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Programme speech by

Prof. Dr. Hans-Gert PÖTTERING
President of the European Parliament

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Defending Europe's values – for a citizens' Europe
Implementing reforms – for democracy and the parliamentary system
Encouraging a dialogue of cultures – for partnership and tolerance

(Salutation),

Electing a new President every two and a half years has been the tradition of the European Parliament since its first direct elections in June 1979. By historical standards two and a half years is a short time. Let us not forget, however, that one President of the European Parliament lives through five European Council Presidencies – in this case Germany, followed by Portugal, Slovenia, France and the Czech Republic. This makes clear the responsibility borne by our Parliament, particularly at this time when the task of uniting Europe has come a long way, but is not yet complete and indeed, given the current failure of the constitutional process in France and the Netherlands, is still in danger. The European Parliament is aware of this responsibility, so cannot allow itself to be outdone by anybody when it comes to completing this task of unifying our continent!

We are all situated within the continuum of those who went before us and those who will follow. I would therefore like to thank my predecessor, Josep Borrell Fontelles, most warmly and sincerely on behalf of the whole European Parliament and, in particular, also in my own name, for his great commitment and indefatigable work as our President over the past two and a half years! My warm and sincere thanks go also to the former Presidents who are with us today:

– Emilio Colombo, President of the not yet directly elected Parliament;

then, after 1979:

- Simone Veil,
- Lord Plumb,
- Enrique Barón Crespo,
- Egon Klepsch,
- Klaus Hänsch,
- José-María Gil-Robles,
- Nicole Fontaine and
- Pat Cox.

I welcome them all most warmly. Pierre Pflimlin and Piet Danker are no longer among us. We remember them with gratitude.

I share with my colleagues Klaus Hänsch, Ingo Friedrich, Karl von Wogau, Francis Wurtz and Jens-Peter Bonde the privilege of having been a Member of the European Parliament since its first elections in 1979. In the years since then we have lived through highs and lows in European politics.

The greatest success has been overcoming the division of Europe. Our shared values have prevailed. The accession to the European Union of the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia – and of Cyprus and Malta – on 1 May 2004, and of Bulgaria and Romania on 1 January this year, together with the reunification of Germany on 3 October 1990, remain for me the miracle of this generation. We all have reason to be extremely happy about this, now as always.

But, dear colleagues,

it continues to be the job of us all to learn from each other and to strengthen our respect and understanding for each other. We should stop talking about the 'old' and the 'new' Member States. We are, all of us, the European Parliament, and the nations that we represent are the community of the European Union.

In the eighties the talk was of 'Eurosclerosis'. But then came the single market and the single European currency. We as the European Parliament fought for our rights, and will continue to do so. Today this parliament is influential and self-confident. So experience teaches us that we can win successes for Europe when we want them ourselves, when our will to achieve unity for our continent while maintaining its diversity remains strong and determined. I would like to ask you all to continue in this determination.

But we shall only succeed in this if the citizens of the European Union – alongside their attachment to home and their own country – understand and are aware, as Europeans, of what binds them to one another. A sense of community and a sense of being 'us' are necessary conditions for our shared future. European unification is not simply a desire dictated by our minds, European unification is also an affair of the heart. Making this clear to people is perhaps the greatest challenge that we must meet together.

It is our job to serve the citizens of the European Union. Europeans should be proud of what they have achieved by their labours over the centuries in terms of values, freedom, law and democracy. It has been a long haul. We know that our European roots lie in Greek philosophy, Roman law, the Judeo-Christian heritage, the

Enlightenment – in other words, our shared European culture. But there have also been tragic European civil wars, and in the 20th century the totalitarian ideologies, with their disdain for humanity, and then, in 1945, the courage of the founding fathers in following the path of forgiveness and reconciliation, in building a new, better, more peaceful, shared Europe. We should still remember this today, and rediscover the things that are common to us all. The great French European Jacques Delors spoke, in the tradition of Robert Schuman, of the ‘European soul’. The great Polish European Władysław Bartoszewski once said: ‘Europe means above all else freedom of the individual and human rights – both political and economic’. They were both right.

I would like to talk about European values. They have their fundamental roots in the dignity of the individual. In the dignity of the individual we respect the other, make a commitment, and thus build a system based on responsibility and solidarity. In our practical political activities we should always serve the dignity of the individual, and I would like to encourage all of us to defend human dignity and human rights throughout the world.

That is not an abstract plea. We are not the world’s teachers, but our humanitarian image and our values become more convincing to others if we live our own lives with credibility. This has very concrete implications for our policies:

- We want partnership with a Russia that is democratic and capable of action. That is why we expect the Russian authorities to make discernible efforts to ensure that the murderers of Ana Politkovskaya, who did so much for press freedom in her country, receive fitting punishment.

- We shall never forget that without the United States of America neither National Socialism nor Soviet communism could have been vanquished. But we also say to our American friends that ‘Guantanamo’ is not reconcilable with our European principles of the rule of law.
- We protect human life. If anyone, for example the President of a nation with a great history of civilisation, denies the Holocaust, we will counter that claim with determination, in order to ensure that the horror of a new holocaust is not visited upon us.
- We are convinced that the people of Israel and Palestine are linked by their common human dignity. We therefore support equally the right of Israel to exist and the right of the Palestinian people to live in a State of their own.
- We are on the side of those who are fighting peacefully for freedom and democracy. Hence our solidarity with the Sakharov Prize winner Alexander Milinkevich and his fellow fighters for a free and democratic Belarus without fear and oppression. The same solidarity goes to our other Sakharov Prize winners, ‘Las Damas de Blanco’ (The Ladies in White) in Cuba and Aung San Suu Kyi in Burma/Myanmar.
- We defend human dignity and human rights. We, the European Parliament, are utterly convinced that the death penalty is irreconcilable with these. I urge us all, the institutions of the European Union and the Member States, to stand up for the abolition of the death penalty in the forum of the United Nations.

If we wish to achieve our goals, we must continue to work on building a European Union that is capable of action. We must put ourselves in a state of mind that ensures that we can represent our values and interests in Europe and as a respected partner in the world.

The great speech given by Louise Weiss on 17 July 1979 in her capacity as Oldest Member of the first directly elected European Parliament still rings in my ears. She said: ‘In any event, let us never forget that we are heirs and executors at one and the same time: the heirs of an intellectual world and its executors for the benefit of coming generations’.

I can find no better words. Our feelings today are scarcely any different from those expressed in 1979 and yet at the same time we live in a world of new challenges that are peculiarly our own.

The idea of uniting Europe has for the most part been carried through successfully since the signing of the Treaty of Rome fifty years ago. It has become the outward expression of one of the happiest periods in our long European history. To begin with, after the Second World War, the idea of Europe drew its strength from the desire for peace and freedom. Then strengthening prosperity and achieving social equality became the tasks and motivations for European union. In both ideas Europe remained true to itself, as the unifying of our continent afforded a unique opportunity for the two halves of the continent, which had been divided for far too long, to grow together in freedom.

Today, Europe draws its recognition and motivation from its citizens' desire for security. This is our very serious concern, thrust upon us, unasked for but unavoidable, by the need to combat terrorism. For this we need answers to the questions that weigh heavily on the minds of our citizens.

- The need for security also includes the task of providing employment and social protection in a rapidly changing world. We cannot make ourselves safe from globalisation. We must construct a cushion by strengthening our competitiveness while retaining the European social model.
- It includes not just talking about the dramatic change in climate, but taking the necessary measures – together with our partners in the world – and enforcing them with determination, before it is too late.
- A common energy supply is one aspect of security.
- Another aspect of security is a common immigration policy that takes as much account of human rights as of the need for integration in our society. We must not allow people to go on dying in the waters of the Mediterranean.
- We cannot find the security we seek in a world that is going up in flames, lives in poverty, is under social pressure, is disordered and in which the natural environment continues to be destroyed.

If we in Europe wish to live in security, we must commit ourselves as a partner to every aspect of the world's security. And we must be aware of this: without European solutions, most of the challenges faced by this continent and the world can no longer be met. Europe's unity has always been strengthened by crisis, even if this may seem paradoxical at first sight. I am not saying that we need crises because we are incapable of extracting good results from good circumstances. The European Union needs a new departure, a renewal. The road is a hard one, it is true. But I am firmly convinced that our continent is better equipped today for its future in the world of the 21st century than it was 15 or 20 years ago.

We ourselves shall be judged on how well we set the newly achieved European unity on a lastingly good and safe path. Leadership is expected of us politicians. We must give better reasons than we have so far for why Europe is good for us all, what added value European union brings and what the aims of our efforts are. We must overcome the impression that European policies only have a technical function, with no long-term goal or enduring meaning. We must convince the public by our actions. In order to do that, we must concentrate on essentials.

It is our common task to prepare for the future in such a sustainable way that it is as safe as humans can make it for our children and our grandchildren. For this we need to make a new start, for a better Europe, a stronger, future-oriented Europe. But, above all, we need a Europe that believes in itself, that draws its strength from its values and that wants to, and can, be a good partner in the world.

Without the media we cannot convey Europe to the public. I would like specifically to thank the correspondents and journalists here in Strasbourg for their fair and objective reporting. But I appeal to the national media, particularly the television channels, whether private or public, to play their part in relations with the European public. It is no longer appropriate to the times to portray European union only from a national perspective. I ask the national broadcasting corporations to open their studios to European themes and to invite Members of the European Parliament there as guests in that context.

We need a new pact between the citizens of Europe and their political institutions in the European Union. ‘Citizens’ Europe’ and the credibility of the European institutions are conditional upon each other. The ‘Better Lawmaking’ programme can make a contribution to this if it achieves more democratic oversight, transparency in the Council, reliable transposition into national law, social, environmental, economic and administrative impact assessment, and simplification of the legal texts. When planning a piece of European legislation, we should always ask ourselves: Does it serve people and the environment? Is it necessary in the light of the subsidiarity principle? Does it help to make us more competitive? Does it reduce red tape and costs? Only if these questions can be answered in the affirmative should we go into action as legislators in the European Parliament.

We, the European Parliament, should not only be at pains to represent citizens’ interests. We should also show our respect for the dedication of European citizens who by their work are raising Europe’s profile – in Europe and in the world. We should introduce a European Parliament award for that. And why should we not also

pay particular honour to commitment on the part of young people to the European idea? High-ranking European awards have had such a good effect on public awareness, why do we not create awards for the younger generation, for young Europeans who are showing particular dedication to the European ideal?

In national museums, European history is nearly always represented in purely national terms. I would like to suggest a locus for history and for the future, where the concept of the European idea can continue to grow. I would like to suggest the founding of a 'House of European History'. It should not be a dry, boring museum, but a place where our memory of European history and the work of European unification is jointly cultivated, and which at the same time is available as a locus for the European identity to go on being shaped by present and future citizens of the European Union. A 'House of European History' such as this should be established in the seat of the European institutions and should network with comparable foundations in the Member States. The 'Declaration on the Future of Europe', to be adopted jointly by the European Council, the European Parliament and the European Commission on 25 March 2007 in Berlin could create the conditions for this.

Dear colleagues!

The European Union is the largest grouping of nations in the world – 27 nations with almost 500 million citizens. Europe is a complex continent. This faces all of us with huge challenges. The European Union can no longer operate using the inadequate instruments of current treaty law. If our community of values is to endure, we must reform it fundamentally. The Constitutional Treaty strengthens both the European Parliament and the national parliaments, it makes for greater parliamentarianism and

democracy. Communal self-administration as the basis of our European democratic order is recognised for the first time. The distribution of powers defines European competencies. I say to you quite openly, ladies and gentlemen: I do not understand people who on the one hand criticise ‘Brussels’ – and sometimes that is just as justified as it is to criticise national politics – but at the same time reject the Constitutional Treaty, which is the very instrument we need to help eradicate and rectify the perceived deficiencies.

We must not allow there to be any doubt about this: the European Parliament stands by the Constitutional Treaty. We want to help ensure that the substance of the Constitutional Treaty, including the chapter on values, becomes a legal and political reality. The consensus arrived at here in the European Parliament on the services directive and on the limits of the European Union’s ability to enlarge is a constructive response to people’s concerns. The ‘Declaration on the Future of Europe’ scheduled for 25 March 2007 in Berlin could be another important milestone on this road. Its core should be: commitment to our values and to the necessary reforms; an undertaking to rise jointly to the challenges of the future of which I spoke earlier; a commitment to solidarity among the nations of Europe and to the supremacy of law as the basis for our actions. No country, no nation of the European Union is to be left alone with its problems. But this also rules out national selfishness. Anyone who only serves the interests of his own country will ultimately squander these as well, because he will destroy the solidarity necessary for the defence of those interests.

We intend to help to ensure that under the German Council Presidency a road map and a mandate are agreed at the summit in Brussels on 21 and 22 June, as the outcome

of which full implementation of the substantive core of the European Constitution will be in place by the next European Parliament elections in 2009. I would like to remind you that the Constitutional Treaty was signed by all 27 governments. Of course, we have to respect the results of the referenda.

But regardless of that: If a change of government in a country of the European Union calls into question what has been agreed, not only is society split in that nation, but our continent, which is already quite complicated enough, is increasingly incapacitated. We must commit to our European legal principles: *pacta sunt servanda* – treaties are to be honoured.

Our will to implement these necessary reforms must be strong and determined. And we must carry these reforms through in such a way that the nations of the European Union are not driven apart, but brought together. We insist that the European Parliament must be appropriately involved in the work.

We, as the European Parliament, must also be prepared to reform our own house. In the first instance that will make great demands on every one of us, for example in terms of being present for votes and important debates. A lot remains to be done here. That is why on Thursday, the day after tomorrow, I shall be submitting a proposal to the group chairmen for a comprehensive reform of the working of the European Parliament. Against this background, the Conference of Presidents has set up a working party on improving our work. I ask my colleagues to start work and to present us with its results as soon as they possibly can.

We have an efficient administration, and I should like to thank Secretary-General Julian Priestley, who will be leaving office on 1 March after ten years, most warmly and sincerely for the great dedication he has shown! The only measure of the administration is the way that it serves our European convictions – without party-political bias, fairly and objectively.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Europe's future is dependent to a great extent on successful coexistence among cultures and religions within the European Union and between the European Union and our neighbours, first and foremost in the Arab and Islamic world.

We must therefore do our part to ensure that dialogue among cultures and religions is the hallmark of Europe. We live in the continent of the three great cultures and religions – the Christian, the Jewish and the Islamic. And we have fellow citizens who come from one of the world's other great cultures and who are at home in the world's other religions. We as the European Parliament must encourage and support examples of European civil society that are dedicated to dialogue between cultures. In Seville I made the acquaintance of the work of the 'Tres Culturas' organisation, and I say to you – not only to honour my Spanish predecessor, Josep Borrell – that we must actively support every example of coexistence in Europe of Christians, Muslims and Jews – and also, of course, of those who do not belong to any of these religions. This is a crucial investment in our intellectual development. At the same time, it is the best contribution we can make to encouraging dialogue between cultures across the Mediterranean and beyond, to the Middle East and North Africa. We do not want the 'clash of civilisations', we want peace in freedom and justice among all nations and

beliefs. This means building an intellectual and cultural bridge across the Mediterranean.

This dialogue must be grounded in tolerance and truth. Tolerance does not mean accepting anything and everything. Tolerance means respecting the convictions of the other while maintaining one's own, and thus coexisting peacefully. On one of my many visits to Arab countries, I was asked by a senior Islamic dignitary how Muslims live in Europe. My answer was that they are often not sufficiently integrated, but that they can live out their own beliefs and have their own mosques and places of prayer. The question I asked in reply was whether it was true that in his country a Muslim man or woman could be punished with death if he or she converted to the Christian faith. The fact that I received no answer was answer enough.

Dear colleagues,

I am firmly convinced that the Dialogue of Cultures can only succeed if it is based on truth and mutual tolerance.

It is my intention to visit the European Union's neighbouring Arab states and, when visiting European Union countries, to try to have talks with ethnic minorities, particularly their younger members. In the Euro-Mediterranean Assembly we have an important parliamentary institution for dialogue with the Middle East, including Israel and the Arab world. We must use this institution effectively for peace, partnership and, if possible, friendship. As soon as circumstances permit, I shall visit Israel, Palestine and Lebanon. I am grateful for the invitation I have received to address the

Israeli Parliament, the Knesset. In inviting speakers to address the European Parliament, we should place the emphasis on the Dialogue of Cultures.

Dear colleagues,

It is the task of us all to strengthen democracy and the European parliamentary system. That is why it is our intention to collaborate with the national parliaments in constructive partnership for the good of our nations and of the whole European Union.

Helmut Kohl, honorary citizen of the European Union, once said to me, 'We haven't got much time. The world we live in is not prepared to wait for us to solve our internal problems'. He is right. I would like to add: failure to act, indifference, would be the greatest wrong we could commit.

At the end of my term of office a new European Parliament will be elected. If we do convincing work and if good things are said about Europe in the national capitals as well, then the turnout for the European Parliament elections will go up again. It should be our ambition to achieve this.

Our work is often unglamorous, it can be stressful and not particularly spectacular. But our goals are great and so are the expectations vested in us. We set out to fulfil them. In this task I would like to represent you all in such a way that the dignity of the European Parliament, the unity of our continent of Europe and the effectiveness of the European Union are strengthened. I ask you for your help, thank you for your confidence and hope that together we can achieve our goals.