

ACTING TOGETHER ATTRACTS PEOPLE

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17 October 2006

Warsaw

I was extremely pleased to receive your kind invitation. The chance to speak positively about the European Union is a chance not to be missed. It is true that public opinion polls show that the enthusiasm for European integration within the Union has waned over the last few years but if you read carefully the results of the Eurobarometer you can discover that European institutions enjoy much higher public support than national institutions. And people want more Europe in such areas as security, foreign policy, employment and economy.

My feeling is that there is some confusion in Europe. What is behind this Europe-wide public confusion ?

It is true that economic problems, expressed as both slow growth and high unemployment, are in my view largely to blame for the disillusionment with the Union. However, I have a strong feeling that we

are now moving in the right direction, though possibly not fast enough. Indeed some Member States have low unemployment and respectable growth rates. This is mostly true for new Member States. Others have been making steady progress with a reform agenda though in the face of some opposition (Germany).

There is the challenge of globalisation. We cannot turn it off. Quite the contrary. In the context of globalisation, the challenge for Europe is to remain open and not to reach out to protectionist measures. European consumers have gained from trade liberalisation and globalisation, but the slow rate of adjustment in the economy has often led the same consumers to oppose globalisation because of the threat it poses to many traditional sectors. It is also true that due to slow adjustment, most of the growth generated by globalisation takes place outside Europe.

Enlargement of the Union is another area where courage of political leadership and political will have waned. A decade ago political leaders had the courage to decide on enlargement that between 2004 and 2007 nearly doubled the membership in the Union. Today the future of EU enlargement is a big question mark, a source of public confusion and a victim of lack of political will.

Institutional problems also lead to some pessimism. Two last referenda on the European constitution have postponed the institutional reform of the Union. The paradox is that the Constitutional Treaty was designed to solve some of the problems of the Union and its citizens. I have no doubt that the Union will have to look at the institutional design again in order to ensure that it remains efficient, effective, democratic and open in the longer term. Institutions matter and Europe of projects, Europe focused

on delivery, on implementing growth and jobs strategy is only a part of the solution.

Let me also say that for new generations of Europeans we need a new narrative about what the EU is for in the 21st century – based on concrete benefits it provides for citizens, on the positive, not protective role it plays in managing globalisation and on the promotion of common European values in the world.

The European Union is a Union of European democracies, sharing fundamental values, which freely pool certain elements of their policies to enhance the well-being of their citizens.

The Treaty of Rome, the fiftieth anniversary of which will be celebrated next year, contained relatively little on values. Ever-closer Union and the basics of the market economy are really the essentials expressed in the Treaty. This is not to say that the original six members did not share what we now consider to be fundamental values, but they did not feel the need to express them at that time in the Treaty of Rome. The founder members of the Union were all signatories of the Council of Europe Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms signed in Rome in 1950 and were therefore bound by the articles of that Convention.

The Preamble to the 1986 Single European Act is more explicit about the Union's values. It mentions both democracy and human rights and, following on from the Social Charter, the fundamental rights of citizens of the Union, freedom, equality and social justice.

The Maastricht Treaty concentrated on reforming the internal workings of the Union and defining the steps towards monetary union, rather than on fundamental values. Nevertheless fundamental rights and democracy find their way into Article F of the Treaty. It also established a Common Foreign and Security Policy the objectives of which included 'to safeguard the common values and fundamental interests and independence of the Union' and 'to develop and consolidate democracy and the rule of law, and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms'. It also established the concept of 'citizenship of the Union' which included the rights and obligations of the peoples of the member states.

The Amsterdam Treaty took these areas further, as it aimed to develop the idea of a 'Citizen' Europe' to bridge the growing gulf of credibility between the Union institutions and the average citizen. Article 6 of the Amsterdam Treaty, building on Article F of Maastricht, specified for the first time that 'The Union is founded on the principles of liberty, democracy, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and the rule of law, principles which are common to the Member States'. These fundamental values thus became criteria for membership of the Union. In this light, it also spelled out for the first time the sanctions which the Union could take against a member state which systematically infringed human rights or basic freedoms.

However, it is really only in the Draft Constitutional Treaty, signed by all 27 states in November 2004 in Rome but not ratified, that the full significance of the Union's fundamental values appears. Here they are set out clearly and in detail at the beginning of the Treaty. When one reads the draft Treaty and compares it to the actual Union Treaty in

force, one can immediately see the difference between the result of ad hoc changes to the Treaty of Rome and the completely new Constitutional Treaty. It would be a shame if the latter were lost.

European values are so important because to some extent they represent the core of the achievements of the European countries in the post-war period and in some countries they are the result of hundreds of years of struggle. All member states hold dear the values of democracy and personal freedom, human rights, the protection of minorities, the rule of law, freedom to practice religion, equal rights and the other values you find in the Constitutional Treaty. Whereas these values appeared unassailable in the early years of the Union, today we see that they are indeed under attack both from outside and in specific areas even within the Union.

The fact that our values are not universally held, not even in our neighbourhood, has become more apparent since the disintegration of Communism in Europe and the globalisation of economic and political activity. This is one reason why the conditions applied to new applicants for membership of the Union have become much tougher in recent years and have concentrated on the so-called 'political conditions'.

Many of our main competitors in world trade also reject some of our values. They are also under attack from international terrorism. Here the temptation is to play into the hands of our enemies by compromising our values for the sake of security. Certain compromises will have to be made, and we have seen it recently in air travel restrictions, but we must ensure that the values which have been established over the last fifty years are defended for the sake of future generations.

The defence of our values and the promotion of our common interests requires that the Member States pool their efforts for the good of the Union. But this pooling of interests is entered into freely. Although it is not infrequent that Governments blame Brussels when they impose policies which the electorate does not like, the reality is that the EU is a Union into which the member states have entered as sovereign states.

This pooling of sovereignty does not mean that the Member States are having systems imposed on them, which they do not want. Indeed the Treaty states clearly that:

'the Union shall respect the national identities of its Member States'.

It is indeed the possibility of adding value to national policies by acting together in the Union which attracts people. They realise every day that there are certain crucial areas of policy which today cannot be mastered by individual Member States. One urgent and extremely complex area is migration, in which the actions of any one Member State affect all the others in an area without borders. The fight against international terrorism is another, in which cooperation between security services and police in the Member States is an essential component.

The more classic areas of Union policy remain however clear reminders of the value added of working together. The internal market remains one of the great triumphs of the Union, which has led to major economic gains and rising living standards. There are always 'beggar-my-neighbour' nationalist forces which try to reintroduce destructive protectionism to protect their national markets but fortunately the Union

has been strong enough to resist most of these attempts. A break down in the internal market would really mark the end of European influence in the world. In spite of the present predicament of the Doha Development Round in the WTO, the collective negotiation of trade issues has also allowed the Union to have a decisive impact on the way world trade has been liberalised over recent decades.

So to summarise: the Union exists to defend its fundamental values, many of which you yourselves have been defending for centuries, and which are the central pillar which holds us all together. It pursues these values and its interests through common policies, through which the Member States freely constrain some of their freedom of action. But the Member States themselves are the basic building blocks of the Union and they remain sovereign.

On the very first page of the Treaty of Rome which established the European Economic Community the word 'solidarity' appears. If we go back further to the European Coal and Steel Community Treaty of 1951, again on the first page we find the sentence:

'Recognising that Europe can be built only through practical achievements which will first of all create real solidarity, and through the establishment of common bases for economic development'.

But solidarity as a basic value of the Union was never restricted to the members of the Union. From the beginning it applied to the relations between the Union and the rest of the world. Externally the Union has been by far the largest provider of foreign assistance funds to the developing world. We are involved in financing projects throughout the

world, with a concentration on the poorest countries, particularly in Africa.

If you look into the Oxford English Dictionary you will find a definition of solidarity as 'unity resulting from common interest, feelings or sympathies'. And I am also convinced that we all ask ourselves, time and again, when moments of crisis emerge, whether solidarity in this sense of unity really exists in the world of today. It is true that those moments when solidarity is stretched to the breaking point do accompany our daily life and episodes of upheavals in the world.

My duties as a commissioner mean that I actually spend half my time outside Brussels, like globetrotter, every week meeting ordinary citizens, touching the real Europe of local level. Again, the Oxford Dictionary says that a globetrotter is somebody who travels frequently and widely for pleasure, and indeed it is a pleasure to meet committed people, people who care. I can assure you, it is a great pleasure to see the European Union from below.

Half a century ago, the emergence of European integration has been an act of solidarity between countries which had been at war. The way European project has evolved demonstrates this characteristic very clearly. For over fifty years the principle of solidarity has guided us in Europe and today it remains as relevant as back in 1957. Many people think of European solidarity as being about money. This is not true. European solidarity goes far deeper. It is essentially about the individual member state's concern being not just for its own interest but for that of other member states and the Union as a whole.

An essential element of developing solidarity in the Union is for individual citizens to learn about and experience life in other member states. Here the Union has played a big role in promoting student exchanges. It is certainly true to say that over the last twenty years they have revolutionized student life and created cohorts of young Europeans who have a vastly greater experience of other member states and world than their parents' generations. I am convinced that increased understanding of others reinforces the spirit of solidarity between people.

But let me say very openly that if we are to preserve our fundamental principle of solidarity across regions, across generations and across continents, we must generate wealth to support it.

Europe today is integrated to a degree never before seen in the peacetime. European values continue to inspire nations, communities and individuals throughout the world. Democracy, human rights, liberal and free societies and solidarity with the weak – these are values which are taken for granted in Europe. And they are gaining ground in the world even though major exceptions do exist where these values inspire only political opposition.

We are not an inward looking community. One of our responsibilities is to work closely with and support our neighbourhood. In more global terms, we must continue to engage constructively, especially with those regions where there is conflict and war. We know the benefits of peace.

And let me also stress that we must not put solidarity at risk because we do not know what to do or because we as democratic community disagree on some policy issues.

Solidarity means listening to what people want. They certainly want to belong, to feel that they are part of a community which cares for them. And on my travels I meet people for whom belonging means also contributing. When treated as partners people develop the feeling of ownership and responsibility.

We all can agree that our goals must not be set by politicians alone: they must be wholeheartedly endorsed by the citizens, whose collective will gives the whole project legitimacy. Establishing a genuine dialogue is essential. It is our responsibility, mine, yours, to create dialogue and to take active part in it. People are looking for leadership, but, also, more than speeches from politicians they need full participation and a stake in the decision-making process.

Obviously churches, religious communities and spiritual leaders have their important role to play in the European construction. I do not need to invite you to actively involve your congregations in the European dialogue, to ensure as vigorous and as diverse a debate as possible. I know you do it.

Let me also express my hope that an open, transparent and regular dialogue between the EU, churches and religious communities as expressed in Articles I-47 and I-52 of the Constitution will find its way. The dialogue between the European institutions, and religions and churches has been taking place, with positive results, for many years already. Articles I-47 and I-52, which cover participatory democracy and the status of churches and non-confessional organisations, are not prerequisites for this dialogue to continue. Like many other articles in the Constitution, they

are simply making explicit what has always been implicit in the treaties. This is of course very important, and nobody should underestimate the progress represented by these new provisions. But it is equally important to recognize that the guiding principles of our dialogue are rooted in the first principles of the treaties, and that this not only gives the legitimacy to what we do, but calls for its continuation and intensification.

What kind of Europe do we want – for ourselves and for future generations? A dynamic Europe that leads the world in science and technology? A productive Europe where everyone has a job? A caring Europe where the sick, the elderly and the handicapped are looked after? A just Europe where there is no discrimination and everyone has equal access to jobs and education? A clean, green Europe that cares for its own environment and helps meet the global challenges too? A Europe of values that we share and care for ?

I want *all* of those things and, moreover, I believe they are within our grasp. I am hopeful about Europe's future because I have faith in Europe's people and I believe strongly in European values.

The founding fathers of the European Union set out to bind *nations* together through shared sovereignty and joint decision-making. I believe we now need even more Europe that binds *people* together, through shared goals and dreams, shared friendship and respect. Not merely a Union of economics and politics but a union of *shared values*.

To me, the integration of Europe is a miracle that the Europeans have not fully grasped yet. Today we must not just take it for granted. We must wake up every day with fresh commitment to it. Europe is far from being

perfect. Moreover we tend to find pleasure in discussing our misfortunes and weaknesses. It is true that there are grounds for concern but there are also grounds for hope and optimism.

In the coming years, I see the Union as a place of relative political stability in a rapidly changing world, with a set of fundamental values which are anchored in the Treaty and which will become more explicit when the Constitution or something like the Constitution is ratified. More and more the member states will realise that working together in the Union is the only way to achieve our objectives of solidarity, prosperity and security in an unstable world, and this will lead them to be more enthusiastic about the Common Foreign and Security Policy. Economic reform will spread to more Member States, more gradually than I would like, but this will ensure the degree of economic growth required to support our objectives.

While the risks are large, especially to my hopes for economic reform, we do really have no alternative to working together on our common future. So let's regain our spirit of enthusiasm for the European adventure and achieve our greatest dreams!