

SPEECHES CARLOS V EUROPEAN AWARD 2022

European and Ibero-American Academy of Yuste Foundation

The European and Ibero-American Academy of Yuste Foundation is a public non-profit-making body of cultural, scientific, research and disseminating nature, which is integrated in the Extremaduran Regional Government's foundational public sector.

The Foundation has its registered office at the Monastery of San Jerónimo of Yuste, the place chosen by Charles V as a retreat to reflect during the last years of his life, thus making it one of the key places of Europe's history and memory.

Objectives

To contribute to the momentum and consolidation of the existing linkages between Extremadura, Europe and Ibero-America under the principles of loyalty, respect for the respective identity, mutual benefit and solidarity.

Aims

To support the promotion of democracy, the respect for human rights, the furtherance of international peace and concord, as well as the development of all peoples and nations in the world through the promotion of culture, research, the dissemination of knowledge and social integration.

Working Areas

Research, Education, Dissemination, Culture and Cooperation

BOARD OF TRUSTEES

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A representative with rank of Minister of the Government of the Netherlands.

A representative with the rank of Minister of the Government of Portugal.

A representative with the rank of Minister of the Government of Hungary.

Fifteen representatives of the Regional Government of Extremadura appointed by the Government Council, including the holder of the body with competences in External Action materia of the Regional Government of Extremadura.

Four people of recognised prestige in the Ibero-American field, designated by the Government Council of the Regional Government of Extremadura.

Five representatives of the University of Extremadura appointed by the Rector of the University of Extremadura.

Presidents of Provincial Councils

Secretary:

The head of the General Secretariat of the Presidency of the Regional Government of Extremadura or, when applicable, the regional ministry with the powers on External Action.

CARLOS V EUROPEAN AWARD

European Disability Forum

The European Disability Forum is an organisation of people with disabilities that has been defending the interests of more than 100 million people with disabilities in Europe for 25 years. It is an independent non-governmental organisation (NGO) bringing together organisations representing people with disabilities from all over Europe. They are run by people with disabilities and their families. They are a strong and united voice of people with disabilities in Europe. They advocate the inclusion of people with disabilities in European Union (EU) policy and beyond. Its mission is to ensure the full inclusion of persons with disabilities in society. Also, to ensure access to human rights through active participation in policy development, implementation and monitoring of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in Europe.

Decision of the Jury

In this 15th edition, the jury has decided to award the Carlos V European Award to the EUROPEAN DISABILITY FORUM (EDF), a European NGO that brings together organisations representing 100 million people with disabilities and their families across Europe. The EDF celebrates its 25th anniversary this year; a time it has employed defending the rights of people with disabilities and promoting their inclusion, caring for those who need it most and who suffer multiple discrimination for having different capacities, valuing their dignity as people and the great value they are to society. Through its work, the EDF promotes a more inclusive Europe and a more social, just and egalitarian Europe, and contributes to the process of European integration, to the values that the European Union defends and to ensuring that all citizens can live together in this common area on an equal footing and without being discriminated against because of their social capacities. It thus favours a more humane Europe that focuses on the well-being of its citizens, providing strong legal frameworks to defend inclusion, accessibility, freedom of movement, independent life, dignity, non-discrimination, active and effective

participation in society, respect for difference as part of human diversity and other fundamental rights and freedoms.

Members of the Carlos V European Award Jury

Guillermo Fernández Vara. President of the Regional Government of Extremadura and of the Board of Trustees of the European and Ibero-American Academy of Yuste Foundation. President of the Jury of the Carlos V European Award. Spain.

José Manuel Albares Bueno. Minister for Foreign Affairs, European Union and Cooperation. First Vice President of the Board of the European and Ibero-American Academy of Yuste Foundation. Spain.

María Andrés Marín. Director of the European Parliament Office in Madrid. Spain.

María Ángeles Benítez Salas. Head of the European Commission Representation in Madrid. Spain.

Pilar Blanco-Morales Limones. Vice President and Regional Minister of Public Administration and Finance. Regional Government of Extremadura. Member of the European and Ibero-American Academy of Yuste Foundation's Board of Trustees. Spain.

Sofia Corradi - Mamma Erasmus. Former Scientific Director of the Permanent Conference of Italian University Rectors' Office in Rome (CRUI). 2016 Carlos V European Award. Italy.

Jacques Delors. Former President of the European Commission. 1995 Carlos V European Award. France.

Rebeca Grynspan Mayufis. Secretary-General of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD). Member of the European and Ibero-American Academy of Yuste. Costa Rica.

Antonio Hidalgo García. Rector of the University of Extremadura and second vice president of the Board of Trustees of the European and Ibero-American Academy of Yuste Foundation. Spain.

María del Carmen Iglesias Cano. Director of the Royal Academy of History and academic of the Royal Spanish Academy. Member of the European and Ibero-American Academy of Yuste. Spain.

Blanca Martín Delgado. President of the Assembly of Extremadura. Spain.

Manuela Mendonça. President of the Portuguese Academy of History and member of the European and Ibero-American Academy of Yuste. Portugal.

ADDRESSES DURING THE AWARD CEREMONY

Address by Guillermo Fernández Vara, President of the Regional Government of Extremadura

The Chilean poet Pablo Neruda wrote: “You can cut all the flowers but you cannot keep spring from coming”, because in spite of everything, and although these times are attributed to very serious geopolitical, sanitary and economic tensions, hope is on the side of humanity because, like Sartre’s freedom, hope is constitutive of the human being. Welcome, one more year, to this Monastery of San Jerónimo de Yuste, a key location in the memory of Europe, a space from which we think of a better Europe.

Charles V always defended the idea of the whole and not a single part of it. In this place that is full of life today, he decided to rest, meditate and observe his legacy and the new future. A metaphor for common projects: they need hope, work and reflection in order to continue in the future.

Your Majesty, our deepest and sincere appreciation for joining us in one more edition in Yuste. Your presence supports the commitment to the European project and to Euro-Ibero-American relations, a keystone, which the work of the European and Ibero-American Academy of Yuste Foundation, promoter of the Carlos V European Award, rests on.

With this award we give recognition to people, organisations and initiatives that have contributed to the knowledge and enhancement of the values of Europe. In this edition, the award is granted to an institution as well as to many millions of Europeans, because the European Disability Forum is an NGO that brings together organisations that represent 100 million people with disabilities and their families across Europe. Twenty-five years defending their rights and promoting their inclusion, valuing their dignity as people and the great asset they are for society, contributing to a more inclusive, more social, fairer and egalitarian Europe. For all this, my sincere congratulations.

We know that Europe is more than a territorial demarcation, much more than the extension of 27 Member States. Europe is a way of living, of defending rights, and it has its strength in its diversity, in the multitude of citizens and the capacities that integrate it, it is each and every one of the people who inhabit it.

Europe has known and knows how to conjugate the first person of the plural, because for Europe the key lies in WE ARE, an inclusive and egalitarian “we are” that encompasses everyone, without leaving anyone behind. Europe is built little by little, through those concrete achievements that Robert Schuman spoke of. Legislative milestones have been articulated, ranging from the international level, such as the International Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, going past community level, such as the European Pillar of Social Rights or the European Strategy for Persons with Disabilities, up to regional level, such as the Accessibility Law of Extremadura or the Office of Cognitive Accessibility and Easy Reading of Extremadura, the first public office of its kind in our country; measures that place Extremadura at the forefront of accessibility, as proven by the fact that Mérida, the capital of Extremadura, was awarded the 2021 Reina Letizia Award for accessibility and universal design in municipalities last week. Much progress has been made, but we still need to break many barriers down.

Equality and inclusion must be legal, but they must be real above all, because we cannot forget that the Europe of the citizens, that WE ARE, is built day by day. And every progress, every conquest, every scientific and technological innovation must always be accompanied by greater

equality and social inclusion that guarantee a dignified life, services that allow everyone to participate in society and in the labour market, because only then can we go further.

And in this European Year of Youth, I would like to highlight the role that youth can and should play in building a better, more inclusive, greener and digital future. A few weeks ago, after receiving a well-deserved recognition, a young and experienced scientist and researcher from Extremadura defended the values of serenity and reflection as principles of creativity and a source of progress. Perhaps at a time when acceleration and speed are paramount, it is her voice and her words that are demanding a new reality. She, her youth, the science she represents, the collective work involved in research were key to finding the way out of the last COVID-19 crisis experienced. These generations, who find a referent in Sofia Corradi and their legacy in the Erasmus Programme, are already the reflection of the future that will determine what we will become.

Ladies and gentlemen,

In War and Peace, Tolstoy wrote: "Is it possible to live peacefully in our times, when you have a heart?". This same question assails us currently as well; how to live peacefully in these turbulent moments in which we see how History is written because the war has returned to Europe. In this historical account, we cannot look away, because this invasion is not the war OF Ukraine, it is a war IN Ukraine that is radiating its devastating consequences throughout Europe and the world.

The images that reach us from the different Ukrainian cities move us and scourge us. The irreparable loss of human life is compounded by the humanitarian injury caused by the departure of millions of refugees and internally displaced persons; the shortage of supplies that do not arrive and paralyse the industrial chain in our factories and in our fields; the escalation in the price of electricity, of fuels... All this is showing us that in this globalised world we are condemned to understand each other, to seek agreements, to build bridges instead of digging trenches.

The European Union was born as a peace project after two devastating global conflicts and this war in Ukraine is an anomaly in Europe that does not fit in our understanding. With this war scene where the battlefields have been located close to the parks we inhabit, the streets we pass by and the theatres where we enjoy culture, we have to work to give a single answer: more and better Europe. A united Europe that has given a forceful response to Russia's challenges and threats with the European Peace Fund, to supply military equipment to Ukraine, with economic and commercial sanctions to isolate the aggressor in an unprecedented response and with the reception of millions of refugees.

First the pandemic and then this war must make us reflect on the challenges that Europe must face in order to be strong and to be able to face the challenges with strategic autonomy so as not to depend on third countries. To this end, we must relocate the production chain; let geopolitical Europe continue to advance its foreign and defence policy in order to have a voice on the international stage.

This new crisis can be an incentive to promote the ecological and digital transition, to release ballast of energy dependencies, to know and be committed to our potentialities and our resources, whether agricultural, climate or strategic. And Extremadura is ready and has much to contribute with.

This is the scenario that we have before us, so today - more than ever - spaces for dialogue, reflection and dialogue are necessary. And here, if I may, today I want look towards home, towards the European and Ibero-American Academy of Yuste Foundation, which celebrates its 30th anniversary this year. Three decades creating forums to continue deepening the project of European integration, looking at this common house that Europe is, but without losing sight of the American continent which we are united to by history, culture, language and affections, building bridges and proving that there is much more that unites us than what separates us.

One of the most important bodies of Yuste Foundation is its Academy. I would like to extend a special thought to two of its members. Firstly, to Ursula Lerh, who died a few days ago; a former German minister and gerontologist, who occupied the Marie Curie Chair, and who was one of the most committed women to the welfare of the citizenry, of women and the elderly.

Secondly, I extend the other endearing thought to one of the most committed writers and intellectuals, José Saramago, Rembrandt Chair of the Academy of Yuste, on the centenary of his birth. A learned and humble man who put us in front of the mirror to question us as individuals and as a society, leaving us reflections that are more valid than ever today. A man who fostered the rapprochement and knowledge between Spain and Portugal and the role that these two countries could play for Europe in order for it to turn its gaze to Ibero-America and Africa.

Ladies and gentlemen, I will shortly conclude.

As I said at the beginning, the present is fraught with uncertainties, but in our endeavour lies hope, hope for real equality, for a society where each person contributes and is not useless. Hope goes beyond possibilities, it goes with dreams and we know that realities exist because someone dreamed them first.

Nobody saw music like maestro Rodrigo, nobody heard musical notes like Beethoven, nobody explored the universe and time like Stephen Hawking; nobody solved mathematical equations like Nash, and no one expressed more feeling than the flamenco dancer from Cáceres, Enrique el Cojo; examples that show us that different disabilities have many capabilities.

To all those who have a disability, we ask you to help us walk those other paths, to teach us those other worlds, to show us those other gazes, teach us so that we may learn what a dignified life is, one of overcoming challenges, of crowning unthinkable peaks, of living with dignity. Do not stop dreaming, because we will anchor our determination in your self-improvement dreams.

Thank you very much.

Address by Miss Maribel Cáceres Cabanillas, Vice-President of Plena Inclusión España

Your Majesty, President of the Congress of Deputies, President of the Regional Government of Extremadura, authorities, former laureates and guests to this ceremony of the Carlos V European Award: good morning.

I look around me and I see many familiar faces; I know who you are: personalities who appear on television and in the newspapers, but most of those present do not know me, which is why I would like to introduce myself, because nobody should be anonymous. My name is Maribel Cáceres Cabanillas, I am a woman with intellectual disability and I am vice president of Plena Inclusión España. Before I start with my testimony, I want to thank you for thinking of me in order to be here with you today, but not just on my behalf, but on behalf of all the people I proudly represent every day, people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

I have been part of the associative movement of Plena Inclusión's for more than 10 years; there have been lights and shadows, a lot of effort, a lot of struggle and also a lot of satisfaction.

From the first place I occupied in the special employment centre (CEE) of Plena Inclusión Badajoz or Plena Inclusión Montijo as a user of the occupational centre service, to being what I am now, my dedication has focused, first to become a fully empowered person who makes her own decisions and lives her life independently and to, furthermore, ensure that all people with intellectual and developmental disabilities become subjects in their own right and with a project based on all the dimensions of their lives like everyone else. And this has only been possible by moving from being a service recipient to choosing what services I need, how I need them and what I don't need.

Thanks to the support received from the associative movement of Plena Inclusión and my conviction that another society is possible, I am currently the president of the first association of women with intellectual disabilities in Spain.

From this association and from the state platform we can raise our voice and expose our demands to society from a gender perspective, fighting against gender violence and for our sexual and reproductive rights.

As vice president of Plena Inclusión España, I work, as I said before, so that all the people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, like me, may enjoy a full exercise of civil rights, developing our own personal autonomy, having an independent life project.

People with other abilities can contribute a lot to society, our families and our environment. We wish to train ourselves and in order to do so we pay special attention to education being inclusive, adapted to the specific needs of each person. We wish to live in community, work in community, enjoy leisure in community, together, equal and with the same rights as people without disabilities.

We know that we cannot travel this path alone, so we need to continue working side by side with the Administration in order to achieve progress as is the case of Extremadura's Cognitive Accessibility Office, OACEX, unique in all Spain, which is working to remove that important and invisible barrier that is to be able to understand our environment and generalise easy reading.

It is essential that public administrations and the whole of society in general put themselves in our shoes and stop seeing us as people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, but as people with rights and that, like everyone at some point in life, need support to achieve goals.

That would be real inclusion, where we leave the term “disability” behind, as a very heavy label that did not let us show that, as I said before, with the necessary supports any barrier can disappear, because barriers can disappear if there is a desire for them to, if properly pursued and if there is a firm will that all people be individuals with different personalities but equal in rights and opportunities.

We know that words matter and in the last few days I have heard that disability must be on the agenda. And the term “agenda” is a term that comes from Latin and means “things to be done”. Then let’s do it.

Thank you very much.

Address by Mister Ioannis Vardakastanis, President of the European Disability Forum

Your Majesty the King of Spain, Felipe VI. Distinguished President of the Spanish Congress of Deputies, Minister of the Government of Spain, President of the Regional Government of Extremadura, members of the Diplomatic Corp, recipients of the Carlos V European Award, Academicians and Members of the Yuste Foundation, Bishop of the Diocese of Plasencia, Pauline Community of Yuste, authorities, representatives of civil society. Dear friends and colleagues.

On behalf of the European Disability Forum and all our member organisations, I would like to wholeheartedly thank the European and Ibero-American Academy of Yuste Foundation, and the members of the jury for awarding EDF with the prestigious recognition of the Carlos V European award.

This is an award to the European disability movement, to all the women and men with disabilities who come together to jointly advocate for a more inclusive Europe for 100 million persons with disabilities. This is an award to a civil society movement that represents and actively works to achieve the EU motto: “united in diversity”. Because we know that Europe’s diversity is one of our greatest assets. And because we, persons with disabilities, after too many years of discrimination, segregation and even persecution and violence against us, we found in the core values of the EU the possibility to shape a continent that embraces human diversity, and in which we can grow and participate on an equal footing with others.

We are particularly honoured to receive this award in Spain, one of the most sensitive countries in the European Union concerning the rights of persons with disabilities, thanks to the excellent work and the strength of the Spanish disability movement led by our member CERMI, and with worldwide acknowledged disability organisations like ONCE, and committed local and regional organisations that relentlessly work to ensure inclusion and equal opportunities in regions like Extremadura.

We are also pleased to receive this award on the year of our 25th anniversary, a year in which we look back to take stock of the progress made in these 25 years, and together we look forward to the future we want for Europe.

However, this year’s celebration is unfortunately overshadowed by the dramatic situation that millions of persons with disabilities went through in recent years, and are still going through. First, the COVID-19 pandemic, and now the war in Ukraine. We live a crisis within a crisis, and persons with disabilities face in both cases the greatest risks of abandonment, abuse and neglect.

It happened during the worst times of the pandemic, when we witnessed how persons with disabilities were left without any support, when residential institutions became hotbeds of infection and were further isolated and abandoned, or when persons with disabilities were denied emergency treatment due to discriminatory triage.

EDF and its members were instrumental in calling on the European Union and national government to address the extremely harsh challenges posed by the pandemic. We called for the prioritisation of persons with disabilities in the vaccination strategies, for specific accommodations to persons with disabilities during lockdowns, for the accessibility of the EU COVID pass, and the creation of a special committee in the European Parliament which has recently started.

The EU adopted a historic budget to alleviate the harmful effects of the pandemic. The implementation of the Recovery and Resilience Funds has already started, and persons with disabilities through their representative organisations must be involved in the planning and deployment of these funds.

Now the violent war in Ukraine is again putting persons with disabilities at a higher risk for their lives. Like in the pandemic, the situation is aggravated for those who live in institutions and cannot escape from the war. We know that today, many Ukrainians with disabilities who have stayed in the country are faced with situations without food, water and essential medication, without staff to support them, without access to humanitarian aid and to shelter during bombings.

And those persons with disabilities who managed to flee Ukraine arrive in the EU in extremely precarious situations. The reception centres are not accessible to them, and they arrive in many cases without the most basic assistive technologies and support. EDF and our members in the neighbouring countries, and across Europe, are supporting as much as possible. We also need the integration plans of EU countries to fully take into consideration the specific needs of women, men and children with disabilities. We need more European countries to welcome refugees with disabilities, as you are doing here in Spain.

Since the beginning of the war, EDF established a close cooperation with the umbrella organisations of persons with disabilities in Ukraine, which recently became one of our members. We are firm believers of the strength and legitimacy of working together for a peaceful, human rights based and social European Union.

This belief is proven by our 25 years of history. Since the creation of the European Disability Forum in 1997, and the inclusion of disability in the Amsterdam Treaty article on combating discrimination, the European Union has become increasingly present in the everyday lives of persons with disabilities.

From the European Parking Card adopted in 1998 to the proposal for a new Electoral Law approved last week in the European Parliament guaranteeing the right to vote to all persons with disabilities without exemption, and more accessible European elections, EDF and its members have been active in the main achievements making the European Union more inclusive to persons with disabilities.

The EU and EDF were present and active in the UN negotiations leading to the adoption of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2006, which entered into force in the EU in 2011 and has been ratified by all Member States. The CRPD is now part of the legal framework of our Union, but its implementation is still far from being a reality.

Taking the CRPD as our guiding compass, EDF advocated for an ambitious Disability Rights Strategy, adopted by the Commission last year. This strategy, as well as national disability strategies, should turn the words into deeds, and urgently address the challenges persons with disabilities face every day.

We need to fight discrimination. Despite the EU Directive on equal treatment in employment, and despite the over 1,3 million signatures EDF and its members gathered in 2007, the EU does not have yet a horizontal equal treatment legislation, and over 50% of persons with disabilities in Europe feel discriminated against.

Women with disabilities face even greater discrimination in all areas of life, and still in some countries of the EU suffer dreadful practices such as forced sterilisation. A practice that we advocate to ban in the proposal for a Directive on combating violence against women.

We also need equal access to quality and inclusive employment and education. Only 50,8% of persons with disabilities have employment compared to 75% of nondisabled people, and the rate of education dropout is substantially higher among students with disabilities. From the disability movement we proposed that EU funds, such as the European Social Fund, underpin the independent living and the social inclusion of persons with disabilities, because almost 30% of persons with disabilities are at risk of poverty and social exclusion.

Furthermore, from EDF and our members, we also fight to ensure one of the core values of the EU: freedom of movement, which is still not a reality for many persons with disabilities. To do so, we supported the EU in adopting important legislation which impacts on our daily lives. For example, the rights of passengers with disabilities in all modes of transport, as well as in accessibility legislation, where the EU has definitely progressed extensively in recent years with laws such as the Web Accessibility Directive or the European Accessibility Act.

But still, millions of persons with disabilities cannot move freely in the EU, cannot access transportation, sometimes are denied boarding on planes, and their disability is not recognised across EU Member States. From EDF we recommended the creation of a European Disability Card that the Commission will finally propose next year.

As I mentioned at the beginning, persons with disabilities are fully committed to the project of the European Union, and want to participate in addressing its challenges for the future. The digital and the green transitions, as well as the institutional reforms derived from the Conference on the Future of Europe, must put people and Europe's diversity at the centre to create a more social, resilient and inclusive Europe in which we can all enjoy the same rights and opportunities on an equal basis with others.

All these achievements and the ones to come in the future prove the key role that persons with disabilities and their representative organisations play, and must play, in defining the policies affecting them. We make a difference when we are involved in the decisions shaping our societies. In line with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, we will continue raising the guiding motto of the disability movement: nothing about us without us.

We thank you very much for recognising EDF and our members with the Carlos V European award, and for your attention.

Address by His Majesty the King, at the Carlos V European Award ceremony

It is undoubtedly a joy to return to Yuste in the month of May, so, in itself, it implies: that little by little we are recovering a relative normalcy since the last time we met, which was last 14 October.

This Monday, as you know, was Europe Day. It was 72 years since Schuman's Declaration, which established the pillars of this great social, political and economic project, which has also been essential in Spain's national project in the last decades of our history.

But this date is not only, nor should it only be, a cause for celebration. Because Europe must not only be celebrated and commemorated; it must also be protected and strengthened, it must be built on. This is how we will best be safeguarding the freedom, dignity of persons and human rights; and, with them, values such as peace, cooperation and solidarity; values that we want and need to vindicate again today, with the strength of our convictions, in the face of the horror that is plaguing Ukraine at the moment.

In short, we must defend - in order to preserve it - our model of coexistence under the democratic principles that underlie us, as well as the way of understanding ourselves and of collaborating in relations with the rest of the world.

And this is a daily task that, more than ever, requires the firm collaboration of all institutions and the participation of all citizens. Europe is built in the institutions, but also in the day-to-day life of those who live in it, in a continuous process that goes from bottom up and back, from east to west and from south to north, from the periphery to the centre, from Yuste to Brussels.

And in these crucial times in which we live, in which the world is becoming such a complex scenario for our European model, which really tests it to its very foundations, we need precisely the best version of Europe: the one that enables us to face the immediate issues and challenges we share, and which equally facilitates and assists Member States in addressing their specific problems or difficulties. And all this, under the enormous pressure and risk posed by the reality of a new war in Europe.

The war has indeed struck at the gates of the Union; and it persists, leaving a terrible trail of death and destruction. In addition, it has brought a generalised instability of global consequences with it that are difficult to discern in all their extent today.

Europe must remain united because, as our winner of the last edition, Angela Merkel, pointed out, "Only a Europe united inwards is a strong Europe outwards". And it is with that conviction that we must recover its position and exercise it on the international scene, because its triumph is that of the values that represent it and that it projects. And the efforts to achieve this must rise and be in line with the demands posed by the risks and threats of each moment. Schuman already warned this in his own, in 1950, and I quote:

"World peace cannot be safeguarded without the making of creative efforts proportionate to the dangers which threaten it. The contribution which an organised and living Europe can bring to civilisation is indispensable to the maintenance of peaceful relations".

Knowing that democracy is the best argument against the absurdity of war, we defend it firmly; and we do so by relying on the mechanisms - and improving them - in order and balance, reason and justice, which represents the rule of law for all.

It is on this solid foundation of successful achievements, values and convictions, and also with the realistic determination to contribute to a united, even more social and more humane Europe, that the European Disability Forum is joining our list of distinguished winners today.

This is the second time in the history of the Carlos V European Award's 15 editions that a single person is not honoured, but rather an organisation or project. And this award demonstrates the Forum's commitment to the process of European integration from the premise of an inclusive and accessible Europe for all. Congratulations, President Vardakastanis, to the European Disability Forum and to the more than 100 constituent entities and to the more than 100 million European citizens they represent, congratulations on this award which values and highlights your 25 years of work committed to the promotion and full protection of the rights and freedoms of people with disabilities. And, of course, allow me to congratulate you on your 25th anniversary on this occasion as well.

This recognition of the Forum also applies to Europe itself and its members, since the Forum comprises almost 15% of its population. And we certainly deeply hope that it will have a positive impact in helping to promote a much-needed awareness of this issue and to give greater visibility to the challenges and also to the progress of disability. It must encourage the whole of society to become involved and collaborate in this task, to become involved and to support this cause. It is true that much progress has been made towards greater inclusion, but there are still barriers to overcome.

At this point, it is important to highlight and value the role played by all associations in supporting, defending and promoting persons with disabilities. Based on the motto that the Forum has – one that is so clear, so significant -, “Nothing about us without us”, they work for the welfare of those who need it most, on a normative level and also from a practical perspective. Without cohesion and inclusion, a society does not progress; that is why all citizens must have opportunities.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Europe is a continent that is open to the world, but we Spaniards, especially, would not understand the European past and present without Ibero-America. Links and shared history that are anchored in five centuries ago and that have formed an identity, more alive today than ever, which we are proud to promote.

Today, we also congratulate the European and Ibero-American Academy of Yuste Foundation, an entity that celebrates 30 years of existence, a reflection of a European, Ibero-American and cross-border Extremadura that has been building bridges between Europe and Ibero-America for decades in order to recognise us in the diversity of our accents and our cultures. The Foundation, which I am very pleased to be Honorary President of, is one of the best hinges between two continents, two regions that share languages, culture, history and affection, and which are called to share a future of progress and welfare.

One of the pillars of its work is its Academy, made up of intellectuals, scientists and artists of recognised prestige who, through their work, have helped to enhance the European project and what it represents. Today we need its light as a beacon in these dark moments that we have to go through.

Yuste, due to its history, action and vocation, is at the heart of Europe, and the Foundation continues and will continue in its endeavour to continue creating spaces for dialogue, reflection, knowledge and encounter; spaces so sorely needed in these turbulent times, and so appropriate to the identity of the European project.

Thank you all very much and congratulations again to the European Disability Forum.