



College of Europe
Collège d'Europe



Natolin

Speech of the President of the European Parliament, Hans-Gert Pöttering, at the Opening Ceremony of the 2008-2009 academic year

1 October 2008 - College d'Europe, Natolin (Poland)

Honourable Rector of the College of Europe, dear Prof. Paul Demaret,
Honourable Vice-Rector of the College of Europe, dear Mrs Ośniecka-Tamecka,
Mr Chairman of the European Parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee and President of
the Board of the Foundation College of Europe, dear colleague, Jacek Saryusz-Wolski,
Dear Students,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great honour and pleasure for me to address this distinguished audience on the occasion of the opening of the 2008-09 Marcus Aurelius promotion of the College of Europe. It is a privilege to join the long list of high ranking personalities from all over Europe that have been invited to open an Academic Year at the College of Europe since 1949.

You are 85 students coming from 23 countries, who will be studying together in the forthcoming year at the Campus in Natolin. As President of the European Parliament, it is a big reward to see that so many young people from all over Europe, from different backgrounds and traditions, all identifying themselves with the idea and spirit of European unity, wish to come together to learn more about the functioning of the European institutions, our common history and the future of the European community of values.

This institution is very highly respected for offering a challenging and comprehensive curriculum in European studies. Your professors are eminent specialists from some of the most renowned universities, as well as experts from within the European institutions. You, the Marcus Aurelius promotion, as well as your colleagues in Bruges, are all surely destined to play a crucial and valuable role in the future of the European continent.

As you know, last year, the European Union celebrated the 50th anniversary of the Treaties of Rome. We looked back in gratitude to the achievements of the last half century - a period which brought freedom, security, prosperity and ever increasing chances for many of the citizens of our continent - especially for the younger generation.

But for a long time, only half of Europe's citizens had the chance to benefit from democracy and the opportunities offered by the European Communities. The others,

against their will, faced dictatorship. In this very country - here in Natolin – the people were unfree. The great achievement of the last two decades is to have defeated communism and overcome the division of Europe.

Today our European continent is reunited and shares common values of peace, freedom and democracy - and the totalitarian systems have failed. This is something which is terribly important to understand and remember about our recent past. And I believe that what happened has something to do with the concept of European integration.

That is the reason why I am particularly happy to be here today amongst the students from the Natolin Campus.

The fact that a second campus of the College of Europe has been established here is illustrative of the long way we have come since the fall of communism and the reunification of our continent.

Established in the wake of these changes, this College symbolises the incredible energy of renewal in Poland and in Central and Eastern Europe over the last twenty years. It is the symbol of the new Poland in a new Europe!

xxx Success of the European Union xxx

The European Union has indeed become much more relevant and important than ever before. We have seen an enormous success with the introduction of a common European currency. The free movement for people became a concrete reality for millions of European citizens with the opening of the Schengen borders on 21 December last:

It was a moment of great emotion for me personally when I was at the Zittau triangle at the Czech, German and Polish borders, symbolically sawing through the wooden barriers marking the boundaries between our European nations.

Not only has the European Union grown in the number from the original Six to now 27 Member States, representing nearly 500 million people, but it has also grown in its ambitions and responsibilities - notably by responding to the wishes of the citizens, who called for the European Union to be more active in areas such as foreign policy, security and climate change.

Unfortunately, in recent years, we have also encountered scepticism, worries and concerns. We experience a growing sense of unease about the future in all our countries, among our citizens. Since the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of the Cold War, the international scene has changed rapidly, creating an important and ever-increasing need for security, cooperation and leadership.

In the most recent months, we have witnessed huge developments - the visible rise of China; the dramatic assertion of Russia; instability in Pakistan.

Allow me at this point to express my solidarity with the Polish engineer kidnapped in Pakistan, and with his family. Once again, I would like to stress that democracy should, must never give in to terrorism - and that it is a political and moral obligation to ensure that the rule of law prevails. Every effort must be made to secure the release of the hostage.

In recent months, we have also witnessed huge fluctuations in the price of oil, the slow-down of the European and US economies, and continuing difficulties in achieving institutional reform in the European Union.

The patron of this promotion, Marcus Aurelius, was the last of the five wise Roman emperors. Wisdom is a rare quality in today's world. Let yourself be inspired by Marcus Aurelius, as we will need a lot of wisdom to deal with the increasing and new global challenges our societies are facing today.

Recently, two major pillars of the world order have been put under a strong challenge: the financial system and the international law.

The current major crisis on the financial markets reminds us once again just how intertwined our fate is - and how interdependent our economies are. Considering the scale of recent disruption and its increasing impact on the European financial system, as well as on the real economy, this topic will be at the centre of discussions at the European Council meeting of Heads of State and Government later this month.

Because, even if the Euro had shielded us to some extent from the impact of the sometimes disastrous impact of the crisis affecting financial markets since last summer, we have seen clear evidence, both in the United States and in the European Union, of the shortcomings in regulatory and supervisory procedures. This has made the limits to self-regulation glaringly obvious.

In the United States, recognition of this fact has led quickly to the revamping of supervisory and liability arrangements, but in the event these changes proved too little too late.

In the European Union, although a political discussion has started concerning ways of reducing financial risks, it has not yet led to any comprehensive reform of supervisory systems, let alone proposals to improve the protection offered to millions of private investors. On neither side of the Atlantic has this issue been handled particularly effectively.

In a report adopted on 23 September, the European Parliament called on the European Commission to present a legislative proposal by the end of the year on the overall review of the regulation of all relevant financial institutions, including hedge funds and private equity.

It is now up to the Commission and especially to the Commissioner responsible, Charlie

McCreevy, not only to take heed of this clear call by the European Parliament, but to react urgently to the clear and present signs of danger for our European economy. It is time to act, balanced, wisely, but nevertheless decisively.

xxx Georgia Crisis and relations with Russia xxx

Another major challenge to the international order was the escalation of the crisis in Georgia last August. Speaking to the Heads of State and Government at the special European Council beginning of September, I felt that there was no reason to play down the seriousness of the situation. That crisis constituted a threat to security on the European continent without parallel since the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Russia's decision, on 26 August, to recognise the independence of the Georgian Caucasus provinces of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, in defiance of international law, not only made a peaceful solution to the conflict more difficult to achieve, but also jeopardised the overall stability of the world order.

There was no way the international community could accept that the territorial integrity of Georgia be called into question by means of unilateral decisions taken in Moscow!

Moreover, Russia has tried to justify its invasion by arguing that it was seeking to "protect Russian citizens" in South Ossetia and Abkhazia, something which has set a dangerous precedent, and given other former Soviet Republics - such as Ukraine and Moldova - which have sizeable Russian minorities, legitimate cause for concern.

I was in Latvia a few weeks ago: the people there, like those in Estonia and Lithuania, remember only too well the tragic periods in their history which were marked by foreign rule, breaches of human rights, and the use of violence against them.

We say to the European Union citizens in those countries: 'You are no longer alone! A threat to your country would constitute a threat to the European Union as a whole'.

The conflict in Georgia represented a decisive test of political cohesiveness for the European Union. The French Presidency of the European Union has played a very constructive role as a mediator in this conflict.

In contributing to a solution to the conflict, the European Union has demonstrated that it is ready and willing to honour the commitments given under Article 11 of the EU Treaty: we are determined to defend peace and our shared values, as well as to strengthen international security and cooperation.

It is today, 1 October, that the European Union will start deploying its 200-strong cease-fire monitoring mission in Georgia. We do hope that it will also soon be able to enter the security zone adjacent to the South Ossetia province. The aim of the EU mission is to enable Russian forces to withdraw according to the agreement.

Yet the EU mission will also serve as an instrument for intensifying EU-Georgia relations. Indeed, I would say that the European Union has learned three critical lessons from this crisis.

Lesson 1: Neighbourhood Policy

First, it is essential for the European Union to develop a much stronger and more coherent policy towards our neighbours in the Caucasus republics, as well as for Ukraine and Moldova. We need to strengthen our political and economic cooperation with the goal of creating a genuine 'European Economic Area Plus', including the establishment of a free trade zone.

We have a real responsibility to promote democracy and prosperity - and indeed mere stability - to countries which are making important choices about their future now. If they make the wrong choices, the consequences could be very uncomfortable for us in the years to come.

The former EU- Foreign Relations Commissioner Chris Patten once described the key foreign policy achievement of the European Union in two words - 'projecting stability'. He was and is absolutely right.

That is why, for example, in the European Parliament we are trying to build much stronger parliamentary ties with our new neighbours to the East. Proposals are being put forward, which I strongly support, for creating a Joint Parliamentary Assembly with our Eastern Neighbours.

Speaking of the European Union's neighbours, we should always bear in mind that one of Poland's neighbours is the last Stalinist dictatorship in Europe! The parliamentary elections last Sunday in Belarus, once again, fell short of democratic standards. The significant progress we had hoped for in the democratic development of that country did not materialise.

Recently, I met students from Belarus at the university in exile in Vilnius. They also have the same right as all of us to a future in freedom and in the respect of the rule of law.

It is our duty in the European Union never to remain silent when human rights and the dignity of the human being are being trampled upon. This is the major lesson of our troubled history of injustice and dictatorship, which lies at the heart of our system of political values.

Lesson 2: Relations with Russia

If human rights are indivisible, this principle must form the basis of the European Union's

external relations.

Russia is a big and proud country - and an important partner of the European Union. Yet our dialogue and cooperation with Russia must be based on shared values, in particular respect for human rights and the accepted principles governing the international community.

Your immediate predecessors on this campus last year here in Natolin can be proud that their promotion was named after a great defender – and martyr - of the freedom of the press in Russia, Anna Politkovskaya.

History, autocracy and dictatorship have shaped Russia, as much as they have shaped in the most dramatic way the history and fate of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. Yet, the future we can only build and win together, in peace and respect for international law, and in respect for one another.

I am convinced that very many people in Russia also see its future as part of an open world economy and part of a community of states based on common basic rules and cooperation between partners. They are not seeking a return to self-imposed isolation, as they themselves in Russia would be the first to suffer from the effects of such a policy.

Relations based on partnership between the European Union and Russia are in our shared interest. Peace on our continent in the 21st century requires a strong and effective European Union, cooperating with a stable and democratic Russia.

On this basis, we should maintain the aim of concluding a Strategic Partnership with Russia. But our principles must be very clearly expressed in any future Partnership and Cooperation Agreement. And in the field of energy, more specifically, we must insist that Russia honour its obligations in a clear, unambiguous and legally binding manner. This was the second lesson of the crisis in Georgia.

Lesson 3: Energy Security and Climate Change

The third lesson of the latest events on our continent is that we must urgently move forward in developing a genuine European energy policy.

The European Union and its Member States must do everything to reduce our dependence on third countries for energy supplies, and at all costs we must avoid one-sided dependence. It is vital to increase our energy efficiency, to lower demand for fossil fuels and to promote a proper energy mix by investing in all sectors in a suitably balanced manner, in particular in renewable energy and green technologies.

This goes to the heart of what the European Union is about. The added value of European integration is that it is more than the sum of its parts. Its *raison d'être* is to bring its peoples and states closer together to create joint solutions where we have shared

problems.

At the core, the European Union is a community based on solidarity and mutual support: Should one European Union Member State be faced with a threat to have, for example, its energy supplies cut off, all the other Union Member States would have a duty to support it. The European Union needs a clear European Strategy on security of energy supply, which is based on solidarity between member states.

Solidarity between the Member States in the energy sphere is a principle laid down in the Lisbon Treaty. This is one reason, out of many others, why the Lisbon Treaty should be ratified and implemented as quickly as possible. The European Parliament has called upon all Member States which have not yet ratified the Treaty to do so as soon as possible. In our view, the events in Georgia dramatically underline the necessity of the Lisbon Treaty, our need for its new solutions.

Yet, the problems affecting the ratification process must not prevent us from moving forward with the practical work of implementing European Union policies.

Among the manifold challenges facing our societies, fighting climate change is perhaps the most pressing of all. On the European continent, we have managed to create lasting peace between our countries, now we have to tackle the huge task of creating peace with the planet we live on.

And, allow me to underline: the worst consequences of climate change are still ahead of us and will mostly affect your generation. It will have major implications on all aspects of our life, our economy, our health, but also on international security and global governance.

The timeframe at our disposal is pretty narrow. Dr. Pachauri, the Chairman of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), considers that we have a maximum of 7 to 8 years; otherwise it will be too late to ward off the direst consequences of global warming.

The European Union has demonstrated its willingness to tackle climate change by adopting, at the 2007 Spring European Council, ambitious unilateral targets for fighting climate change and for promoting a common sustainable energy policy.

These targets were reiterated by the Heads of State and Government at the March 2008 Summit with a political agreement on the so-called "energy package", put forward by the European Commission last January.

The European Parliament is currently considering these legislative proposals and hopes to complete its work on the package before the end of the year.

Allow me though to say: We are not there yet, neither in the European Parliament, nor in the Council of Ministers. Yet, we have to succeed. It is time has come to show solidarity

at all levels.

We want to be able to point to tangible results when the climate protection conference is held here in Poland in Poznan in December 2008. This will lead us to a global post-Kyoto agreement in Copenhagen in 2009.

The European Union has promised to lead the world towards a global post-Kyoto agreement with binding targets. The eyes of the world will be on us throughout 2008 and 2009 until Copenhagen. We must fulfil these expectations!

Adopting the “Energy package” as soon as possible is also a matter of credibility. The European Union’s role as leader in the fight against climate change is not just about setting targets. If we want to be able to convince our partners worldwide to participate in a global and binding framework, we will have to deliver.

xxx The cost of non-Lisbon xxx

In the course of my lecture, I have mentioned some of the more pressing foreign policy, energy or environmental tasks ahead of us. To be able to address them properly, we need to have the institutions of a mature and responsible European democracy at our disposal.

Responding to the challenges of globalisation is both a main reason for institutional reform and a core element of the European Union’s political agenda. As young people, these challenges will mainly impact your lives and you will need to address them in the decades ahead.

There is a close link between, on the one hand, the European Union's global role, its capacity to deliver on concrete policies, and, on the other hand, its inner strength and ability to take swift decisions in areas that matter.

Reforms and new starts are not an end in themselves. The way the European Union adapts to the future will determine how much influence it can exert in the world. Today, European integration is no longer just about peace in Europe. It is also about enabling the European continent to assert itself in the era of globalisation.

Recent years have seen both intense debates about the future of the European Union and setbacks in the integration process. The result of the last seven years since the Nice treaty and the subsequent call for a deeper and wider debate about the future of the European Union - the Lisbon Treaty - may not be the most perfect document. By definition, anything which results from a process of compromise cannot satisfy every wish of every partner.

But it is an excellent compromise which would allow the European Union to take appropriate action to respond to the needs of its citizens, and to promote its values and interests around the world.

The innovations of the Treaty of Lisbon would open new perspectives: It would provide us, for example, with a High Representative for Foreign and Security Policy who could actually speak with some authority for the 27 member states as a whole.

To take another example, it would establish mechanisms that allow us to address energy security and energy solidarity issues.

It also would ensure proper parliamentary involvement in major policy areas. Over the last two decades, the European Parliament has already acquired substantial powers: under the co-decision procedure; we already have the final say in about three-quarters of the legislative decisions that matter. In 1979, when I first became an MEP, the European Parliament was a mere consultation body.

Some have said in the past that the European Parliament was a mere talking shop, a democratic fig-leaf. In my opinion this never has been true - and has lost the last shred of any meaning today.

The European Parliament has a crucial role to play for democracy in the European Union and a strong practical impact through legislation on the everyday life of European citizens. We have decided of the outcome on highly controversial legislative texts, such as the Services and Chemicals directives, just as we have pushed down the price of roaming charges for mobile phones, against strong resistance in the Council.

With the Lisbon Treaty, the 'co-decision' procedure becomes the general format of legislation in the European Union, not least in areas like agriculture, fisheries and trade policy - where currently no parliaments, whether national or European, have any meaningful say at all. This further reinforces the dual legitimacy of the States and the peoples, which is the hallmark of the European Union.

So, the Treaty of Lisbon is not just some 'optional extra' of some significance. It entrusts the European Union with a clear responsibility and legitimacy to meet the key challenges of tomorrow.

There is a price to pay to not having Lisbon. The cost of non-Lisbon is clear, and we are living with it every day, as the challenges of tomorrow gradually become our challenges of today and we are still lacking the necessary instruments to efficiently counteract them.

In that context, the outcome of the Irish referendum in Ireland on 12 June 2008 was a great disappointment for those people who want to make the European Union's decision-making procedures more democratic, more transparent and more effective. The biggest losers as a result of the 'No' vote are the citizens on our continent, who have placed their hopes in a stronger European Union.

Today, 24 countries have ratified the Reform Treaty through their national Parliaments. In another country, the ratification process is already well advanced. Just as we must

respect the outcome of the referendum in Ireland, which has resulted from a democratic process in accordance with the Irish Constitution, we must also respect the decisions taken by those 24 Member States which have approved the Lisbon Treaty in accordance with their constitutional rules.

The public debate in Ireland and the reasons cited during the campaign for voting 'no' suggest that the problems which prevented ratification perhaps had less to do with the institutional changes introduced by the Lisbon Treaty than with specific Irish issues that do not necessarily apply to other countries.

European Union is a force for peace in the world. The provisions of the Lisbon Treaty on security and defence issues neither attempt to introduce military service at European level, nor do they have implications for Ireland's policy of military neutrality.

A possible solution - allowing the other 26 Member States to continue working closer together in this field and taking action in the framework of peace-building missions - would be for Ireland to make use of constructive abstention enabled and provided for in the framework of ESDP.

Let us be clear: the European Union is our answer to the challenges of the 21st century. It is essential to have a democratic Union that works.

Now, it is up to the Irish Government and Prime Minister Cowen to put forward possible responses to the questions raised by the voters in Ireland. But all the EU-Member States and the European institutions have an equal responsibility to work together with Ireland to find a suitable and positive solution for us all.

xxx Conclusion xxx

In the age of global challenges, the value added effect of united action at European level is more apparent than ever. It is time that we really recognise that as Europeans, we have a shared interest in taking joint action.

The new Lisbon Treaty is a vital part of this agenda. Modern, streamlined institutions will support a more effective policy-making process.

With the right policies, with the right institutions, and of course, the necessary political will and leadership, I believe that we can rise to the challenge. But without them, we will struggle, as others move forward. The rest of the world will not wait for Europe. We have to make our own destiny!

For that, it's time to start thinking in terms of opportunities for our continent. It's time to realise what chance we have to live in peace, freedom and democracy, to benefit from a level of prosperity and social well-being other regions all over the world envy us for. These are great achievements, a highly valued heritage to build upon for a better future together.

It is the duty of your generation to pursue this task and drive forward our European Union for the next half century to shape a better world. This, I believe, requires more than anything a very good education and a moral compass to cope with the fast developments and changes in our world. I am sure you will receive both requirements here at the Campus of Natolin.

We count on you! We will need a lot of dynamic young people, inspired by the wisdom of Marcus Aurelius to take the right decisions at the right time!

I wish you a lot of success for you personal and professional life and hope to meet you very soon in a high ranking position within the European Union institutions or at the service of your home country.

Thank you for inviting me today - and the best for the up-coming academic year at the College of Europe in Natolin.