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The European Union and its place in the world – the current agenda

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

College of Europe

Bruges, 7 April 2008

Professors,

Dear students,

Thank you for your kind invitation to visit the College of Europe and for this warm welcome today. And thank you Julia for those charming words of introduction.

I am delighted to have this opportunity to speak here at this centre of European excellence which has produced so many of Europe's leaders in the past and, I am sure, is now shaping those of the future.

There is no shortage of challenges ahead as you begin your career in Europe. But the one which most concerns *me* is how best to strengthen the EU's position in the world to respond to accelerating globalisation. After all, as John F Kennedy put it, "*Domestic policy can only defeat us; foreign policy can kill us!*"

I know you are already familiar with the EU's external relations and the changes which are about to be implemented. So perhaps today I will give you the perspective of an insider, and share with you some of the issues on my mind.

Four subjects are on the top of my agenda, not least because the French Presidency which begins in July has already indicated that these will be its priorities: first, preparing for the implementation of the Lisbon Reform Treaty and the changes it will introduce in the field of external relations; second, the revision of the European Security Strategy first drawn up in 2003; third, energy and climate change; and fourth, the European Neighbourhood Policy and the Mediterranean Union.

1) Implementing the Lisbon Reform Treaty

The major innovations the Treaty introduced in the field of foreign policy and external relations are well known – a new High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, who will also be "double-hatted" as a Vice-President of the European Commission; a President of the European Council who will be the external face of the EU on his or her level; and a new External Action Service to serve their needs and those of the Commission's President.

But of course what you don't know, what indeed none of us yet know, is exactly how this will work out in practice.

What *is* clear, however, is that three principles should guide us as we prepare the Treaty's implementation:

First, we must adopt a high level of ambition – if we want a secure and economically strong Europe playing a leading role in world affairs, we need a strong EU foreign policy.

That means pushing for those arrangements which will give us the most coherent, effective and visible EU foreign policy possible. We must not lose sight of our overriding objective: the stronger we are, the more we can achieve.

Second, we have to take into account the existing institutional realities and ensure we are building on every institution's strengths. That is how we will get the strongest possible system and thus the most effective foreign policy.

Third, I am telling no secrets by saying that the fundamental obstacle to a more effective EU foreign policy is our Member States mustering the necessary political will to pursue the common EU interest.

As we determine the set-up of the EU's foreign policy we must keep in mind the need to help our Member States overcome that obstacle.

2009 will inevitably be a transitional year, with the entry into force of the new Treaty and the new institutional set-up that entails; a new Commission and European Parliament taking office; and the Treaty's requirement that the new High Representative / Vice-President should finalise the proposals for the functioning of the External Action Service, which will then need to be agreed by the Commission as a whole, followed by the European Parliament and Member States.

The first challenge therefore will be ensuring the success of 2009 as the transitional year, ensuring everything necessary is in place for day one of the treaty's implementation. And the full implementation of the External Action Service will follow in a second phase.

The final proposals for the External Action Service will only emerge next year. However, three points seem clear to us now:

i) The system must be genuinely inclusive, enabling all Member States and EU institutions to play their role.

ii) Although it will be a sui generis service, it will need to be as close as possible to the Commission's policy coordination, budgetary and administrative processes. This is the only way it will be able to effectively support the Vice-President in his or her task of coordinating the Commission's external policy instruments, and in managing the external projection of internal policies like energy, environment, and transport.

iii) The new service, together with the EU delegations, should be the single source of advice and support for all EU actors, including the European Commission and European Council Presidents. That is the most efficient model to avoid duplication.

The simulation games you have played this semester will have given you an insight into the complexity of the issues at stake in the field of external relations and foreign policy so I am sure you can appreciate that there will be many difficult questions for the Commission, Council, Parliament and Member States to answer in the coming months.

But we are determined to push ahead, and President Barroso and I will be working closely with the Council Secretariat, Member States and others to ensure the necessary political orientation is in place before the end of the French Presidency.

2) European Security Strategy

The second big issue on my mind is the revision of the EU's 2003 Security Strategy. The Security Strategy's basic focus on terrorism, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, regional conflicts, failed states and organised crime is still valid five years on. But there are other global challenges which are not mentioned and should have been, like energy security, climate change and migration.

Last December's European Council tasked us with looking at how we could improve implementation of the current strategy and ensure the gaps are plugged. I believe that we need to add three objectives to the strategy, to ensure it fully reflects the EU's security situation. These are:

- Addressing threats to our ability to maintain basic supplies and services (including energy security);
- Dealing with global issues such as climate change and migration; and
- Adopting a human security approach – putting people rather than nation-states at the centre of our concerns.

We need to ensure that the external dimension of internal policies is fully taken into account. For, in reality, the world has moved on since JFK made his statement about domestic and foreign policy. Now the two cannot be so easily separated. In this highly integrated world, events in one place have a direct and immediate impact on another. The very nature of what we consider “security” has changed.

3) Energy and Climate Change

That brings me to the third point on my agenda – energy and climate change.

I don't need to explain to this audience the importance of energy security – you have all seen the rise and rise of the price of oil and the annual disputes between Russia and some of its neighbours over gas supplies. We are facing more competition from other consumer countries (China), and re-nationalisation of resources by producers.

We clearly need to pay energy security more importance in the future, adjusting to the new “World Energy Equation”. That means diversifying our sources of supply, our transit routes and our internal energy mix.

For that the EU needs a more proactive and coherent energy security diplomacy: addressing energy security in our political dialogue with all external partners; discussing and taking action to protect critical infrastructure and diversify supply routes; and building on the memoranda of understanding we have already signed with countries like Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Egypt, and also Turkmenistan and Jordan. I am travelling to Turkmenistan tonight, and next week to Saudi Arabia and the Gulf region to discuss energy issues.

An important part of our approach must also be internal – improving our internal market to give us more flexibility and solidarity, and accepting the need for more coordination and transparency to enable us to speak with one voice towards our external partners. That is why the new Treaty provision on “energy solidarity” is so important.

The Commission will propose concrete policy measures on securing energy supplies and our external energy policy in the 2nd Strategic Energy Review in November.

Climate change is intimately linked with energy security, and an international security issue in its own right. You will have noted that at the last European Council Europe's leaders discussed a paper prepared jointly by the Commission and Council which focused precisely on the issue of climate change and international security.

Climate change is a “threat multiplier” that will increase risks for societies in almost every part of the globe. Climate change will exacerbate water and food scarcity, aggravate poverty, worsen health conditions, and potentially generate increased resource competition (as we saw in last summer's muscle flexing over the Arctic).

If the weakest countries cannot adapt, it may even lead to more forced migration and possibly radicalization and state failure causing internal and external security risks.

For that reason our paper made a number of recommendations for addressing this issue: taking mitigation and adaptation measures on the ground; working closely with the UN to internationalise the response – i.e. strengthening effective multilateralism in the run-up to Copenhagen 2009, also under Japan's G8 Presidency; engaging our partner countries in all relevant fora; and finally mainstreaming climate change into all EC policies.

4) ENP and the Mediterranean Union

I understand that last month you undertook an intensive course on the EU's Neighbourhood Policy, so you will have understood the context in which we released our latest country reports last week.

I know several of you also come from ENP partner-countries and were responsible for the "Noisy Neighbours" week earlier this year – certainly a highlight in the College's long tradition of student parties! I am delighted that you have benefited from EU scholarships to attend this eminent institution.

ENP continues to prove its worth – showing that our policy of encouraging and rewarding reform does have an impact on our neighbours and is bringing them closer to us. Our goal of promoting stability, security and prosperity for our neighbours, and thus also for ourselves, is more relevant than ever. ENP will therefore remain an important priority in the months ahead. In particular, I plan to move ahead with four "avant-garde" countries (Ukraine, Israel, Morocco and Moldova), with whom we want to deepen relations specifically.

The French Presidency has already made clear its desire to reinforce the multilateral element of our relations in the South. So the last European Council proposed that the Barcelona Process be given a boost by a new Union for the Mediterranean.

This political impulse is welcome. The aim is to build on the achievements of the Barcelona Process to intensify our cooperation with the region and strengthen key bilateral relationships. Clearly, we must focus on added value – e.g. by better involving the private sector. Also, it is crucial that all EU Member States and institutions are fully involved.

We are currently preparing proposals on how this will work with a view to the Summit that will take place in Paris in July.

So in short: It's not a question of competing with existing institutions but rather of finding ways to go further in our relations. So the focus will be on regional projects. In thinking about those projects we will be talking to all the EU's member states and our partner countries, but I can imagine an emphasis on common areas of concern like developing infrastructure interconnections and promoting regional cohesion, economic integration and environmental protection.

After all, our common objective is to strengthen our relations across and around our "mare nostrum", the Mediterranean region that we all share. This will also be reflected in the planned Co-Presidency of this Union from a Northern and Southern country.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

These are the issues which are on the top of my agenda at the moment, but there are many other topics of burning importance.

Peace in the Middle East continues to elude us, but as a member of the Middle East Quartet and co-chair of the Paris Donors' Conference, I am hopeful that we will be able to make progress on the ground as soon as possible, not least on access and movement for the Palestinians as well as on Israeli settlements (which are an obstacle to peace). EU support – both political and financial – will remain crucial for the development of a democratic and viable Palestinian state (esp. through our financial mechanism Pegase).

Furthermore, our relations with Russia are of great importance, and we are faced now with a moment of opportunity as a new President enters the international stage. Let us take president-elect Medvedew at his word.

And of course, Afghanistan, relations with China and other issues remain high on my agenda.

Beyond that there is an important Summit next month with the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean and a whole host of thematic issues – especially women and security – which are an important focus of my work – as reflected in the major conference of female leaders which I hosted in March.

I hope you have a flavour now for the current debate in the corridors of Brussels' institutions and of the kinds of issues which await you when you graduate later this year.

Europe needs you - its young generation - to help it operate more effectively in a globalized world.

And let me say how pleased I am that the College has added the "International Relations and Diplomacy" strand to its curriculum. As Isaac Goldberg joked, *"Diplomacy is to do and say the nastiest things in the nicest way"* – an important skill!

More seriously, I am convinced this will make an essential contribution to building up the European Union's identity and power on the world stage.

And I hope you will be even more inspired to do all you can to play your part, now and in the future.