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## **European Union fifty years on**

*Check Against Delivery*  
*Seul le texte prononcé fait foi*  
*Es gilt das gesprochene Wort*

Debate on “Vision of Europe - Vision for Europe: The present and future  
role of Central Europe in the EU”, organised by the Hungarian Public Life  
and Cultural Society and Konrad Adenauer Stiftung

**Brussels, 21 March 2007**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It's a great pleasure to be here today with my good friend Janos. I thank the Hungarian Public Life and Cultural Society and the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung for inviting me to speak at your event.

In a few days Europe's leaders will be meeting in Berlin to celebrate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the European Union. What will be the outcome of that meeting? What message will they have for the people of Europe?

They will undoubtedly remind us of the importance of European Union and ask us to reflect on all we've achieved by acting together over the last 50 years. They will also point to the future and the need to keep our Union on track if we are to hold our own in a rapidly changing world.

So today let us contribute to their work, **first** by reflecting on the EU's achievements, **second** by focusing on one recent development – the European Neighbourhood Policy and the steps the Commission is about to take to strengthen it; and **third** by looking to the future and what the EU's focus should be.

### **1) Achievements**

Looking back is important, not as an academic exercise, but rather to appreciate what we could lose. Peace, prosperity and security for the EU's members is now, thankfully, the norm. But it is not so far back in history that the whole of Europe was reeling from the devastation of war and much of it has only very recently emerged from violence and division. It's hard to convey the magnitude of Europe's past suffering and the benefits of peace without succumbing to cliché. We understandably want to look to the future not the past. Yet we do need to find ways of ensuring those lessons are never forgotten.

It's also important to properly appreciate other achievements, like creating the world's largest free trade area allowing people, goods and services to move freely between our member states. Our common standards of environmental protection and product safety are increasingly being adopted by nations around the world keen to do business with us. The single currency is shared by the majority of the EU's citizens, we now have an enormous choice of competitively priced goods and services.

We can study, work or live in another EU country with a minimum of red tape, and enjoy health and social benefits everywhere. Travel across the EU is increasingly passport-free. The EU has also laid the foundations of an area where borders are no obstacle to justice or security.

Of course neither my country nor Janos' has a 50 year history within the EU. But I would say that both of us benefited from the EU's existence long before we were in a position to join.

Indeed, it's often said that those outside the EU appreciate its attractions more than those within. Certainly its more-than four-fold expansion from the original 6 to the current 27 indicates how desirable membership is.

The EU's growth is one of the most obvious signs of its success. Through a series of enlargements the geographic centre of Europe is at last also the geographical centre of the EU.

*The Economist* wrote this week that, "by far the most successful EU foreign policy has been its own expansion".

But, it added, "even enthusiasts for enlargement think it may be approaching its natural limits". Certainly there is a degree of enlargement fatigue in Europe which it is irresponsible to ignore.

Who knows what the future will bring, but for the time being it is clear that we cannot continue to rely entirely on enlargement to extend the boundaries of open society and market economy.

Yet we do want to put the EU's transformative power to further use. Since one of the EU's primary concerns is the prosperity, stability and security of our immediate neighbours, we need an effective policy towards them.

## **2) ENP – and its implementation**

Which brings me to my second point – the launch, in 2004, of the European Neighbourhood Policy.

The idea is to encourage political, social and economic reforms by providing countries with sufficient incentives to overcome the political costs associated with reform. In so doing we can simultaneously improve life for their citizens and tackle some of our citizens' most important concerns, like climate change, migration, energy security and economic growth.

The incentives we originally offered included integration in the EU's internal market and participation in our programmes and agencies. We have since gone further, proposing a number of measures last December to bring countries even closer to the EU. These include a special scholarship scheme for the region; greater economic integration with our market; and a facilitated visa process to enable more exchanges between businessmen, journalists, civil society, academics and others so they can attend our meetings and work with us more easily.

Next week I will discuss all these ideas with my colleagues at the informal meeting of Foreign Ministers. I want them to give their blessing for us to move ahead on practical implementation and to get the buy-in of their colleagues in Interior Ministries and elsewhere. We cannot expect our neighbours to feel closer to us if we keep them at arms length with complex, expensive visa procedures. Nor can we expect them to make major progress on economic reform without the prospect of better access to the EU's markets.

We will also discuss another aspect of last December's package - the idea of building more regional cooperation around the Black Sea area. In the coming weeks the Commission will adopt a new **Communication on Black Sea Synergy**, setting out our ideas for how this would work in practice.

We want to build closer links between the EU and the other states in the Black Sea area. We already have bilateral relations with them all, but it is important to add a multilateral and inter-regional component. We certainly will take advantage of regional cooperation structures which already exist, like the Danube Cooperation Process (of which Austria and Hungary are both members) and the Black Sea Economic Cooperation.

Many of the key opportunities and challenges in the Black Sea area, like energy, transport, environment, movement, and security, require coordinated action at regional level. We want to offer closer coordination in all these areas, plus democracy and human rights, conflict-resolution, research and education networks and trade.

We also want to reach out to areas further away, like Central Asia. I will be in Astana next week where, for the first time, we will have a troika meeting at foreign ministers level. We will discuss with our Central Asian partners the new EU strategy for Central Asia on which we are currently working with the Presidency. There's an obvious energy rationale for linking our new Central Asia strategy to our new Black Sea policy. But such joined-up policy-making is also important as part of our drive for greater coherence and effectiveness in the EU's external policies, as set out in our "Europe in the World" communication last year.

### **3) The future**

That brings me to my third and final point, the future. As we look ahead, the EU is clearly the best mechanism for tackling what EU citizens say they most fear: globalisation. The interconnections and integration of issues - terrorism, religious extremism, migration, trade, energy and climate change – and the speed with which the world is now moving, make it impossible for one country acting alone to achieve its policy goals. That's why European Union makes more sense than ever. We have to work together to safeguard energy security, cope with climate change, manage migration and fight pandemics.

We must also recognise that the balance of power in our world is shifting. The story of the current period of globalisation is the story of the re-emergence of Asia as a global power. If Europe wants its voice to be heard, it must present itself as a coherent and effective player on the world stage. If we want to consolidate a rules-based international order for the future, we need to play our cards right, and we need to do so *now*.

The EU's citizens have understood this. They know that only by acting together can we wield the leverage we need to bring the rest of the international community on board. They consistently say they want a stronger EU foreign policy. And so we must respond - especially in a period when the EU stands accused of being out of touch with its citizens' needs and demands.

We are making progress. ENP is but one example of the way we are putting all our policy tools - trade, aid, humanitarian assistance and increasingly military and diplomatic might – to better effect and acting more coherently on the world stage. Think of the EU's role in negotiations with Iran, in bringing peace to Aceh and in avoiding a humanitarian crisis in the Palestinian territories over the last year thanks to our Temporary International Mechanism.

We should also not be modest about the fact that we are the world's largest donor of international assistance – the Commission alone provides over €7 billion every year. And we should make better use of our accumulated knowledge of conflict resolution through regional cooperation and how to manage the transition to a market economy and open society.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Building an effective European foreign policy to meet the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is I believe, an important part of the vision our leaders should lay out next weekend.

We have to use the achievements of the last 50 years – our wealth, peace and social responsibility – to increase our weight on the world stage and thus both maintain our European way of life and values into the future, and extend those benefits to others.