

**Address by Commissioner Professor Danuta Hübner
at the official launch of the activities of BELA Foundation
Brussels, November 27. 2007**

‘New Europeans at the Helm’

Dear President Pöttering, Dear Ms. Monheim, Dear Graf von Krockow, Ladies and Gentlemen, Dear Friends,

First of all I would like to join Hans-Gert Pöttering and say that I am very happy that the Bela Foundation has brought us all here in an interesting moment of the European Union's history.

The new Treaty that is around the corner opens new opportunities to Europe,

We are preparing a health check of our policy agenda, with a view to better address multiple unprecedented challenges that the world, of which Europe is only a small part, is generating. Many do this across the world. I believe we need to look into the future at all levels of governance in Europe. In the Berlin Declaration adopted by European leaders in March 2007, when we celebrated the 50th anniversary of the Treaties of Rome, it was stated clearly that the tasks of Europe should be shared among all levels: European, national, regional and local.

The new Treaty is a great opportunity for a better Europe. It is a symbol of European unity – the enlarged Europe has done it together. It translates into

more democracy, more citizens' security; it also means a new approach to subsidiarity. It brings new institutional arrangements. The Treaty offers a chance for us to be more efficient in responding to new challenges, and a chance to be more relevant globally.

In reviewing our policy agenda for the future and deciding on new priorities we need wise choices. Let me mention three of them.

Remaining open is essential. We need minds open to change, to develop new ideas, to develop new ways of delivery of European policies.

We need an open European economy, based on innovation and cooperation. The word 'cooperation' should be reinvented; today even competitiveness needs to be embedded in cooperation networks.

We need to keep Europe open to globalisation to fully exploit its opportunities; it is the only way to take advantage of all the opportunities it brings.

So openness is one wise choice we should go for.

Another one is the involvement of people in this process of making Europe happen, in making policy choices. We need people back in labour markets. We need them back in education systems. They are the owners of Europe, of its agenda and only a feeling of ownership can generate responsibility for Europe.

As a Commissioner in charge of regional policy I am happy to be responsible for a truly engaging policy. I can talk for hours on stories of engaging people in building a common Europe— there are many of them across the EU.

The third wise choice is related to leadership. One can say that we can leave it to the European democracy. It is true, but we have to be aware that today Europe needs leadership for a different society, for a better informed society.

When we look back, we see that Europe has produced a great number of heroes in its history. In the contemporary history the most important ones are fathers of European integration: Robert Schuman, Jean Monnet, Alcide de Gasperi, Konrad Adenauer, Walter Hallstein, Jacques Delors, Arthur Cockfield. What they all have in common is that they are all West Europeans. Central and Eastern Europe was on the other bank of the river when the European project was launched. But the "fathers" knew that the rest of Europe would knock on the door one day. And so we, Central and Eastern Europeans, did. Because women and men of Central and Eastern Europe believed that they should be free and back in Europe. So the divisions could reach their irreversible end. There are lists with names of heroes on the other side of the river. John Paul II, Lech Wałęsa, Vaclav Havel are placed on the very top. But the lists are much longer. On these lists there are many young who kept the flag of freedom flying over decades and pursued the ideal of reuniting Europe.

When I go back to the beginning of 1990, I must admit that in that part of Europe it was largely the young generation who took over the reigns of government when the old regime collapsed. When I first became the Europe Minister in Warsaw, the average age of my staff was 31.

It was also the young generation who seized the economic opportunities which the new situation presented.

It was the young who steered these countries immediately after 1989 towards membership in the European Union. They had experienced life in a centrally planned economy and in societies dominated by the regime, which, in restricting freedom, snuffed out the entrepreneurial spirit amongst the young. The young leaders in central and eastern Europe chose freedom and very often this went under the banner of a 'return to Europe'.

More than 3 years after the 2004 enlargement, we find that it is still the young who are the European enthusiasts; and this is true of both the old Member States and the new. This is shown in every Eurobarometer poll that is taken: even in relatively eurosceptic Britain a majority of the young support European integration. But I experience it directly as Commissioner for Regional Policy, as I travel round the different parts of Europe. I meet thousands of people and it is usually the young who are most enthusiastic about the future of Europe. The answer is very simple – this is their future. They want also to learn more about their neighbours and to discover what binds us Europeans together.

Travelling to our European neighbours, whether in the east in Ukraine or in the western Balkans, one finds the same enthusiasm amongst the young for the idea of integration with the European Union.

Of course the Union has helped to stimulate interest in the young in learning about other European countries through its many schemes for youth and educational exchanges. It is normal today to find large numbers of students from other European countries studying at our universities. This is as true for the new member states as for the old.

In my view these schemes should be expanded within the Union but also supported in our neighbouring countries. Money spent on widening the experience of the young and helping them to develop ties with other European countries must be one of the most rewarding investments that we can make.

The development of official and private networks is so much easier today, thanks to technological advance, than it was a few years ago. The relationships which develop through study or work abroad are far more easily maintained through Email, telephone, and all the other communication possibilities than they were a few years ago.

The enhanced possibilities offered to networking by these new technologies, as well as today's possibilities for physical mobility within the Continent, allows the young to travel and work in other European countries, without losing those vital connections to family and friends at home. Today millions of our young

people are studying and working abroad. It is estimated that around one million, mainly young, people from Poland have gone to work in other European countries in the three years since Poland's accession to the Union. The same is true for most of the other new Member States. But we tend to discuss less the huge numbers of people from old Member States who are also working abroad. Cities like London, Paris, Frankfurt or Prague are today full of Europeans other than just nationals. And they are not from new Member States only. This is the best proof of how the freedom of movement enriches people to people contact.

This mobility, made so easy through the exercise of the fundamental freedoms of the European Union, is enriching for both guests and hosts. It is surely through people-to-people contacts that we will really build a united Europe. I would like to add that we need to develop initiatives to allow all layers of society to enjoy these contacts. Expanding this work to our neighbours must also be a priority.

I wish the Bela Foundation every success in contributing to this so badly needed effort of involving young people in making Europe better prepared to face the future.