

Speech to be given by Prime Minister Jan Peter Balkenende at the conference *The politics of European values*, The Hague, 7 September 2004

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

Thank you for accepting the invitation to attend this conference, *The politics of European values*. Your presence here and your contribution to the debate has great significance.

Why has the Dutch Presidency taken the initiative to organise a debate about European values? Would it not be better to focus on the concrete challenges before Europe? Such as combating unemployment and fighting terrorism?

Ladies and gentlemen, let me make clear from the start how I see this issue. I believe that serious reflection about the values we Europeans share is *crucial* for the vitality and energy of the European Union. It derives from the history of European cooperation. And is necessary as we look to the future.

The philosopher John Kekes defined values as ‘possibilities whose realisation may make lives good’.

A value is therefore not something that we *possess*. Not an achievement we can boast about. A value is a *task*, a motivation, an incentive to take action.

The stronger the motivation, the more we can achieve together in the struggle ‘to make lives good’. Not only our own lives but also the lives of others. In Europe and beyond.

The European Union is a community of values. Our society is the product of several great religious and philosophical traditions. The ideas of the Greeks and Romans, Christianity, Judaism, humanism and the Enlightenment have made us who we are. And dialogue with the Islamic and Arabic culture has also helped to form our identity. Anyone who travels through Andalusia can see this.

The pattern of our values has been woven over hundreds of years. Hundreds of years which have seen high points of art and civilisation and low points of injustice and violence. Sometimes they came in cycles. Sometimes together.

We are the Europe of Michelangelo and Montesquieu. But we are also the Europe of the guillotine and the gas chamber. We must never forget that.

Bitter experience has taught us how fundamental our values are and how great the mission they represent. The values of:

Respect for human rights and human dignity.

Liberty.

Equality.

Solidarity.

These are the universal moral values which bind us and are enshrined in our treaties.

The Second World War taught us the importance of shared values. In an impoverished Europe which conflict had ripped apart, people yearned for peace, freedom, stability and a new chance to prosper.

The founders of European integration - Monnet, Schuman, Adenauer, De Gasperi and others – understood that these ideals could be achieved only by combining and interweaving the practical interests of the countries of Europe.

In his memoirs, Jean Monnet called this ‘la solidarité de fait’. By this he meant that feelings of friendship do not create a community. Monnet turned this idea around, saying that friendship comes from working together in a community.

And that is how the founders built their fragile house of peace on a foundation of coal and steel.

The founders passed the torch on to the next generation of Europeans. Jacques Delors, Helmut Kohl, François Mitterrand, Václav Havel, Valéry Giscard d’Estaing, and many others. All of them widened and deepened European cooperation. It was their leadership that made it possible for Europe to make great strides towards its post-war ideals – peace, stability and prosperity.

European cooperation continued to expand. The European Communities’ influence on the lives of the citizens grew. First came a customs union, then a European Social Fund, then a monetary union, and finally agreement on a Constitutional Treaty. Democracy took root where dictators had ruled. The European Union grew to 25 member states with 450 million citizens.

I was struck by what President Vaira Vike-Freiberga of Latvia said in her address to the European Parliament about a year ago.

“One might ask what Latvia expects from Europe”, she said. “Within the fold of the European Union, we see the opportunity to reinforce our sovereignty, to maintain our identity, culture and language. The European Union is a large family of democratic nations, where the interests of each and every nation are respected, and where solidarity is the cornerstone of cooperation.”

And so she put into words not only the hopes of her own compatriots but also those of all 75 million new EU citizens.

We now stand at the threshold of a new phase of European cooperation. In late October, the Constitutional Treaty for the European Union will be signed. After 50 years, the Union will have a constitutional foundation. A new generation of politicians – the generation of José Manuel Barroso – is ready to carry the torch onwards.

But is the torch still burning brightly? Is there still fire? Is there still enthusiasm? As the European Union races ahead, it seems that it has lost the European citizen somewhere along the way. Many Europeans are turning their backs on the whole project. They have trouble seeing what is common to Europe. They do not feel part of the great whole.

Even in the new member states enthusiasm about the European family of democracies seems to be quickly cooling.

In the early 1950s, Jean Monnet wrote: 'We are not forming a coalition of states. We are uniting people.' Apparently, the opposite happened. We have achieved a united Europe without uniting the Europeans.

As Bronislaw Geremek said: 'We have Europe. Now we need Europeans'.

I believe this situation poses three threats to the European Union.

First, indifference and scepticism. Europe is a project with great historical significance for all of us. But in the hearts and minds of many people the project has no resonance. And we have failed to recognise this for too long.

The generation which lived through the Second World War is disappearing. Post-war generations see Europe's great achievements – liberty, peace and prosperity – as a given.

The horrors of the Second World War, the chilling winds of the Cold War and the crushing weight of the Iron Curtain are little more than fading memories. Ideals that once commanded great loyalty are now taken for granted.

For many people, the idea of Europe as a heritage and a mission does not mean much anymore. But without ideals, Europe's very foundations will begin to erode. Without ideals, the basis of continued European cooperation will crumble.

A second threat is the increasing emphasis on pure self-interest.

My generation grew up with the image of Europe as an *economic* form of cooperation. The political motives behind European integration were overshadowed by the economic project. The result is an image of Europe as a marketplace for producers and consumers. As a cash cow. As an arena in which we do battle over economic interests.

The other side of European cooperation – Europe as a political project and a community of values – has not been emphasised. Which means that European integration has come about, as it were, behind the backs of the Europeans.

The spotlights were directed at the Europe of the market and money and not the Europe of man and morals. But without a moral foundation there can be no free market economy.

Even Adam Smith – the champion of economic individualism – made this point. He wrote not only *The Wealth of Nations* but also *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*. People forget that sometimes. Blindly chasing after economic self-interest is dangerous. It is harmful to others and to ourselves. As partners, we must be able to rise above ourselves.

A third threat is that Europe will not display enough power as it tackles the great challenges of today and tomorrow.

Until we know precisely what we all stand for, know what inspires and motivates us, we will not be able to take joint action – at the very moment that this is so important. For greater security and the fight against terrorism. For sustainable economic growth. For the integration of large new ethnic minorities into our societies. For combating injustice and poverty in – as Ruud Lubbers says – a globalising world.

Three threats which confront Europe. They are the consequence of not seeing the leitmotif in our colourful European mosaic. We are now paying the price of not paying attention to our shared values, to our common *mission*.

In his highly critical study *European Integration 1950-2003*, the American historian John Gillingham writes:

“The EU of the 1990s contributed little to increasing mutual understanding and respect. A *demos* thus did not develop.”

In addition to focusing on uniting Europe, we must now focus on uniting the Europeans.

The Constitution for Europe is an important step in the right direction. It will make Europe more democratic and more transparent. It provides further guarantees that decisions will be taken by those closest to the citizens. And it acknowledges the significance of Europe as a community of values.

For this we owe a great debt of gratitude to the groundwork of the European Convention and to our own James Madison, Valéry Giscard d’Estaing.

The Constitution lists the values on which the Union rests: respect for human dignity, liberty, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights. It reads: ‘These values are common to the Member States in a society of pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice and solidarity.’

These shared values are the mortar between the bricks of the constantly growing European house. They are the glue which binds governments together – governments which must accept that it is not reasonable to cling to pure self-interest when common concerns call for a common strategy.

Because we are not partners in the European Union in order to *compete* but in order to *complete* one another's work. The greater the awareness of our shared values the greater the European Union's political resolve can be.

A Europe which is conscious of its shared values is also an *economically* stronger Europe. Francis Fukuyama is one of those who have pointed out that a country's or region's competitiveness also depends on the degree of mutual trust and understanding between citizens. When we speak of Europe as a community of values, that concept embraces even the Lisbon Agenda.

Shared values also bind us together as European citizens. What is the point of doing away with Europe's borders if borders between Europe's citizens remain? How can we be happy that the Iron Curtain is gone if individuals and groups across our continent barricade themselves behind iron curtains of their own?

The discussion about shared values is so important precisely now that cultural and religious differences in Europe are becoming more and more pronounced. Now that increasing numbers of people are questioning the very idea of Europe. Now that some groups are threatening to isolate themselves and now that fear, insecurity and nationalism are again raising their heads. It is important for us to reflect on that as we prepare for further rounds of enlargement and consider starting accession negotiations with Turkey.

The preamble of the Constitution for Europe states that Europe is 'united in its diversity'. This may be the most concise statement of what makes Europe Europe.

What is so special about unity in diversity? In his book *La civilisation de l'Occident médiéval*, Jacques Le Goff writes about King Étienne of Hungary who ruled in the early eleventh century. The King said the following about his court.:

"The guests from different countries bring different languages with them, different customs, tools and weapons. And this diversity is an ornament for the kingdom, a jewel for the court. Because a kingdom with only one language and one set of customs is weak and brittle."

What a magnificent description of the positive potential of diversity! Positive potential which is achieved when, despite their differences, people can still be a part of a vibrant community. When people do not keep their talents to themselves but make them available to the community of which they are members. That is what produces a vital civil society.

The same idea is presented in Amitai Etzioni's Diversity Within Unity Platform. I am delighted that he is here with us today.

The words 'united in diversity' raise the question of where this unity lies. Why should we believe that the European Union can accept so much diversity and yet remain whole?

The answer lies in the values on which the Union is based, which I have already named. They are contained in these three: freedom, solidarity and mutual respect.

These three *together* make it possible for Europe to open its doors to a great diversity of peoples and at the same time to speak of a community. A community in which people respect each other's opinions and lifestyles and are prepared to take responsibility for one another.

These values are our task, our mission. They guide our actions.

By working on sustainable economic growth and social justice in Europe and offering equal opportunities to everyone.

By working on a peaceful, secure society in which people can realise their potential and be open to one another. A society without 'iron curtains' between cultures and religions, in which people are themselves, thanks to contact with others.

By working on a world in which freedom, peace and prosperity are within the reach of as many people as possible. Just as they are within the reach of us Europeans.

Ladies and gentlemen, can we still dare to believe in a European dream in 2004?

At least *outside* Europe, there are people who do believe in that.

Last month, the American writer Jeremy Rifkin even published a book entitled *The European Dream* in which he writes:

'A new European Dream is being born. It is a dream that emphasises community relationships over individual autonomy, cultural diversity over assimilation, quality of life over the accumulation of wealth, and global cooperation over the unilateral exercise of power'.

Can we identify with this dream? If the answer is yes, we have serious work to do. We will not make it a reality by believing that our culture is better than other cultures. We will make it a reality through dialogue and deep reflection about the foundation of European unity, that is, about our common values.

Values must be the road which leads to what we cannot reach by way of the economy and institutions alone – the accession of European citizens to the European Union. The vocation of that European Union is to keep on learning from its diversity and from interaction with other cultures.

This is why the Netherlands has taken the initiative to organise a debate about European values.

So that we can prevent Europe from becoming a spiritless machine that, in the end, grinds to a halt.

So that together we can find what it is that connects us and derive new enthusiasm, new spirit from what we find. The spirit sorely needed to tackle the great issues of our times. The issues no country can tackle alone.

After more than fifty years, Europe as a community of values is still just as necessary.

Thank you.