

**Speech van minister-president dr. Jan Peter Balkenende,
start van het nieuwe programma over Europese waarden
en burgerschap aan het Europa College, Brugge, 25 april
2005**

Ladies and gentlemen,

‘We have Europe. Now we need Europeans.’

These are the words of Bronislaw Geremek.

I’m so pleased that such a distinguished scholar was chosen to hold the first rotating chair for European values and citizenship at the College of Europe.

Professor Geremek, your knowledge and experience is so wide-ranging that I can’t possibly do justice to it in the short time I have here.

You are a historian with an impressive record.

As advisor to the Solidarity movement, you were closely involved in the peaceful revolution in Poland in the eighties.

You served your country as Minister of Foreign Affairs.

And for many years now, you have played an active role in the debate on European identity and values.

‘We have Europe. Now we need Europeans.’ Mr Geremek, you’re in luck, because this auditorium is full of young Europeans. Europeans from different backgrounds and with different ideas about Europe. Critical people. Full of ideas about new ways of doing things. But united by their common interest in the history and future of the European community of values.

What is Europe? The ancient Greeks believed, Europa was a princess who caught the eye of Zeus, the king of the gods. Zeus transformed himself into a bull and carried the princess off to Crete.

In this story, Europa comes across as a rather helpless creature. I would prefer to see Europe in a more active, confident role. We cannot let ourselves be carried away. We need to take the bull by the horns.

Looking back on this continent’s history, we can see that the bull went on raging for centuries, with Europa on its back. Our history is a long series of wars and conflicts, interrupted by the occasional truce.

Fortunately, there's more to the story. Our history is also a parade of glittering achievements: inventions, books, ideas and works of art. Achievements appreciated not just in Europe, but throughout the world.

We are the Europe of Montesquieu and Michelangelo. But also of the guillotine and the gas chamber.

This year Europe remembers the sixtieth anniversary of the end of the Second World War. One of the darkest pages in our shared history. Last month I was in Jerusalem, at Yad Vashem, the museum dedicated to recording the horrors of the holocaust. A piece of European history. Our past. It is a sobering experience.

Since 1945 we in Western Europe have lived our lives in freedom, peace and prosperity. Sixty years is a long time. So long that we've begun to take that peace and prosperity for granted.

We can see the same happening in Central and Eastern Europe, even though the memory of oppression is still fresh there.

It is useful to look at what one of the EU's founding fathers – Jean Monnet – had to say on the subject. During the war and the years that followed, he understood two things quite clearly:

- First, peace demands our constant attention, even in peacetime.
- And second, conflicts and violence can only be resolved if nations move beyond nationalism. Lasting peace only has a chance if you can work together to build something that stands above borders.

The European Coal and Steel Community was established in 1951. For the first time in the history of Europe, a group of countries chose to surrender part of their sovereignty to a supranational organisation. The ECSC laid the groundwork for both the European Economic Community and the European Union.

Now, at the start of the twenty-first century, it is clear to everyone that this approach was the right one. Even the harshest critics of the EU have to concede that the seeds of peace, freedom, prosperity and stability have taken root across the continent.

And now the winds of change are blowing these seeds further eastward. To Turkey and the Balkans. We've also seen positive developments in Ukraine and Georgia.

Twenty-five countries, with a combined population of over 455 million, no longer settle their differences on the battlefield, but at the negotiating table.

Together they comprise a democratic space in which people can move freely and trade freely. According to Robert Cooper, the EU is a 'voluntary empire', whose expansion has never been seen as a threat by the countries around it. Historically speaking, a unique achievement.

But is that enough?

Once again, let me remind you of the words of Jean Monnet: freedom demands our constant attention.

His words are as true today as they were a half century ago. Only our challenge now is not preventing countries from drifting apart. But preventing people from drifting apart.

The last few decades have been a time of spectacular growth for the EU, from 6 member states to 25.

But how many Dutchmen or Britons could find Slovenia on a map? And what percentage of Slovaks know where Belgium is?

It's not just the diversity of countries within the Union that has grown. The diversity within the member states has increased dramatically.

For example, immigrants now make up ten per cent of the Dutch population. In the big cities, half of all young people are the children of newcomers. We see the same ethnic and cultural diversity in France, Belgium, Germany, the Baltic States and elsewhere.

Diversity is a good thing; it makes society more interesting. But it also has a downside. It can lead to uncertainty. Distrust. Conflicting ideas. And at times – sadly – to violence.

There is also another factor in the mix. My generation – the baby boom generation – grew up with an image of Europe as an economic enterprise. A business partnership. Far less was said about the other side of European integration: Europe as a political project designed to preserve common values and put them into practice.

A rapidly expanding Union, increasing diversity and an image of Europe as an economic enterprise. These three factors have helped weaken people's sense of commitment to the European project.

We run the risk of ending up with a European house that looks strong from the outside, but is crumbling on the inside.

'We have Europe. Now we need Europeans.'

This is why the Netherlands used the EU Presidency last autumn to draw attention to European values and what they mean for our future. This programme at the College of Europe is a result of our efforts.

Values are at the foundation of everything we do in Europe. From our security strategy to the Lisbon agenda. If we don't make those values explicit, how can we expect people to get excited about Europe?

We can think of values as our inspiration. If we don't talk about our common inspiration, we will never be able to act boldly on the major issues of our time: security, sustainable economic growth and the integration of newcomers.

Last year, the Netherlands organised a series of international conferences, where this theme was debated by many thinkers from around the world.

There was general agreement that even on this diverse continent, certain values bind us. Freedom, respect for human rights and the rule of law, solidarity and equality – these values are universal. And it is precisely these values that make it possible to live in a Europe so full of differences.

It is no coincidence that they are at the heart of the Constitutional Treaty. Our common values are now clear for all to see. Over the next few months, a number of European countries – including my own – will be giving their citizens an opportunity to vote on that Treaty.

There is a fierce debate in progress. It is good to enter that debate with conviction.

The constitution means:

- Being stronger in building security and prosperity;
- Less European interference in domestic affairs;
- Europa-wide protection of civil rights;
- Greater attention to what Europeans want, and more openness in Europe.

These are grand aspirations. As I see it, the Constitution is good for democracy, good for transparency and good for our strength in meeting our shared challenges.

Europe means peace, prosperity and protection. It is not us, but the constitution's *opponents* who should be defending their position. They offer only fear. They have no offer for a better future.

Ladies and gentlemen, a free democratic Europe cannot exist without an active civil society and committed citizens who are proud of their freedom, their opportunities and their rich cultures. Pride comes from awareness. Schools, cultural organisations, politicians, and thinkers and do-ers like yourselves can help raise that awareness.

Another important outcome of the conferences was the belief that we should not build barriers around our European identity. Openness is an essential aspect of European civilisation. For centuries, new ideas have met with a warm reception here.

Adam Zagajewski observed that a defining feature of Europe was that 'it allows and even invites criticism and self-criticism in science and society'. That is the power of Europe.

When I look at my own country's history, I see the many groups that have influenced our culture and identity. The Romans, Franks, Burgundians, Spaniards, Jews from Portugal, the French, inhabitants of our former colonies. And today, newcomers from Turkey and Morocco.

Our identity is formed by the classics, the Judeo-Christian tradition, humanism, the Enlightenment and the ongoing dialogue with Islamic and Arabic cultures. It is our interaction with others that makes us who we are.

I am also reminded of the words that Jean Monnet wrote in the early 1950s:

'The six European countries have not begun the mammoth task of tearing down the walls that separate them only to build even higher walls to keep out the rest of the world.'

We mustn't seek safety in seclusion, but in dialogue. Inside Europe, and beyond its borders.

People, knowledge and ideas cannot circulate widely enough.

This is why I'm so pleased about this programme in European values and citizenship at the College of Europe. A new chance to build bridges between countries and generations. And between the worlds of science, policy and culture.

European cooperation has brought peace, freedom and prosperity to 455 million people. No one can deny that this is an achievement of historic dimensions.

The European project deserves to be carried forward into the twenty-first century, with renewed vigour.

This is why we must see the Union as more than an economic partnership. More than a single market and common currency. We are also driven by the non-material values of freedom, respect and solidarity. And we need to say so, forcefully.

Mr Geremek, you once said, 'Every community needs a feeling of belonging in order to survive'.

We cannot create a feeling of belonging with quotas, subsidies and guidelines. Important though they may be!

We can only create a feeling of belonging if we in Europe talk about our passions and dreams. Our ambitions. Our hopes. Our inspirations. Our values. And how to act on them.

I hope your time here proves to be educational and inspiring. You're in very good hands with Professor Geremek.

Thank you.