

Introductory remarks by Coen Teulings, Chairman of Merifin Capital, hosting an AECA Conference Luncheon with Speaker Dr. Benita Ferrero-Waldner, Commissioner for External Relations and European Neighbourhood Policy at the European Commission, in Brussels, Belgium, on 11 December 2008

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

The European Union - and also the Eurozone for that matter - is a tremendous success story and far more so than anyone could have imagined 10 years ago. Similarly it seems likely that the European Union will be rather different 10 years from now and so will neighbouring states including Turkey. The European Union is a complex exercise and will remain work in progress. The success and benefits of the European Union unfortunately are not always well represented by member states and national politicians. Rather than being the EU's strongest supporters they often turn into the enemy when they prefer to use "Brussels" as a scapegoat for anything that is wrong in their own backyard. Adding insult to injury they sometimes subject the European Union even to a referendum: "Das gesunde Volksempfinden". A referendum in my view is the ultimate abdication of responsibility by politicians. Any complicated and unwieldy document deserves to be turned down in a referendum and this of course is what happened to the Lisbon Treaty. These matters ought to be decided by an elected parliament. Because that is what a parliamentary democracy is all about. For politicians this sometimes seems an entirely new concept.

It is rather interesting that with the entry of new members from Eastern-Europe, the European Union model seems to be developing into a more decentralised fashion more akin to the former Austrian Hungarian empire rather than, dare I say, a more centralised French model. This is inevitable and appropriate for an ever increasing number of members. Dr. Otto von Habsburg incidentally, if he had been younger, could have been an ideal first President of the European Union, and would that not have been ironic ? It seems entirely fitting therefore that a distinguished Austrian Commissioner should be in charge of the European Neighbourhood Policy and External Relations.

Neighbourhood Policy is reflected in the Eastern Partnership which was announced last week with Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan. And in the South we have the Union for the Mediterranean. Cooperation with strategic partners including the United States of America, Russia and the other BRIC countries but also Japan, Mexico and South Africa – is especially important for addressing major global issues such as energy security, climate change and, may I add, the current financial crisis. We are aware that plan economy has failed, we know now too that free capital markets do not work either without proper regulation just as zoos do not work without proper fencing. An attitude of “this is our way which is the best way which is the only way” - seemingly popular sometimes with Americans - is not helpful in building relationships and solving international problems.

It is important therefore that we start by listening carefully and treating each other with respect. It may sound obvious but it is so essential. We do represent European values such as rule of law, property rights, democracy, good governance, but these values may not always apply to the same extent in different environments. There may be a democracy the Russian way and there may be a democracy the Chinese way and they may not entirely be “our own way”. We should appreciate the sensitivities of other countries without trying to bulldoze over them which usually backfires anyway. The Eastern Partnership seems a good example of how to approach matters properly.

Let us listen to our Speaker who I hope also will elaborate on how women are a force of stability in politics. It is a great honour and privilege to host this Conference-Luncheon for an outstanding European and a most distinguished Austrian citizen, Commissioner Benita Ferrero-Waldner.

Thank you

Coen Teulings 11 December 2008