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Europe is our common future



In bright sunshine the Berlin Declaration was adopted by the Heads of State and Government of the European Union on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of its founding. Besides recalling the EU's achievements, the document identifies the EU's future goals as well as the challenges it faces: safeguarding the European way of life and assuming global responsibility.

As Chancellor Angela Merkel noted in the very personal speech she made at the ceremony, "Fifty years of the Treaties of Rome – that means for me, to put it in a nutshell, a dream has come true." The dream of peace and prosperity could come true because - after devastation and destruction – the Europeans had let themselves be guided by the quality

that is their most important attribute: tolerance.

Setting the right course

Yet peace and prosperity can on no account be taken for granted. How can what has been achieved be preserved, strengthened and deepened? "By concentrating on what is our greatest strength – the power of freedom," the President of the European Council emphasized.

Over the years ahead it would be crucial to safeguard the European way of life and assume global responsibility. That meant, the Chancellor pointed out, that "Europe needs to be able to act, to act more effectively than it can at present." The European Union needs more and better defined competences than it has today: in energy policy, foreign policy, in justice and home affairs. And it must ensure, she noted, that even with 27 or more Member States its institutions function efficiently and democratically.

A dynamic Europe

For only a Europe with strong institutions can be dynamic and achieve strong growth. The key to growth, the Chancellor made clear, lies "in the knowledge and ability of Europe's citizens, in education, research and innovation"

One important reason why Europe needs to be efficient and able to act effectively is that the tasks it faces are increasingly complex – to fight terrorism, organized crime and illegal immigration Europe has to unite its efforts. That also means working towards the peaceful resolution of conflicts in the world. The Union is also committed to driving back poverty, hunger and disease.

Such tasks can hardly be addressed successfully if decisions in these fields can be taken only by the unanimous consent of 27 Member States.

Placing Europe on a renewed common basis

At the close of the German EU Presidency at the end of June Angela Merkel plans to present a roadmap setting out how Europe should go forward. The intention is to preserve as much as possible of the substance of the abortive Constitutional Treaty. The President of the European Council has set herself the goal of getting a new treaty onto the table by the second half of 2008 at the latest.

Between now and then, however, there will have to be a great deal of discussion. It will not always be possible to involve the public in this process, but "we will continue the discussions within the European Union in a spirit of good comradeship," the Chancellor made clear at the press conference at the end of the official part of the celebrations.

Decisions by the European Parliament elections in 2009




One thing is certain: in June 2009 the citizens of Europe will elect a new European Parliament. By then at the latest it will be clear how Europe sees its future path. The citizens of Europe need to know how the EU with its 27 Member States will remain able to act. They need to know what tasks the Union will be responsible for and what tasks will remain the responsibility of the nation states.

According to European Parliament President Hans-Gert Pötering, this means that the process of ratifying a new treaty will have to be completed by June 2009. That does not leave much time to place Europe on "a renewed common basis." The Chancellor, however, has her sights firmly fixed on success. "I am certain," she declared, "that it is not only in the interests of Europe, but also of the individual Member States and the citizens of Europe, that this process be brought to a successful conclusion."

Text of the Chancellor's speech

President of the European Council Angela Merkel, European Parliament President Hans-Gert Pötering and European Commission President José Manuel Barroso signed the Berlin Declaration in the Schlüterhof of the German Historical Museum.

Text of the Berlin Declaration

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