Per Stig Møllers tale ved European Broadcasting Unions generalforsamling

Taler
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Ladies and gentlemen, First of all, I would like to thank you all for the invitation to speak here today. I especially welcome this opportunity, because as some of you might know, I have in my past worked quite a lot in the broadcasting business in general and with radio broadcasting in particular. And I still remember the Assembly in 1987, which I hosted as chairman of the Board of Governors in Denmark's Radio. I am therefore happy to stand here facing the people that are shaping the European broadcasting of the twenty-first century. I am especially happy to see many new friends from the new EU member states and friends from the EU neighbourhood countries.

I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate the Danish Broadcasting Corporation on its 80 years birthday this year. Much has changed since the Corporation was founded as a public service organisation in 1925. The monopoly has been broken and the environment is today much more competitive. That is a challenge but also an opportunity to prove its worth.

In the late eightieths the historical circumstances meant that free broadcasting in Europe inevitable meant broadcasting in Western Europe only. As a politician and minister I have experienced the changes in Europe first hand. The East-West-divide was finally broken down by the enlargement-decision under the Danish EU presi-dency in 2002 and we opened a new chapter for a united Europe. I will get back to the enlargement of the EU in a moment, but let me

first say a few words on the press in a free society. _

A free press and the freedom of speech are fundamental for democracy and a fundamental value for the EU. But the press also has a responsibility for providing balanced and objective information in order to give the public the full picture. It should not only provide positive or maybe more likely negative information on for instance EU matters. Both sides of the coin should be presented although a history with a negative and provocative or sensational angle often is easier to sell in a radio spot on 30 seconds. _

However, Edmund Burke already in 1787 named the press the fourth "state power". Burke pointed out that any state was afraid of making its citizens discontented for a good reason. "For a good reason" is the central part of the sentence. This is according to Burke what the press was supposed to do - identify and name the cases where citizens for a good reason were not satisfied with what the State was doing. _

David Hume, a friend of Burke, had similar thoughts even earlier. However, just before his death in 1777 he revisited his essay from 1741 about press freedom and wrote, that unlimited press freedom had its pitfalls, but a limitation of the press freedom would be even worse. I fully agree. A limitation to protect the State powers interests leads to lesser freedom and must be avoided.

However, things have changed since the eighteenth century. From being a press mainly reacting to events, the press today also to a large extent act actively also

in cases where there is no case to act upon. It often leads to reactions among politicians ending up with new legislation that is not entirely founded on an objective and sound foundation, but as a good story.

Of course we all strongly support free press and the expression of freedom. It is a prerequisite for membership of the EU and a crucial part of the political Copenhagen criteria's. But a free press does not mean a press without any obligations. On the contrary. The press has to acknowledge its own powers and act in accordance to this, which BBC learned the hard way in its conflict with Tony Blair last year! Today Europe again stands at a crossroad. There are major challenges ahead of us, which the EU needs to respond to – internally as well as externally. The answer is openness and transparency, which will be strengthened, if the Constitutional Treaty is passed. Openness and transparency are key words when describing the proper functioning of states as well as the EU. We should all bear this in mind. It gives me as a minister a responsibility for the way I conduct my duties but it also gives you, as representatives of the media, a responsibility for the way you are handling your job as watchdogs towards those in power. As foreign minister during the Danish EU presidency in 2002 I presided the General and External Affairs Council which prepared the completion of the enlargement with ten new member states from Central and Eastern Europe as well as Cyprus and Malta. But the enlargement does not end here. In 2004 we closed negotiations with Bulgaria and Rumania who will become members in 2007. The 10-12 new members have already done a lot in order to become members, and Romania and Bulgaria still have requirements to fulfil in order to meet the 2007 deadline, even though negotiations are closed.

In the Balkans the perspectives of EU membership also serves as a strong incitement to reforms. In 2004, it was decided to open accession negotiations with Croatia on the condition of full cooperation with the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, ICTY. The next move will have to be taken by Croatia.

The decision at the European Council in December 2004 of opening accession negotiations with Turkey on the 3rd of October 2005 is important and has generated a lot of debate also in the media. The reforms undertaken in Turkey over the last years have been impressive. Turkey is certainly a country in a time of change and more changes shall come if Turkey is to fulfil the conditions for obtaining membership. The strengthened negotiating framework for accession negotiations established in December 2004 should assure the adequate balance with a view to maintain the pressure for further reforms.

The EU has also established a comprehensive cooperation with the new neighbours in Eastern Europe and in the Balkans. The new neighbourhood policy is ambitious and a driver for democratic reforms. We should continue this process.

As part of our bilateral neighbourhood program, the Danish government intents to support the establishment of free media in Ukraine, Belarus and at the Balkans. The Danish efforts will underpin efforts by the EU and the Council of Europe. There is a need for such assistance. Press freedom has come under attack in some of the new democracies, which emerged as a result of the collapse of the Soviet Union. We have great hopes for a positive development in Ukraine. We are worried about certain tendencies in Russia and downright pessimistic about the situation in Belarus. But press freedom is also pivotal for the necessary reform and development process in the broader Middle East, which is why we give special attention and support to media-development in our Arabic Initiative.

Let me now turn to another very important issue – the ratification of the constitutional treaty. Denmark will have a referendum on September 27th this year. The treaty is important for Denmark as well as for Europe since it provides the basic democratic rules by which, our common European democracy can function in an enlarged EU of 25 members and more to come.

The treaty ensures that the enlarged EU of 25 or more member states will be able to function effectively in the future. We owe it to the new member states to make enlargement work in practice. With so many countries around the table, we risk political deadlock and decisions based on the lowest common denominator unless it becomes easier to reach decisions. The Constitutional Treaty introduces qualified majority voting in more policy areas. This way, Europe will maintain its ability to act.

The treaty defines clearly what the EU is and can, and what it is not and cannot. The treaty establishes a clear division of labour between the Union and the member states. It makes it absolutely clear, that the EU is a voluntary co-operation of independent states, and it says, that the EU only possesses the authority, which the member states have conferred to it.

Finally, the treaty enables Europe to assume greater global responsibilities. The world needs a strong and coherent Europe. Europe has a lot more to offer as an international partner for peace, development and security, and it should become capable of assuming the political responsibility that should go with our economic influence. The treaty increases our ability to pursue a common European foreign policy and gives us the possibility to influence on world politics in a way we cannot do today. Ladies and gentlemen, I began by saying that a free press and freedom of speech is fundamental for democracy, but also that the press has a responsibility to provide balanced and objective information

on everything, including the EU.

I hope that, as a mean of information, radios all over Europe will help informing people about what the constitutional treaty is about and what it is not about. The Radio must enlighten and inform. I believe, that a lot of the scepticism and doubts about the European project stems from lack of information about what the EU actually is and represents. I believe it has to be the responsibility of us all to provide this information in a balanced way. It is often said, that the EU lacks popular anchoring, and I have to say there is clearly something to it. But could this lack be caused by the fact that despite of vast communication, we are not adequately familiar with our common past – which is exactly what the EU is supposed to open our eyes to, in order for history not to be repeated?

In this regard the radio media can provide a significant contribution by focusing on both the negative and the positive stories about the EU, and by highlighting the important stories of cross cultural importance by bringing other European people, their history, their lives, views, prejudice and tradition into our own living rooms. Since, through the radio, the entire European space is present in one's own room.

Thank you very much.

Tags
Det Konservative Folkeparti, EU, Politisk tale

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