

Opening Ceremony

College of Europe

Bruges, 4 November 2009

Speech by Mr Jerzy BUZEK, President of the European Parliament



Dear Rector Demaret,

Dear Members of the Academic Council,

Dear Students, Dear Friends,

This is not my first visit to the College of Europe, as Prime Minister I was in your sister campus in Natolin, in Warsaw. I am glad to be welcomed back; it is always a great privilege for me to be able to address you, the next generation of Europeans.

I wish to speak today about an issue which is close to my heart: the need for a European solution to the questions of energy and climate change.

Dear Students,

This year is the 200th Anniversary of the birth of Charles Darwin, an appropriate patron for this Promotion. The Rector has told you about his life and his most important achievement.

Charles Darwin was a controversial figure, a scientist who proposed an idea that went against the orthodoxy of the time.

Climate change was the controversy of our time.

Twenty years ago when scientists pointed to the evidence, they were dismissed as alarmists. This summer, for the first time in 50 million years, we were able to navigate the North Pole because part of the ice cap melted.

We know that the alarmists were right.

In the 1990s I was the Polish representative to the International Energy Agency's "Greenhouse Gas Effect Programme". By 1996 we knew with a 90% certainty that Greenhouse Gas is caused by man.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

All of us insure our cars, the chance of having an accident are very small, yet we spend money on insurance. Shouldn't we spend money to reduce the risk when we have a 90% certainty that the accident will happen?

We are less than a month away from the Copenhagen conference on climate change. Last week's European Council meeting allowed Europe to have a common position, based on solidarity, not just with the less developed countries in the world, but also at home.

The principle that not only emissions, but a countries GNP will be the key to decide on contributions is a fair one.

The outcome of the Copenhagen conference must be a new, legally binding agreement based on the Kyoto protocols. If we do not slow global warming to 2 degrees Celsius, the consequences will be catastrophic. Just by way of an example, the sea will be at Bruges again.

Dear Colleagues,

It is also a myth that the fight against climate change stands in the way of development. Economies can grow while keeping emissions low.

But we need to cooperate on a global scale, and to help those who do not have the funds to invest in new technologies. The costs for developing countries by 2020 can be as high as 100 billion Euros annually; the international community will have to provide the bulk of the financing

The European commitment to help pay for fast-start international funding worth 5-7 billion Euros per year to avoid delays. is necessary and shows our commitment, and solidarity.

I hope that our partners in the United States, Japan but also China, India, Brazil and South Africa will also show this level of solidarity.

When he accepted the 2007 Nobel Peace Prize, former Vice-president Al Gore declared that 'it is time to make peace with the planet'. In agreeing with his conclusion, I would add: 'It is also time for European nations to serve as forces for peace in this process'.

Dear Friends,

This brings me to my second point, the need for a real European Energy Policy.

For some in the EU, energy policy is the fight against climate change, for others it is about energy security. It is both. Without energy security, and a comprehensive energy policy, we can not address climate change.

Remember that the primary source of energy today is still fossil fuels, any change to minimise its use diminishes CO2.

Winter is coming. Europeans may not understand geopolitics; they do understand that the heating is turned off in their homes, their hospitals, their schools. Last January we saw what the lack of a proper Union policy can do. Slovakia and Bulgaria had no gas for two weeks.

This can happen anywhere. Ask your Italian colleagues about the great black out of 2003.

In March the Council should accept a new plan on Europe's energy policy which will deal with better transport and diversification of gas, both to and in the Union. But this is not ambitious enough.

Today we have to support a forward looking energy policy both within the EU and in our external relations so that we can guarantee our security, and coordinate our efforts on climate change.

It is time for us to consider creating a European Energy Community.

In the 1950s, the European Coal and Steel Community was formed, giving joint control over coal, which was vital to the production of energy. We also created Euratom as a way to harness the peaceful use of nuclear power.

Today we need a new Schuman declaration, no longer because we fear war among ourselves, but because we need a new sense of solidarity in production, purchase and consumption of energy.

Why an Energy Community? Because we need new financial instruments to build an energy infrastructure for the 21st century. We have to extend the network of pipelines so that we are not dependent on any one state, and we have to build greater interconnectivity of our gas and electric grids.

We need a decision on common purchases of gas and petroleum which will create a real common energy policy.

We should accelerate the work on the mechanism for energy solidarity

We need to continue with diversification of energy sources by investing more in renewables such as wind, water, biomass and solar power.

Let us also be brave and say it, that nuclear energy has to remain available to the mix.

No member state can afford not to do it, but no state can afford to do it alone. This can only be done by sustained, European investments over the long term.

Energy is such an issue of national sovereignty that not all members will be willing to join at the start. But we must take a step forward and move on with those who are willing to join. It is time to consider pooling sovereignty over energy production

Dear Friends,

The 20th century was largely a time in which Europeans fought for freedom. In the 21st century, we must learn to take advantage of this freedom.

To define freedom as simply a refusal to harm others is not enough for responsible nations aware of their history. Freedom, as I understand it, cannot exist without a responsibility to use the blessings it bestows.

We are answerable to future generations, and this sense of responsibility will determine the condition in which we leave the world to them, just as it was left in our own care for such a short time.

I have a duty to you, the next generation of Europeans, as you have a duty to your own children and grand-children.

This year, in celebrating the 40-year anniversary of the moon-landing, the astronauts were united in their recollection that only when looking down on our planet from space can its beauty and uniqueness be fully grasped.

We need to continue to remind people to look after our planet because it is the only one we have.

Dear Students,

This is the 60th promotion of the College of Europe, an institution which is almost as young as I am!

By having two campuses, in two parts of Europe, the College was one of the first institutions which reintegrated the Europe we have now reunited. Learn from each other, share your experiences, because this is what makes our Europe united.

I wish you the best of luck for your studies.

Thank you.