

Štefan Füle

European Commissioner for Enlargement and Neighbourhood
Policy

**Speech at the opening ceremony of the
61st academic year of the College of
Europe**

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

College of Europe

Natolin, 6 December 2010

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Dear Students,

It is a great pleasure to address you here today. The 2010-2011 promotion celebrates Albert Einstein. My grasp of physics leaves a little to be desired. However, I believe that Einstein's theory of the relativity of simultaneity proves that while you may be listening to the opening address of the academic year in December I am in fact delivering it in October!

The College of Europe in Natolin is an institution, which is symbolic of the changes that have occurred across wider Europe in the last 20 years. It prepares future leaders including civil society activists, parliamentarians, officials ... and even some of my advisors.

At the time of Natolin's foundation, I do not believe that anyone could have anticipated the changes that occurred over the past eighteen years.

Poland, Natolin's host country, was taking its steps along the path of transformation into a democratic state and active member of the European Union. The process of German re-unification was well under way. However, at the same time the wars in Yugoslavia were ravaging the Western Balkans. This was a time of great instability and uncertainty for the future.

We have come a very long way since then:

- We are a Union of 27 member states.
- We have an enlargement policy with nine countries, including three countries that are negotiating their accession and six others on various stages of the road.
- We have a policy towards our neighbours which covers sixteen countries that is now delivering its first results.

The Natolin Campus is a renowned centre for the study of the EU as a regional actor. I understand that this is one of the optional specializations in the second semester – I hope that my speech will stimulate your interest and encourage you to contribute to the ongoing debates in this area.

It is now examination time at Natolin. Therefore, I decided to structure my lecture today around a series of four exam-style questions:

1. Enlargement policy and neighbourhood policy: compare and contrast.
2. The European Union's enlargement policy: foreign policy or domestic policy?
3. Neighbourhood policy, one size fits all or a tailored approach?
4. And to conclude: What is the role of enlargement and neighbourhood policy in 21st century Europe, and what is your role in this process?

Let me take each of these questions in turn and share my views with you.

1. Enlargement policy and neighbourhood policy: compare and contrast.

The European Union is a community of values. It is based on the rule of law and respect for fundamental rights. It is a zone of peace, stability and prosperity, even in these troubled times.

These core values are at the heart of both our enlargement and neighbourhood policies.

- Both policies share the same overarching goal of extending the European area of peace, stability and prosperity beyond the present borders of the European Union itself.

- Both policies help us better achieve our own policy objectives in a number of areas that are key to economic recovery and sustainable growth.
- Both policies enable the European Union to meet the challenges of a shifting, multi-polar world, in which we need to continue projecting our values and interests - beyond our borders.

Enlargement policy concerns the relations of the European Union with countries that have the prospect of becoming members of the European Union themselves.

Neighbourhood policy concerns neighbouring countries, with whom we wish to have closer relations, but these countries do not have an accession perspective for the time being.

This distinction has an impact in terms of the policy tools available to us and also on the depth of the relationship that is created. I will return to this issue later in my speech, but now let us move on to question two:

2. The European Union's enlargement policy: foreign policy or domestic policy?

At first glance, the enlargement policy is part of the EU's foreign policy par excellence.

It takes serious challenges on our doorstep and turns them into opportunities for a more secure and prosperous Europe and a stable world. From this perspective, enlargement is a policy that has been a real success.

Let us look at our host country here today. Twenty-one years have passed since the conditions for a free and democratic Poland were negotiated around the famous Round Table. The reforms and changes made by Poland, in common with all countries of the last two waves of enlargement, bear testimony to the hard work of the governments and the society at large. To a large extent, the driving force was the prospect of EU accession.

These two elements, the prospect of membership and the hard work and determination of the countries themselves to move towards EU standards and values have managed to:

- cement democracy,
- reinforce the rule of law and respect for fundamental rights,
- and promote market economies.

Similar progress can now be seen within the countries of the current enlargement process.

Consider the Western Balkans. Fifteen years ago, the region appeared in everyone's mind as a place of destruction and despair. Now, it is consolidating peace and stability through a clear European Union membership perspective.

Consider Turkey, a growing regional power, taking steps to bring its secular democracy in line with European Union standards.

Or consider Iceland, a country hard hit by the financial crisis, which opted for the European Union's model of stability and solidarity and is now negotiating membership.

While it is clear that Enlargement can be viewed as a foreign policy, perhaps it is more accurate to adopt the 'Nato perspective' of viewing enlargement as the policy of a regional actor. Indeed, this also leaves room for discussing the domestic nature of the reforms, on which the enlargement process depends.

The prospect of EU membership provides a clear incentive for countries to undertake reforms that can turn this prospect into reality. However, these reforms are so extensive and deep that they become a powerful domestic agenda in all cases. Becoming a member state requires fulfilling the Copenhagen criteria. This in turn touches the very heart of each country's political agenda, including:

- Democracy and respect for the rule of law. In many cases this involves a complete change in political and legal system - a change for the better.
- A functioning market economy and the ability to be competitive on the Internal Market, often requiring a complete economic reorganisation of the country.
- The ability to respect the obligations of EU membership. This involves adopting all relevant European Union legislation – in some countries, it has been necessary to transform up to 60% of the national legal order.

This is a process which I, as many of you who experienced the 2004 and 2006 'big bang' enlargements, witnessed first hand. In this respect, I would like to share some advice. The enlargement process is a unique opportunity to change for the better. However, as we also know it requires hard work, determination and great political courage.

It may be a truism, but the one thing you cannot be taught - even in an institution like Natolin – is: experience.

The last wave of enlargement taught us some important lessons.

For the mutual benefits of EU membership to materialise, the work of the European Union and of the candidate and potential candidate countries must be credible. Within the enlargement process, credibility is a two-way street.

For Member States, credibility means applying rigorous conditionality towards the applicants, but also providing them with a tangible European perspective as they fulfil the relevant conditions. Therefore, a candidate country is only recommended to join the EU once it is fully prepared to do so.

For the candidate and potential candidate countries, credibility is gained not through simply ticking boxes about legislative approximation. It is built through a track record of credible reform and implementation. We have to provide them with a framework in which they can achieve real change, real reform and real results. Only this can guarantee that the reforms undertaken will bring the expected changes and benefits to society – including a tangible European perspective.

Credibility on both sides depends upon the credibility of actors involved: politicians, non-governmental organisations, and citizens. It depends on their understanding of the challenges and their capacity to play their part to the full.

Let me now move on to discuss the other policy employed by Europe as a regional actor. Question three asked whether Neighbourhood policy was 'one size fits all' or a tailored approach?

3. Neighbourhood policy, one size fits all or a tailored approach?

European Neighbourhood Policy was developed in the run-up to the 2004 “big bang” enlargement, which reunited a Europe that had been separated for half a century by the ‘iron curtain’. The policy aims to avoid the creation of new dividing lines in Europe – this time, between countries that are inside or outside the EU.

I am delighted to see that twenty-four students in the Einstein Promotion come from the ENP countries - double the representation of last year's promotion! This includes eight students from the Ukraine, four from Moldova, three from Armenia, as well as students from Algeria, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Morocco and Tunisia. Each

and every one of you can study at the College of Europe with great pride, you represent the European future of your countries – it is in your hands.

Studying at Natolin is a wonderful opportunity for all of you to learn about Neighbourhood policy. I understand that there is a dedicated course on the topic – but you, the students from thirty-two different countries can also learn a lot from each other. To stimulate this debate, I will now outline the main aspects of the policy and present you with some points for debate about its upcoming review.

European Neighbourhood Policy covers sixteen countries to the South and to the East of the EU, each with their own distinct geography, economy, history and culture.

Some wonder: how can the European Union deal with all of these countries in a single policy?

My answer is twofold:

First, our neighbours share many common challenges – including relative poverty and weak democratic cultures. The EU can provide a platform to exchange experience and to overcome these issues.

Second, ENP can be applied in all neighbouring countries as the policy is based on a single set of core values and goals.

Let me first look at these values.

The values of good governance and rule of law, together with democracy and respect for human rights, lie at the heart of ENP. These values underpin all EU norms and standards. The European Union encourages reform in our neighbourhood and seeks to promote convergence towards our shared values.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The goals and values of the European Neighbourhood Policy are applied to all partner countries. However, we adopt an increasingly differentiated approach to bilateral relations with each partner country, as required by the particular situation, needs and ambitions of each country.

We apply this differentiated, tailor-made approach both between and within the regions of the neighbourhood.

In the East of our neighbourhood the European Union has concluded the Eastern Partnership with its six partners: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine.

Bilaterally, the European Union has offered to negotiate Association Agreements with its Eastern partners. These entail deep economic and regulatory integration, enhanced cooperation on energy security, support for economic and social development, as well the prospect of visa free travel in the long term, subject to certain conditions.

Progress is pursued at a pace determined by each country's commitment to our core values and to reform.

With the Ukraine, negotiations on an Association Agreement have already made considerable progress. We launched negotiations with the Republic of Moldova in January 2010. Negotiations with Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia followed in July 2010.

On visa free travel as a long-term goal, we are most advanced in discussions with Ukraine and Moldova. We have recently concluded visa facilitation and readmission agreements with Georgia and similar agreements with other partners will follow.

With Belarus, our engagement will depend chiefly on reforms in five key areas for democratisation:

- no political prisoners
- reform of the electoral code
- freedom of the press and NGOs
- abolition of death penalty

and, of course, we will be watching very closely the conduct of the upcoming elections.

Association Agreements, Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Areas and visa liberalisation will require considerable efforts at further reform within the partner countries' institutions. The EU supports these efforts through Comprehensive Institution-Building programmes, by identifying core institutions and key issues to be tackled, and providing targeted EU support to develop the capacity of those institutions.

One important initiative is the EaP Civil Society Forum. This brings together NGOs from the EU and from all six Eastern partners, including Belarus, and promotes democratic governance starting from the grass-root level.

Ladies and gentlemen, let us now turn our attention towards the EU's neighbours to the South. Once again, we follow a tailor-made approach with each of our partners.

In the South of our neighbourhood, we have agreed on an "advanced status" for Morocco, a country that has made a clear choice to modernise and to strengthen relations with the EU. With Jordan, we have concluded a new "advanced status" Action Plan, and we are discussing similar arrangements with other neighbours, such as Egypt and Tunisia.

The Union for the Mediterranean, launched in 2008, is also developing with many activities at the technical level in important sectors, such as environment and social policy, despite a blockage at the political level.

We regularly monitor the implementation of the European Neighbourhood Policy. So what is our assessment of the ENP so far?

So far, the ENP has met with varied success:

It has resulted in the approximation of legislation towards EU standards in many fields.

It has facilitated increased trade flows between the EU and its partners.

However, it has not brought about the degree of progress we had hoped for in our neighbourhood – especially concerning democracy, rule of law and respect for human rights.

In our neighbourhood, we still have many unsolved regional conflicts: not only the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, but also Transnistria, Nagorno-Karabakh, Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Western Sahara. Our partners call for greater EU support in the resolution of territorial disputes.

Addressing these challenges in our own neighbourhood will be a litmus test of the post-Lisbon EU. The Lisbon treaty and the new European External Action Service will help the European Union better coordinate different instruments and actors. It will allow us to follow a more holistic approach to the promotion of European Union values and interests.

Five years after the implementation of European Neighbourhood Policy, High Representative/Vice-President Ashton and I have undertaken broad-ranging

consultations to review this policy, including EU Member States and partner country governments and civil society. We want to discuss the future of ENP policy, to define a vision and set out the way ahead for the medium term.

So far, the outcome of the consultations is encouraging. Both EU Member States and partner countries want stronger relations based on high level political co-operation and deeper economic integration. Civil society organizations are also very supportive of the ENP as a tool to advance shared values and good governance.

The consultations indicate that we need to move clearly towards the “more for more” approach. We develop a framework in which our expectations of partners are spelled out more clearly, as are the “rewards” that our partners will obtain if those expectations are met. The results of the consultations will form the basis for a Communication in April 2011 and for a comprehensive discussion with Council and Parliament on the future of the ENP.

Ladies and gentlemen, dear Students, allow me to conclude by sharing with you my vision of the role of Enlargement and ENP and the task that remains for your generation.

The European Union now unites countries that once found themselves on different sides of the iron curtain. The peoples of the twenty-seven EU member states enjoy a stable, democratic Europe.

However, in this climate of economic uncertainty, many people ask "why do enlargement and ENP matter?" These policies matter because they reinforce peace and stability in Europe. Enlargement makes the EU a safer place, with its focus on consolidating the rule of law, while promoting democracy and fundamental freedoms across the region. The European Neighbourhood Policy provides a mechanism to project our values in our neighbourhood.

It is our historic duty to ensure that the European project continues to expand the area of peace, stability and prosperity to Europe as a whole - beyond the borders of the European Union.

For this to happen we need leaders who are forward-looking and who understand the issues at stake.

I am sure that the College of Europe does prepare these leaders, and that you are amongst them.

Thank you.