



Per Stig Møllers tale ved konferencen "A Free Market Vision for Europe"

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Per Stig Møller
Udenrigsminister

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Fellow speakers, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

Many thanks to Director Martin Ågerup and his staff at CEPOS for organising this timely and important debate. Europe finds itself at a crossroads, and we need a meeting of minds like this today to help push Europe in the right direction.

The British statesman, Edmund Burke, once said that change is necessary in order to preserve. The question today is: What kind of European Union do we want to preserve and why do we want to preserve it? The French and the Dutch referenda have reminded us that we urgently need to find a clear and straightforward answer to this question. That is the reason, why we have the reflection period.

The short version of the answer is that we need to preserve the basic features of the EU. That is the contractual and rule-based nature of a European co-operation that has served as an excellent framework for relations between Europe's independent nation states for more than fifty years. In other words, we need to preserve the community method.

Why? The answer to that question deserves to be put into a historical context.

The ancient Greek historian and geographer, Strabo, began his *Geographica* of the known world with Europe, because as he said "it is both varied in form and admirably adapted by nature for the development of excellence in men and governments." Flattering words. History has, however, shown that peace does not result from a common territory, a common religion or a common system of government, and not even from excellent men!

In fact, for the past millennium, countless wars over religion, territory and power have been waged in Europe. The period until the Peace of Westphalia in 1648 was marked by religious wars between Catholics, Muslims and Protestants. That was followed by endless hostilities between European monarchs who often regarded war for territory as their own private enterprise. In the 20th century, Europe witnessed the much more bloody conflicts between nation states, which culminated in the biggest manslaughter of all time – the Second World War.

It was against this background that the dream of a peaceful and prosperous Europe was born. The ruins of Berlin, the carnage on the beaches of

Normandy, and the unspeakable sight that met allied forces, when they opened the gates to Auschwitz, finally made European politicians say: enough is enough!

Of course, more visionary people in Europe had all along proposed various roadmaps for peace. In 1310, a German monk by the name of Engelbert of Admont suggested the creation of one European kingdom with one single leader. In 1464, King Podiebrad of Bohemia almost proposed a sort of EU in the form of a European league of princes with common coins and armies. Denmark was happy to join, France was not, and that was the end of it. In the 18th century, it became fashionable among intellectuals to write books about “the eternal peace”. But all the good intentions made no real difference.

Unfortunately, the ultimate wake-up call only came in 1945. It was clear that something new was required in order to avoid past failures like the Treaty of Versailles and the League of Nations. Understandably, there was little appetite for new ideological projects after such a hard fought victory over Hitler’s Neuropa. A completely different approach was therefore taken. One of piecemeal engineering and practical politics, starting with the European Coal and Steel Community.

There is no doubt that the extraordinary development from this humble beginning in 1952 to the enlarged European Union today was helped along by some key historical events. Most notably the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Soviet Union. But the fundamental objective remained the same. To build a peaceful, secure and prosperous Europe. Placed in a historical context, the past fifty years in Europe have therefore been an unbelievable success story and the EU has been the most important factor underpinning it.

With the enlargement with 8 Central and East European countries, which used to be under Soviet rule, the bloody history of the 20th century has ended. A whole and free Europe has emerged. The Constitutional Treaty should have been the crowning achievement of this European co-operation. It was supposed to help us achieve the necessary momentum to continue our political and economic progress in the globalized world of the 21st century.

But something went wrong! It appears that for many European citizens, the EU has somehow lost its purpose. Why?

The analysis of the French “Non” and the Dutch “Nee” to the Constitutional Treaty suggests a mixed bag of reasons. Economic concerns, disaffection with political leaders, lack of information, opposition to further enlargement and fear of losing national sovereignty were among the main reasons.

In the bigger picture, however, I believe that the public dissatisfaction with Europe today stems from the death of a great narrative. The narrative about the EU as a common project for peace between the nation states of Europe. The one I have just outlined for you. One can say that the European Union today suffers from a “postmodern condition”, where the great narrative has disintegrated or rather been deconstructed into a hotchpotch of different stories that do not inspire people or evoke any solidarity.

I heard a French farmer put this in simple terms after the referendum. He had voted for the Maastricht Treaty in 1992, because he believed in the EU as peacemaker, but against the Constitutional Treaty, because he considered peace a certainty. What mattered for him now was his own economic interests. He was afraid that the new treaty would lead to a loss in income and allow more competition from abroad.

This change of heart by the French farmer points towards what I would call tomorrow's Europe of realism in contrast to yesterday's Europe of idealism. People in Europe today take peace and security for granted. Increasingly, they focus on how the EU can benefit their daily life. What's in it for me, they ask!

Fortunately, the answer to that question is - a great deal! The benefits of the single market influence our lives in many ways. Thanks to the EU, we enjoy safer and cheaper food, a European health insurance, better environmental protection, cheaper airline tickets, higher safety standards at work, more mobility for students and retired people, cheaper phone calls, a co-ordinated fight against cross-border crime and the list goes on. And the single market has for the last fifty years had an unparalleled ability to generate jobs.

Jacques Delors once said: "You can't fall in love with the single market". But looking at the numbers, you must be a rather cold-hearted person not to like what you see. According to the European Commission, the single market has created 2.5 million new jobs since 1993 and generated more than 800 billion euro of additional wealth.

Like the stock market, many Europeans are, however, less preoccupied with the present and more focused on the future. They are concerned about the challenges of globalisation and what that will mean for them. Anxiety about outsourcing and competition from low-cost countries like China and India prevail among many voters. Where is my job tomorrow? Taken by a Polish plumber, they ask in France.

The threat from international terrorism, drug trafficking and illegal immigration add to a sense of insecurity among many Europeans. And they do not view the European Union as an instrument to help them against the negative consequences of globalisation.

The governments in Member States together with the Commission have a crucial job to do in this respect. We need to communicate much better with the public about EU issues and what kind of results European co-operation actually provides for ordinary citizens. It is essential to achieve stronger public support for the European project. The politicians in EU capitals should also resist the temptation of putting the blame on Brussels for something negative, and monopolizing the reward when something goes down well with the public. If politicians criticise Brussels six days a week, it is hard to imagine their voters saying yes to the EU come Sunday.

At the EU summit in June, we acknowledged the importance of this job in front of us. We decided therefore to begin a period of reflection in order to carry out a thorough debate about the EU at the national level. During 2006, EU-leaders will evaluate the results of the various national EU-debates and decide on the next steps ahead. France and the Netherlands have a special responsibility in the reflection period. I would expect them next year to present some ideas on how they believe the EU can move on.

What about the Constitutional Treaty in this process? Is it dead, on permanent life support, or is it just in a temporary state of coma? The situation is that 13 member states have ratified it, while 2 member states have rejected it.

Does this mean that France and the Netherlands will ratify in the end? Will there be some sort of renegotiation or additional protocols to convince the French and the Dutch? Will there be an effort to salvage some key elements in the treaty like the double majority or the EU foreign minister? Will we just go on with the Nice Treaty or some sort of Nice Treaty+? Nobody knows, and I doubt whether it is worth while at this early stage to engage in such speculation, when there are so many ifs and buts.

What is important now, is to make active use of the reflection period. In Denmark, we intend to do just that in the coming months. The European Affairs Committee in the Parliament has been charged with organising an open and inclusive debate about the EU. There will probably be two tracks in the debate – a formal one with participation of the political parties – and a parallel track, which will include a wide range of organisations and actors from civil society. Later on, the European Affairs Committee aims to submit a report to Parliament, which in turn might adopt a resolution on the debate in Denmark before the EU summit next year.

Denmark has an important role to play in the reflection period. As European champion in EU referenda - a total of six since 1972 – Denmark has something to offer when it comes to engaging with the public on EU issues. The aim is to

discuss how we can achieve a European co-operation in the future, which is more in line with people's expectations. We need an effective EU that provides added value to people's lives. And we need a democratic EU that is in constant dialogue with European citizens.

To this end, Denmark will continue to push an EU agenda focused on more transparency, better involvement of national parliaments and stronger interaction between the various EU-institutions and the individual citizen. We believe in change in order to preserve.

Only a tiny minority in Denmark actually wants us to leave the EU altogether. The Danish People's Party for example would like to preserve the EU, but only as a free trade area. I disagree with such a position. I believe that the European success story for the past fifty years depends on the EU being something more than just a free trade area. There is no doubt in my mind that the contractual and rule-based nature of EU co-operation has played a fundamental part in maintaining a peaceful Europe during this period.

And here I return to my initial question about why we need to preserve the EU-institutions and the community method. It is simply in defiance of history to believe that peace and prosperity in Europe are just selfsustaining entities that will go on forever. European history clearly shows that peace and prosperity need to be underpinned by a firm set of rules and common obligations between independent nation states. That is why we need the Council, the Commission, the European Parliament and the European Court of Justice as well as many of the common policies that we have been able to agree on over the years.

We must learn from history in order not to repeat it. To know the past, is to see the future, but as we don't like this past, we have to change our political behaviour. And we do that through the construction and development of the EU.

The EU ensures the absence of the traditional great power politics in Europe. It ensures that we will not return to the familiar zero-sum game of the past, where big military powers carved up Europe into different spheres of influence. The smaller European states often became the biggest losers in this game, as they were dominated or subdued by larger neighbours. The small countries were in principle sovereign states, but they dared not do, what their neighbours did not like!

This is why we need to preserve the EU.

Let me conclude by saying that the European Union has gone through many crises before. There is nothing new to that. Some might remember the crisis in '65, when France refused to participate in the meetings in Brussels, because of displeasure with the direction of the co-operation. Or the crisis in '84, when Mrs. Thatcher wanted her money back from the EU budget. Now we haggle over the British rebate, but we will manage to find a solution sooner or later. The necessity of a close and contractual co-operation across national borders in Europe has always made member states find a compromise and move on.

On the other hand, we must not lean back and take European co-operation for

granted. Contrary to what many euro-sceptics believe, the EU is a fragile creature, which needs attentive care. It is an irony of history that the enlargement with ten new Member States has taken place in a situation, where the two biggest economies on the continent, Germany and France, are going through a rough patch. That is simply an unfortunate coincidence. And allegations about the EU being a European Superstate or a grand ideological scheme to remake Europe in a certain way could not be further off the mark.

If we don't make a common effort to change the EU in order to preserve it, we might end up in the same situation, which Ivan Krylov, who is often referred to as Russia's Hans Christian Andersen, has described in his fable about a crayfish, a swan and a pike.

It goes like this:

Once a crayfish, a swan and a pike set out to pull a wagon, And all together they settled in their traces; They pulled with all their might, but still the wagon refused to budge. The load it seemed was not too much for them; Yet the crayfish kept crawling backwards, the swan headed for the sky, and the pike moved towards the sea. Who is guilty here and who is right - that is not for us to say; But the wagon is still there today.

Thank you.

Tags

Det Konservative Folkeparti, EU, Politisk tale

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