

9th May message from EU External Relations/European Neighborhood Policy Commissioner Benita Ferrero-Waldner



9 May, or Europe Day, is the anniversary of the Schuman declaration. Speaking in Paris in 1950, Robert Schuman, then Foreign Minister of France, proposed a new form of political arrangement for Europe, whose aim was to make war between Europe's nations unthinkable. Over 50 years later we recognize his vision paved the way to our current European Union, and brought Western Europe an unprecedented period of peace.

The creation and success of the European project has been described as "one of those events which happen in the world only every four or five hundred years." The last 20 years have seen remarkable progress, from the deepening of the world's largest single market to the widening of the Union from 15 to 25 countries. Indeed, the European Union is constantly evolving, as it seeks to keep pace with the changing demands of its citizens, and the changing nature of the world around us. Yet the last 12 months have not been easy for us. There is an undeniable gap between our historic success and our citizens' perceptions of the EU. Across Europe people are asking what the EU is for, what it is doing to respond to their concerns and how it will help meet 21st century challenges. The size of this gap was revealed in last year's referenda on the EU's constitutional treaty in France and the Netherlands.

The two "no" votes on the constitutional treaty were undoubtedly a setback for European integration. In their aftermath we agreed to have a period of reflection on the future and meaning of European Union. But the period of reflection has not been a period of introspection. We do not want to indulge in prolonged institutional navel-gazing. On the contrary, we have taken advantage of the pause to reconnect with our citizens' most important concerns – security, stability, prosperity and a stronger EU in the world.

Much of what our citizens fear boils down to one single word: "globalization." But I believe globalization is an opportunity, not a threat. It is neither caused nor worsened by the EU. But we cannot deny the side-effects of globalization – companies face new sources of competition, jobs disappear, families and communities are affected.

We are focusing on concrete achievements to show that the EU is part of the solution, not part of the problem. We need to deliver results – proving that the EU is a way of managing the pressures of globalization and turning it to our advantage.

There are certainly many challenges – immigration and demography are causing rapid and not always well-managed changes in European societies; energy security and energy efficiency were thrown into sharp relief by the events in Ukraine and Russia at the beginning of this year; and climate change remains a serious threat to the future of our planet.

We have to improve security against threats that know no borders, like international terrorism and global pandemics. We have to tackle issues like growth and jobs by reforming the economy. And we have to modernize Europe's social models in imaginative new ways to make them more sustainable and to meet Europeans' expectations without suffocating economic dynamism.

Even the biggest member states are too small to handle these challenges alone. The only effective approach is to work together. The EU represents the best mechanism for its peoples and countries to negotiate globalization's terms: protecting our interests; promoting our strategic goals; and consolidating a rule-based international order for the future.

Of particular concern to me, as European Commissioner responsible for external relations, is reinforcing the EU's leading role in world affairs.

We are now a Union of 450 million citizens; we have 20% share of world trade and a quarter of the world's GNP. We also send 55,000 European peacekeepers around the world and give 55% of the world's overseas development assistance.

The EU's citizens want and need a strong EU foreign policy. And a recent survey showed that an increasing majority of the world's citizens perceive the EU as having a positive influence in world affairs, and would even like to see our influence increase. This is a clear message about what the world expects from us, and now we must rise to the challenge.

Although the EU's constitutional treaty would have given us a new momentum on foreign policy, many of the necessary improvements can be made without it. It is largely a question of finding the political will.

We will continue to be the world's largest donor of development and humanitarian assistance; to develop our rapid response capabilities which enable us to mobilize emergency assistance; and to promote economic development and our core values of democracy, human rights, good governance and the rule of law.

We will priorities conflict prevention and crisis management; promoting human rights and human security; and strengthening effective multilateralism. Last year's UN Summit produced several important achievements such as the Human Rights Council which we have to work hard on putting into effect.

We face a number of other challenges in the coming year, such as strengthening the EU's dialogue with the Islamic world, ensuring the current clash of ignorance (revealed by the mutual misunderstanding over the cartoons published in Denmark and elsewhere) doesn't mutate into the much talked about clash of civilizations.

We are using the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership and European Neighborhood Policy to increase our channels for dialogue. The Commission has a new 10 point plan for intercultural dialogue and the Anna Lindh Euro-Mediterranean Foundation will play an important role. In addition we have been promoting interfaith dialogue through the Asia-Europe Meeting and the Association of South East Asian Nations Regional Forum. By 2008, the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue, we want to have made real progress with all our partners.

Another important priority will be consolidating our European Neighborhood Policy. ENP builds on the wealth of experience we have accumulated in helping states transition to democracy and market economy. We offer our eastern and southern neighbors many of the benefits previously associated only with membership, such as a stake in our internal market, involvement in EU programmers, and cooperation in transport and energy networks.

ENP is designed to offer a privileged form of partnership now, irrespective of the exact nature of the future relationship with the EU. We are now beginning to see the first fruits of this enhanced partnership such as the border monitoring mission in Moldova and Ukraine and the first-ever fora to discuss democracy and governance issues with Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia.

Energy, migration and global pandemics will remain important priorities of our external action. In March the Commission produced a policy paper on energy and its importance in our relations with our international partners. In January we announced a new thematic programmed on migration, and we are committed donors in combating global health crises such as avian flu and HIV/AIDS.

Last but not least, we will continue preparations for enlargement. We hope Bulgaria and Romania will join the EU on 1 January 2007, and our partners in the Balkans and Turkey are working towards reform with the prospect of membership in mind.

The EU is becoming an increasingly strong player in the international arena, which gives us a firm platform from which to develop closer ties with partners across the world. No matter what internal challenges we face we will remain outward-looking – for our interests, but also for our partners. Through our network of delegations overseas, the European Commission is working to develop ever-deeper relationships with its partners. We need a world-wide network of friends to address the challenges and opportunities of the 21st century.

More on May 9 Activities:

<http://www.eurunion.org/welcome/EuropeDayCalendar.htm> .