

Matthias Erzberger (1875-1921) Patriot and Visionary

Hybrid Event, Wednesday 24 November 2021

Transcript of the speeches



Speakers Transcript

- S1 So five, four, three, two, one. Here we go.
Welcome everyone to the EPP event in the European Parliament to remember someone that most of us don't know, and it's quite surprising we don't. It's a person who stood by his beliefs and a person who paid for it with his life in signing the Versailles Treaty: Matthias Erzberger, who died 100 years ago last August. And it's also important to remember him because of what is happening today here in the European Parliament, with someone who is also standing strongly by her beliefs, Madame Tsikhanouskaya, talking about the oppression in Belarus. So there are, today, parallels to this. And this is why it is so important to remember. Erzberger was also very important in supporting Lithuania's independence back then and in supporting Germany joining the League of Nations, which it did after he was assassinated, sadly, by right-wing extremists in Germany. And I guess at this point, I'd like to very quickly mention that I have a personal stake in this, because my grandparents, my French and American grandparents (grandfathers) were involved in the First World War, in this senseless war. And to be part of this and be in this building, that is a symbol of that reconciliation and the rebuilding of Europe is quite moving for me. I would like to first introduce the speakers, starting with Rainer Wieland of Germany, a Member of the European Parliament, Liudas Mazyliis of Lithuania - welcome - also a Member of the European Parliament and two historians over there, further on my right, on the far end is Christopher Dowe of Germany and Simonas Jazavita - welcome - who is a Lithuanian historian. We are going to show you a film, after the initial comments by Rainer and Liudas. Let us begin with some opening comments by Liudas. Oh, and in the meantime, also, please keep in mind this is being live-streamed in English. There is interpretation in English, French, German and Lithuanian, and we want to get you involved. If you have something to ask or say, please send it through via the chat as you're watching. And don't forget the handle @EPPGroup if you have something to cast wider on the social networks. So Liudas, please.
- S2 Thank you. Thank you, first of all, to my colleague, Rainer Wieland for this opportunity, for this event and for organising. Now, to speak about Matthias Erzberger: he was destined to work in an extremely difficult epoch. But of course we can ask whether or not we live in any easier times at the moment. The bloodiest war in the history of humanity was drawing to an end. It was called the Great War back then, and nobody believed that another even bloodier war would take place. There was an outbreak of a pandemic, not the COVID-19 pandemic, the Spanish Flu pandemic, which claimed an enormous number of lives. More people died in the pandemic than probably on the battlefields, and at that time Matthias Erzberger had to sign the capitulation act. However, his personality and his interests transcended the boundaries of a single state. He was interested in all Catholic countries, including Lithuania, which back then was only just being established as a modern state. I personally became acquainted with the work of Matthias Erzberger when I embarked on finding documents - very important documents for Lithuania - and I found a lot of information about him. However, his achievements somehow got moved to the margins of critical discourse. So, in my lectures I try to speak extensively about the efforts of Matthias Erzberger, his attempts to make sure that a democratic Lithuania would appear on the map of Europe. That was never an easy task to realise given the institutional setup of Germany at that time. For us, Germans were occupiers. There was an occupying authority in Lithuania. The Council of Lithuania acted, and we had the Declaration of Independence. It is always very difficult to explain to people that there were other institutions in Europe. There was a parliament and there was the press, which, despite censorship and propaganda, was writing about the actual events. Back then, we really needed to make sure that the Declaration of Independence was properly featured in the German press. We don't really know via what mechanisms for exchanging information this news reached Germany. But it did. And the German press wrote about

it. Well, for me as a researcher, it is a great delight to find the human factor, the human aspects among all the official links and relations, to find some mutual trust, to find shared values between the forces, which in diplomatic terms were in confrontation, because Germany and Lithuania were in conflict at that time. And I always feel very privileged as a researcher to be able to search in those primary sources. I was truly delighted to find documents showing the Reichstagsabgeordnete (Deputy of the Reichstag) where Erzberger managed to do so much that was so important to the process of independence for Lithuania. It's quite difficult to understand how a single politician was able to do all this, but it was because he worked on behalf of a number of institutions. His activities transcended the boundaries of institutions. And he was a very responsible democratic politician who had a clear vision, who really understood political processes in the broadest possible sense. His priority for democracy was what marked him out, and he was really a very brave person even before his death. He was aware of the conspiracy against him. He was being accused of almost everything: of signing the capitulation act, of having sold something to someone. In his diary, he wrote, "The bullet which is destined for me has already been fired." He went for a walk on the Schwarzwald mountains and this bullet reached him there. And this summer I went on an excursion. I went and visited that rock and laid a flower there. It is actually quite near to where we are at the moment - 100 kilometers away. Just speaking very personally and with a view of trying to understand what kind of a politician Erzberger was: in the archives in Koblenz, I found the remnants of the Erzberger archives, because when the Nazis came to power, his relatives were forced to burn the main archives of Matthias Erzberger. And while it included a variety of very important documents for Lithuania, including documents on Alsace Armenia, a lot of other documents were destroyed. However, while papers burn, ideas live on. So, a lot of primary sources related to Erzberger were destroyed, but I'm really very happy that in Stuttgart, I found his letters written to Herzog von Urach, who was elected to the throne in Lithuania, although Lithuania never actually became a monarchy. And I saw those letters with my own eyes. They survived 100 years. Another thing that I find very important is that, via the figure of Erzberger, we can try to understand our common European history. We should never forget. We tend to forget because we are afraid to recognise ourselves in the past, as if today we are different, better. However, if we don't really try to understand our common future, if we don't look back to the past and try to understand ourselves from a different angle, we won't ever be able to understand ourselves, as neighbours. So, the life of Matthias Erzberger teaches us directness, fairness. His life was really very purposeful, his life was very tragic and dramatic. However, his life was victorious. Thank you.

- S1 Liudas, thank you very much. Papers burn, but ideas live on. And that's the idea we're going to be talking about and watching a film about very soon. Rainer Wieland, please.
- S2 Thank you very much and a warm welcome to you. I'm from the land of Baden-Wurtemberg and that is the home of Matthias Erzburger and also the place where he died. Towards the western part of the land - and if I may just introduce a small sort of correction for the sake of accuracy - the location of his killing was actually far away from where we find ourselves now. But there are certainly some parallels. Erzberger was killed, shot, 100 years ago. It's true that this person was not publicly discussed, and he hasn't been part of common historical knowledge, probably because he was such a hated figure. With regard to the criminal proceedings against the murderer, they were sort of dragged out, to put it politely. I'm very glad that we are once again remembering and commemorating his life. And I think there are so many things that we can see now, see today, that were happening then. His name is a very important one; we should not underestimate its importance. I am a German, speaking as a Christian Democrat. And allow me to say the following: we need to be able to discuss things, we need to be able to debate things and disagree. That's fine and well. Things become difficult, however, when people become blinkered and see only their own reality, their own beliefs. We seem to be moving towards a time when people exist only within their bubbles, where they firmly believe that they own the truth and because they own the truth, they are above others, that they have moral authority to look down on everyone else and to disrespect others who disagree. And this is precisely what happened: a few young people felt justified in shooting Matthias Erzberger and taking his life, and that's why it is right and fitting that we should remember his life and that we shouldn't allow things to go that far again. Let us consider other historical events. The

John F. Kennedy Pulitzer Prize winning book, Profiles in Courage, talks about politicians who have risked their lives for their beliefs. Matthias Erzberger would certainly be one of those individuals. I'm very, very happy that our Lithuanian colleague has asked us to name a meeting room after Matthias Erzberger. And that's actually something that was decided in the Bureau Meeting just last week. A decision was taken in favour of this proposal. And I think it is a very good and correct decision. I'm very, very happy that this will be happening, thank you.

S1 I was urged to cut off for 10 months, so I feel close to that as well. Interesting that this film will help to understand why there should be a room for Mr. Erzberger in Brussels, in the European Parliament. Let us see this film now, and we'll discuss it with historians.

S2 When we remember Matthias Erzberger, we can learn a lot about democracy. Democracy should never be taken for granted. At that time, people such as Matthias Erzberger had to fight for democracy. And Erzberger paid for it with his life.

This important forerunner of German democracy came from humble beginnings in the shadow of the Swabian Alps. Erzberger's father was a tailor and also worked as a postman. The family was unable to pay for a better apprenticeship or university studies for the talented pupil; they could only afford him a simple apprenticeship as a primary school teacher. In 1896, Erzberger made a decision to pursue a life in politics. He left school and became a political journalist at a Catholic daily newspaper in Württemberg.

At the age of 28, he was the youngest representative in parliament. He soon became well known for colonial criticism. His criticisms resulted in the resignation of one of the German Kaiser's cousins. This was a huge scandal at the time because a primary school teacher had ousted a hereditary prince. The Government reacted by dissolving the Reichstag; the national right-wing reacted with hate and a smear campaign against Erzberger. Erzberger's voters in Southern Germany approved of his course and voted him into the Reichstag again.

Matthias Erzberger was in fact attempting not only to maintain his ideological position but, through some very specific actions, contribute his support to the Council of Lithuania (which the so-called German Army Group – particularly Erich Ludendorff – attempted to constrain somewhat) to win its right to function.

There was another thing: he was instrumental in having prominent Lithuanian politicians, for example, Bishop Pranciškus Karevičius, visit important German officials. He was, as it were, a mediator, attempting to establish relations even with those, such as the aforementioned Ludendorff, who were critical of Lithuania's aspirations for independence.

The politician was prepared to take responsibility in even the most difficult situations. Including when this could be to his personal detriment. He signed the WWI Armistice on behalf of Germany on 11 November 1918. He found a completely different Germany upon his return to Berlin. The Kaiser had fled to Holland and Germany had become a republic. This is the situation in which Erzberger began to fight for Germany to become a parliamentary democracy. In 1919, he spoke out vehemently that Germany should sign the Treaty of Versailles and that the war should not continue. To the anti-republican right-wing, Matthias Erzberger was deemed to be the embodiment of the much-hated Weimar Republic. The right-wingers used this backstabbing myth to try to make Erzberger and other democrats responsible for Germany's defeat and to distract others from their own guilt. On 26 August 1921, right-wing terrorists murdered Erzberger in the Black Forest.

Erzberger's murder was not about just one person and one politician; it was an attack on the entire Weimar Republic democracy.

The reactions to Matthias Erzberger's murder demonstrated the large split in German society after the First World War. Groups opposed to the Republic celebrated with students openly singing celebratory songs. The republican forces, however, were devastated and

mourned. In many places, hundreds of thousands of people went onto the streets and protested against political terrorism from the right-wing and against Erzberger's murder. The Chancellor of Germany spoke at the graveside and exhorted all democrats to stand together and to advocate for Erzberger's political legacy, namely, democracy.

He can be sympathised with. Even though Germany had lost the war, his efforts to secure working conditions were there to be seen.

It also seemed from the Lithuanian press that the victors in the war were frequently overly forceful with their strict demands. Such a favourable attitude was apparent, which is why it is natural to mention it.

Democracy needs democrats who are ready to take responsibility, even in difficult situations and even when it can be to their own disadvantage. Erzberger's fate shows how quickly and smoothly the transition from populist smear campaigns to verbal dehumanisation of the opponent to terrorism and murder can be. When we study Matthias Erzberger, we can learn a lot about our democracy today, in our city, in our country, and in Europe.

S1 Quite a moving film, I would call it. Before we hear more from Christopher, because we do have more to say about this film, obviously, let's go to Simonas Jazavita, historian at the Kaunas City Museum. Simonas, please.

S4 Hello, I will speak in Lithuanian today. Dear Members of the European Parliament, it's really important today to talk about these ideas. We got the invitation from Mr. Liudas Mažylis to come here to the European Parliament. We have already worked alongside him. Our cooperation started some time ago. We had a project in the Kaunas Museum. This was the project to commemorate the Centenary of Lithuania's Independence, and we became interested, during this project, in the figure of Matthias Erzberger. It turns out that he had links to Lithuania and to the Council of Lithuania at the end of the First World War. And what is also interesting for me is that he became a politician quite young, at 28. He studied history in Switzerland at the University of Freiburg, where many high-profile Lithuanians also studied. Maybe this was one of the reasons why he was a pro-Lithuanian politician. Let's come back to the end of 1917. At that time, the situation of Lithuania was very complicated. And all the power was in the hands of the German military Ober Ost. These German officials had all the power over territories which they grabbed from Russia during military operations some years prior to then. Their regime could be described as totalitarian. If someone was on the streets without a passport, they could be sent to prison for five years. It was forbidden to ride bicycles, to take private photos, etc. All these rules were there because Ober Ost leaders grew up in this period of Prussian military schools. And for them, these strict rules were their essence. Erzberger was a different person, even though he was a German politician, and there were certain tensions between these different political players. We will look at these tensions through the lens of the Lithuanian situation. The Council of Lithuania is a good example of how these people in Lithuania wanted to be together. The Council was created in 1917. At that time, there were people belonging to this military regime who thought Lithuania could be a post for further expansion into the East. There is a book on that by one historian who says that Erzberger was the best ally in Germany that Lithuania could have had at that time. Erzberger was becoming more important. And at that time, the Council of Lithuania appeared to have gained a silent approval from Germany, though the Ober Ost were not very much in favour of it. Max Hoffmann, a gifted military chief who had achieved victory at Darnelbruck, compared the possibility of Lithuania's independence or self-determination to that of his daughter, Elsa, who was only five. But let's remember what Erzberger wrote about this in his memoirs. Since the summer of 1917, one of his main goals was to change relations with Lithuania. Germany had to announce that Lithuania was an independent country, and a kind of governing body had to be created, like the Council of Lithuania. So this body was formed in neutral Switzerland. Erzberger had links with Switzerland, where he studied, and there were many high-profile Lithuanians there. Events were moving fast. In 1917, the future President and Chairman of the Council, Antanas Smetona, on 13 November, in a Berlin hotel, delivered a lecture to important German politicians. This lecture asked questions about how things should proceed with Lithuania. Such meetings where Lithuanian

political figures could gather were important. Everybody there was quite active. Someone even insisted that in the beginning of 1918, he should be taken to court as a traitor of German interests because he was so active in favour of Lithuania. Well, we always have to bear in mind what the geopolitical context was in the first days of December of 1917. The Bolsheviks had taken power in Russia and started negotiations of sorts with Germany. The Bolsheviks claimed that they supported countries' national aspirations, and Finland's independence was approved by Lenin. However, things could have turned out differently because we know that communist organisations wanted to destabilise Finland from the inside. Lithuania was also reacting. And we have the Independence Act on 17 December. It's not a fully-fledged act, so we don't consider it to be a real act of independence. Indeed, at that time, in this act, Lithuania was talked about as a kind of autonomous Lithuania inside Germany. In Brest, on 22 December, peace negotiations between Germany and the Bolsheviks were initiated. The Council of Lithuania reacted to these negotiations. They did not want Germany to gain lots of concessions in these negotiations. But on 8 January the following year, Wilson's famous declaration was published and the Ober Ost officials were quite angry. The members of the Council protesting against monarchy then left the council. They refused to follow the direction set on the 11th of December. At this point, we should mention Petras Klimas who was who was an important moderator. A Francophile, he was the most famous Lithuanian diplomat at that time in France. And thanks to him, everyone came to the table. On the 16th of February, the independence of Lithuania was announced. This is the Lithuanian Independence Day, which we celebrate. The Ober Ost refused to let the national Lithuanian newspapers publish this information. But there were some pro-Lithuanians, and Erzberger publicly announced this Declaration of Independence. The Ober Ost and other German politicians said this was hindering Germany, and the possibility of a monarchy was brought up. This was a kind of manoeuvre as the Ober Ost and the Kaiser wanted someone from their camp to become the monarch of Lithuania.

- S1 [...] was in making that declaration. A few minutes, okay. If you could just take one more minute, that would be great. Thank you.
- S2 Von Urach was suggested by Matthias Erzberger. He was his friend. And if the conditions hadn't changed, this idea would have become a reality. But Germany lost the war and Lithuania chose independence, and Erzberger supported the Council of Ministers of an independent Lithuania. We can see this in one of his letters in 1918. And when Erzberger was shot, the Lithuanian government expressed its condolences, saying that the Versailles Treaty could have also played a role in these tragic circumstances. That's what I wanted to say, thank you.
- S1 Simonas, thank you very much for that context. We understand better now how Mr Erzberger was important in helping to secure the independence of Lithuania. Let us move to Christopher to give us a bit more context and to link the situation then with what is going on now. Obviously, as Rainer said, we're not talking about the same situation, but there are still contemporary parallels we should be aware of in terms of people standing by what they believe. Christopher, please.
- S2 Democrats, you mention.
- S6 Thank you very much. Democracy unites people locally, in their own country, in Europe and farther afield. That is the case today, but it also holds true of the past. There are similarities between democracies, but if we look back to the past, we learn about the specific national features of different democratic histories. The Spanish, Lithuanian and Belgian paths to democracy were different from the German path. And what Matthias Erzberger did is an important part of the history of German democracy. In my presentation, I hope to use the German example to talk about some of the overarching aspects, which apply to all democracies. The 3rd of December 1903 was a special day for Erzberger. He was a newly elected MP and was attending his first meeting of the Reichstag, the German national Parliament. Together with his fellow MPs, Erzberger had gone to the White Hall in the Reichstag building and had lined up in front of the Kaiser's throne. Representatives of the German federal states stood to the left and the right of the throne.

The Chancellor of Germany welcomed the MPs and after a short speech on the political situation, he declared that the Reichstag was open, on the orders of the Kaiser. Erzberger was 28 and he was the youngest MP there. The highly symbolic opening of the legislative term was a reminder to MPs of how power was divided in the German Reich under the Kaiser. It was the Kaiser who had a key political role. The Chancellor represented the imperial monarch in dealings with the elected representatives of the people. They only had limited powers - the MPs. The Reichstag could contribute to legislation and it had important budgetary powers. But the Reichstag was not directly involved in important areas such as foreign policy or colonial policy. MPs also had little say over matters of war and peace, as the beginning of World War One in 1914 showed. It was the German Kaiser who decided on military issues without parliamentary involvement. That was the political set-up back then, when Erzberger began his career. Erzberger was a Catholic from South Germany who had risen up the social ladder. He was a primary school teacher with little formal education. He spoke broad Swabian dialect. But here he was in the hustle and bustle of the capital, Berlin, surrounded by the nobles and the administrative elite who were mostly aristocratic, upper class and Prussian Protestant. But he soon made his mark as a confident MP. Erzberger found out from missionaries and officials about shocking, scandalous abuse that was happening in the German colonies that the government was hushing up. Erzberger discreetly informed those in power in the German government. However, they didn't just play down what was happening. Instead, they went after the whistleblowers without tackling the abuse. Erzberger therefore decided to tell the public about these abuses and to discuss them in the Bundestag. After all, these were cases of corruption, mismanagement and murder perpetrated by German officials in the colonies. Erzberger could only appeal to the public and their sense of outrage because he had no legal recourse in the Bundestag to remove the Chancellor or a minister from power. They answered to the Kaiser, not to the parliament. I don't need to tell you, of all people, about how important accountability to the parliament is here in Strasbourg. So Erzberger used and tapped into his experience as a journalist to inform the public. Even the international press became aware of Erzberger and what he was doing. And this meant that he was able to build a lot of public pressure. Despite the bitter resistance of the Kaiser, the Prussian Minister for Agriculture finally stepped down. He, together with his wife, had made vast amounts of money by delivering goods to the German colonial authorities. One of the Kaiser's cousins, who was responsible for colonial policy, also stood down. This all caused quite a stir, quite a controversy, because a small, Swabian primary school teacher had toppled a member of the European nobility. The Kaiser was furious with Erzberger and asked the Chancellor, in writing, to clamp down on Erzberger and his party. The Kaiser asked in a letter, "Is there no way to protect our officials and officers from a slanderer and a traitor like Erzberger?" The Kaiser and Chancellor ended up dissolving the Reichstag in 1906 in order to weaken those who had criticised colonial policy and to have a more malleable parliament. During the election campaigns, the government gave large amounts of money to national organisations and colonial lobbyists so that they would defame Erzberger as a traitor to the Fatherland. But the voters stayed true to Erzberger. Just so that you have the complete picture, Erzberger made the government's secret interference into the election campaign public after the election. As a result, he was the victim of further harassment, and after the war, the issue of political decision-making in Germany took on a new dimension. We've heard about that with the Lithuanian example. So, I should say that the military, over time, had more and more power. The primacy of politics over the military was something that Bismarck had painstakingly achieved in 1870, but it was being lost. And some historians say that, by the second half of the First World War, Germany was basically a military dictatorship. So, Erzberger tried to deal with these changes. As an MP, he tried to gain greater political influence for elected officials. In summer 1917, he successfully passed a peace resolution. A parliamentary majority asked for negotiations to achieve peace and tried to set a path for the government to take on foreign policy. This was not allowed under the Constitution and what Erzberger was doing called into question the political division of power in the country. So, what Erzberger did in 1917 didn't lead to the end of the war, but it did lead to greater parliamentary involvement in foreign policy in Germany. What Erzberger was doing was a step towards reforming Germany, changing it from a Kaiser-led empire to a parliamentary monarchy and to a more democratic Germany. A further step in this direction was the establishment of the Max von Baden government in 1918. The Kaiser could not prevent Erzberger from

becoming part of the new government or from becoming an influential minister. The 1918 government was built on a coalition of Social Democrats, Liberals and the Centre Party, in which Erzberger was involved. The new government of 1918 had two goals: to ensure the primacy of policymakers and politics, and to end the war. After three weeks, the government managed to remove General Ludendorff from power and have him dismissed. The general had had considerable influence on German policy, and a few months earlier, he had forced the Foreign Minister to resign. Ludendorff's dismissal was an important step in reasserting the primacy of politics. In order to ensure that an armistice negotiation was under MPs' control and that the military didn't go its own way, Erzberger led the German armistice delegation. Erzberger was well aware of the fact that this was an important yet thankless task. After several days of negotiation, he signed the armistice on behalf of Germany in the forest of Compiègne and thus ended the war.

- S3 When he returned to Berlin, he found a completely transformed Germany. During the armistice talks, revolution had broken out in the capital, the Republic had been proclaimed and the Kaiser had fled into exile. Imperial Germany was history, and it was now a republic. The future was still uncertain back in 1918. Erzberger immediately offered to serve the revolutionary government and continued to deal with the armistice. At the same time, he was calling for a National Constitutional Assembly to be set up to restore political balance and order. He made it very clear to his party, the Catholic Party of the Centre, that despite differences, they would have to continue to work with Liberals and Social Democrats in order to establish a parliamentary democracy. Any requests and calls for an authoritarian or Soviet-type system were staunchly rejected. A symbol for this rejection was that he had the revolutionary emblem removed from his official car and instead would fly a small flag, which represented the democratic movement. This, of course, drew quite a lot of attention in revolutionary Berlin. He was active in many different political fields, but particularly in two areas, which gave the Weimar Republic a fighting chance of survival: its foreign policy and finance policy. Erzberger made major strides, despite the very harsh conditions. The peace treaty was accepted and was signed, and that allowed the Republic to survive. Now, the basis for its financial survival was also laid down by Erzberger through his reforms. During the war and after the war, the public finances were in ruins and a major tax reform had to be embarked upon. Modern taxation systems and procedures were introduced, and distribution of funds amongst the different administrative levels was reorganised. He was obliged, due to the difficult situation, to raise taxes. However, he did provide for rebates for families. Now, through this policy, what he was trying to do was to turn the Weimar Republic into a Social Welfare state and make democracy attractive in this way.
- S1 Unfortunately, we do have very little time for questions. Would you be able to be a bit more succinct?
- S3 Yes, I am trying to do so, and I'll continue to do so. Now, as a result of this battle for democracy, Erzberger, from a far-right perspective, became a hated figure. Attacks and rabble-rousing eventually led to the killing of Erzberger. It was a secret organisation that was really to blame for this. They were planning an overthrow of the democratic regime around that time. Now, I've spoken a great deal about German history, but I do hope that, through this very German example, I've been able to highlight some of the key characteristics of democracy and why we should value it. And I hope I've made it very clear why our interest in Erzberger's life can help us to better understand modern-day democracy and value it. I think that's valid from a German perspective, but I do hope it is equally valid from an international perspective. Thank you very much. Thank you, Christopher.
- S1 A big hand to both historians who have made interesting points that resonate even today about defending democracy, about the separation of powers, about the right to self-determination as Lithuania got, thanks in part to Mr Erzberger and fighting disinformation. We even have a Special Committee on Fighting Disinformation here in the European Parliament. So some very topical parallels there. I would like to quickly get to any questions we have in the room to start with and anyone else who is watching can send a question through the chat. Is there anyone here who would like to comment on

this and the question of whether we should have a room in the European Parliament in Brussels for Mr. Erzberger? What do you think?

- S4 Thank you. I would like to use the opportunity to speak in Lithuanian. I would like to thank the organisers and our guests and speakers for such interesting presentations. We in Lithuania talk quite a lot about declaring and regaining our independence, but we very often forget those people who really made it happen. That's why it is important to raise awareness about people such as Matthias Erzberger. We have many rooms in the European Parliament, and it would be nice to name these rooms after people who really promote democracy. We in Lithuania, as an independent country, have a history of 100 years, so I think Mathias Erzberger is a really important candidate for having a room named after him. You mentioned meetings in Switzerland, that took place with Lithuanian politicians in Switzerland. Do we really have documentary proof that when Mathias Erzberger studied, he could have met Lithuanians who were also students and subsequently influential politicians there? Do we have any proof or is this just an assumption?
- S5 Thank you for your question. Quite a number of very prominent people were studying in Switzerland, including the clergy. A few names of people who had direct contact with Erzberger include Konstantinas Olšauskas and future Minister Purickis. So, there were a lot of people from the clergy who studied in Switzerland, and they approved of this constitutional monarchy. Apparently those values, those attitudes found echoes in one another and those people found quite a lot of common interests. I would just like to add that during my research in the European archives at the University of Freiburg I realised that there is a wealth of material there that has not been researched fully. I remember when I went there, I found a number of names, people, prominent people in Lithuanian history and culture, and I have no doubt that we would be able to find those links there, because in history, those personal relationships are extremely important and they are there, I'm sure.
- S1 Are there any other questions or comments among those of us here in the room or would anyone else like to send something through the chat? OK, I know, Rainer, it would be nice to have some final comments from you as well.
- S3 I wish to thank my colleagues in the EPP Group and our experts in the room. I think we should continue from here on and pause for thought about the contribution that democracy makes to our societies. I think the decision taken on Monday night in the bureau isn't the end of the line. Perhaps in spring next year, we can go further. And when the room is named officially, we could use that opportunity to organise a gathering, organise a meeting and try to raise awareness of this issue and make it more publicly visible. So I wish to just thank you.
- S1 OK? Any other final comments among those the speakers. Are we good, Liudas? Final comment from you.
- S5 Well, I would just like to express my delight that, via this event, we've managed to draw this very important line between the past, which is so important to all of us, no matter how complex it was, and the challenges of the present and what awaits us in the future, so thank you very much for that.
- S1 And our thanks to everyone for watching and listening, and I hope that this discussion can continue. It's really worth taking a whole day to talk about the resonances and the connections with today. I'm glad we were able to bring more to light about Mr. Erzberger to those of us here and beyond. And for those who would like to broadcast any of their comments to a wider audience, please keep in mind the handle @EPPGroup.eu. And our thanks to the translators, to the interpreters. Our thanks to Liudas, Rainer, Simonas and Christopher. My name is Chris Burns. Thanks very much for watching and see you next time. Thank you.