. Time and again, ships dock in the port of Palermo with migrants rescued on the Mediterranean Sea. It's almost a routine. Is it really routine? A routine that Palermo and other cities at the EU's external borders share as the common denominator of their lonely fate. They have been left alone with a burden that they cannot bear on their own. And they have been forced into a dilemma that they do not want to get into: between the moral aspiration of wanting to help people in need on the one hand – and realizing that they cannot do it alone on the other. This resulted in our joint search for a pragmatic solution to shoulder the challenge together. Because there is not only national selfishness but also international solidarity, not only the power of states, but also that of cities. And, as a wise Greek friend once said: Sometimes cities can do more than states!

Ladies and gentlemen,

So they exist - the many cities in Europe that have internalised this fact and want to face up to their responsibility. That is why you are all here, physically or virtually. You have understood that democracy, integration and solidarity have to be implemented locally. And therefore, our International Alliance of Safe Harbours is to be the beginning of a new Europe, a Europe of the citizens not only of governments.

The German Cities Safe Harbour Alliance was the beginning. The International Alliance of Safe Harbours is the aim. The alliance will stand for solidarity-based and pragmatic solutions in asylum and refugee policy, but also in integration policy. We are therefore striving for a model guided by moral pragmatism.

Please permit me to put this into context: Moral pragmatism, as I see it, can provide a bridge to bring together large parts of our society again. I am talking about the supposed conflict between cosmopolitans and communitarians. Political scientist Wolfgang Merkel describes cosmopolitans as people who consider borders a thing of the past and whose moral pattern of thought assumes that we must overcome national borders. When it comes to the communitarians however, Merkel is struggling with placing them. From his point of view, there are two types. For him, the first type are populist nationalists who demand national borders based on an intended ethnic homogeneity and the exclusion of others. He calls the second type

the normatively decent ones relying on a strong welfare state, who wants to support the weak, but also demands secure borders.

Here, in this second variant, I place moral pragmatism – beyond the attempt to fail with the vision of a world without borders in view of social reality and thus run the risk of achieving nothing for the concrete situation of the people concerned. But clearly as a bulwark against the populist right, the nationalists with their identitarian, ethnically or even racially loaded völkisch dictum of a Europe of the peoples. This world view has rushed Europe into disaster several times in its history. It cost the lives of millions of people during the world wars – and this nationalism threatens to poison Europe again.

We can stand up to this view of the world with moral pragmatism. And we can, as it were, win back those in society who feel that their voice is hardly heard in the current political debates because they do not feel they belong to either of the two supposed camps, who do not want to perceive themselves as world citizens or nationalists.

I want us to win over precisely those people in European cities who want to help people, who consider sea rescue first and foremost as a humanitarian duty, but for whom the question of a fair distribution of tasks, organized procedures and social integration are important. People who, at the same time, do not want to see the European external borders being questioned. It's about combining humanitarian motivations with what's locally feasible.

Those cities that are willing – either on a one-time or permanent basis – to receive people, should be enabled to voluntarily host people. Therefore the network of cities, acknowledged as a part of the distribution mechanism in Europe, provide rapid relief for the cities along the Mediterranean.

Democratically legitimized voluntariness instead of rigid requirements could be the way forward to a system of integration of refugees in Europe accepted by both supporters and sceptics. In my opinion, as Europeans we are obliged to live those values that we consider our basis. We want to fight together for a Europe of solidarity and humanity.

Therefore, I would also like to thank our partners, the consortium “From the Sea to the City”, for their extremely committed, goal-oriented and professional work. Despite a very short time for preparation and an incredibly complex framework with many players, our joint project took on a concrete form and was filled with life. And today we are sitting here together coming from many parts of the world, physically or virtually – that is a masterstroke!

Last but not least, I would like to thank you very much, ladies and gentlemen, for your participation! Without you all this would not be possible at all – our initiative would be a mere idea and the wish to put it into practice just an illusion. I wish us a successful conference, good talks and an enriching exchange!