



Per Stig Møllers tale ved konferencen "The Role of Values in a Reunited Europe"

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Dato

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“Kære kollega”, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

Four days from now we will sign the Constitutional Treaty in the Campidoglio Palace in Rome. In many ways it will mark the closing of a circle – from Rome to Rome. The European Union being the framework for a peaceful development and economic growth in Europe for almost half a century, was founded exactly the same place almost fifty years ago.

The vision of bringing peace and democracy to Europe was born on the ruins of World War Two. But the vision is not new to European humanists. Let me just remind you of the Italian poet Dante, the king of Bohemia, king Podiebraad, and the politician Briand. But each time, it has just been a pipe-dream. This time the dream seems to come true. The means have been economic cooperation. But the aim is still a peaceful and united Europe. That aim is now closer than ever before.

The success of the EU depends to a large extent on its adaptability. Since the formation of the European Economic Community in 1958, the organisation of Europe has undergone many changes. The six became nine in '73. Ten in '81. Twelve in '86. Fifteen in '95. 25 on May 1st this year. And more will follow. Romania, Bulgaria and Croatia will be next.

The sheer number of member states requires an efficient decision-making process in order to maintain the capacity to act. Meanwhile, the EU has constantly been able to adapt to new challenges. Not a single word was said in the first treaty of Rome about the environment, development assistance, the fight against terrorism or for that matter the many other areas where co-operation has proved necessary. Necessary for the sake of the European citizens or necessary because we live in an ever more globalized world, which compels the EU to take a responsibility.

First of all, however, the EU is based on a voluntary co-operation between independent states sharing a set of common values. The Union only has those powers, which we – the member states – confer on it. Our values do not originate from above or from the outside, they emanate from ourselves, from our common culture. Our objective to create sustainable growth and prosperity in Europe, to further the cause of freedom, security and justice for the European citizens, and to promote security, stability and development among our neighbours on the continent and in the wider world – that is a common objective for Danes and Latvians as well as other Europeans. It is also a common objective to improve the democracy, transparency and efficiency in how the EU goes about its business.

For the first time ever, the Constitutional Treaty unites all these elements in one single document. It enables the enlarged EU to meet the new and global challenges in an efficient, democratic and sustainable way.

The Constitutional Treaty is truly a treaty of values. Let me therefore focus on this today. My aim will be to explain how the European Union of today has become the central platform for transforming our common European values into concrete policies and actions on the ground. I will also try to demonstrate that values in the EU are not just essential as a framework for our external

policies, but also important as an internal point of reference between the peoples and member states of the new Union.

Allow me to begin by asking a question:

How is it possible to build a stable and just society of free and equal citizens, who nevertheless are profoundly divided by conflicting religious, political and moral doctrines?

This question constitutes a fundamental challenge to any democratic government today. And it is particularly important to the European continent in which diversity has always been the hallmark.

What we will be doing in Rome on Friday is ultimately to affirm a number of basic rights and values that unite 25 independent nation states. We will do this despite – or rather because of - the fact that our countries have fought countless wars against each other, despite the fact that we each have our own separate historical and specific cultural background, and despite the fact that we speak 21 different languages.

Achieving the signatures of 25 member states has not been a smooth ride. We have had many ups and downs along the way and of course many key challenges still remain. One is the need to change the public perception of the EU and make it a more relevant body to the European citizen. Too often, a thirty second time slot in the evening news on what has transpired in the EU, leaves people with the impression that it is mainly about busy politicians stepping out of fancy cars in Bruxelles. No wonder that some people begin to doubt whether it all makes sense.

I believe that there are two ways to overcome this misrepresentation. One is to continue pushing for more democracy and transparency in the EU as Denmark has been doing. In this respect, the Constitutional Treaty contains significant steps forward, but we should not be complacent. Secondly, we need a more balanced and reflective debate about Europe where we focus on concrete EU policies and specific pieces of legislation. That is not only a task for the Governments of member states, but to a large extent also a job for the European Parliament. Public awareness and accept across Europe of the values and the work of the EU is crucial as we move forward.

If history has shown anything, it must be that building a lasting community of people is not done by subduing individuals to a political authority or simply by establishing governmental institutions. The Roman empire, the Ottoman empire, the Napoleonic Empire, the Austrian-Hungarian empire and so on have all one way or the other collapsed while trying to enforce political control upon foreign nations or maintain obedience among diverse ethnic groups already incorporated into the empire.

The fundamental problem between the ruler and the subjects was, however, to a large extent the same. A lack of values shared by the ruler and the subjects that could underpin the political institutions and make them last.

[How the importance of values have been increasingly recognized in the EU]

The European Union is of course by no means an empire and not even a state. What distinguishes the new Union and what separates it from all the previous attempts to overcome the dividing lines in Europe, is our continuous

commitment to a certain number of basic values.

And what are then all these values, we are talking about? They are values, which we have inherited: From Christianity with its respect of the individual and the neighbours. From Greece with its democracy, the freedom of thought and expression, the right to doubt. From Rome with its respect for the rule of law. And from the Enlightenment with its tolerance, limitation of the state and its free economy. These values are now implemented in the human rights, the gender equality, the free market, the welfare society, democracy, and the rule of law.

These values have taken an ever more important place in Europe. A process culminating in the new Constitutional Treaty for Europe. Commitment to a certain number of values will clearly become a precondition for membership. Furthermore, membership can also be suspended, if the Government in question seriously violates these values. A clear procedure will prevent a repetition of the unfortunate Austrian case.

[Values need to be followed-up by action]

This process has, however, also shown that while values are crucial in framing our policies, they also need to be vigorously backed by action. International terrorism is one obvious threat that requires us to be vigilant in this endeavour. Likewise, the complex challenges posed by failing states, civil wars, humanitarian disasters, illegal immigration and climatic changes makes it imperative that we – the Union and its member states - have the resolve and ability to turn our values into concrete policies and actions on the ground.

[The EU as a platform to implement European values in practise]

Let me illustrate this by some examples.

Poverty, child malnutrition and death from preventable diseases offend our values, because for us every human being is unique. We believe that it is politically and morally unacceptable that more than one billion men, women and children of the world's population have to subsist on less than one Euro per day. Nevertheless, it is only gradually beginning from the late seventies and onwards that we in any meaningful way have addressed the huge challenge of development in the third world. Today the European Union is the world's largest provider of development assistance accounting for over 50% of the global amount. Last year alone that corresponded to some 29 billion euros.

Another example could be food safety.

In 2002, the EU's General Food Law entered into force, which introduces a long list of sanitary requirements through the entire food making process in member states. It also imposes regular sanitary control inspections at all levels of the food production chain to ensure compliance with these requirements. Existing food law at national level has been harmonised in order to ensure that a free movement of food between EU countries does not entail health risks. Instead of 25 different food safety regimes across Europe, we now have a common high-quality system in Europe that guarantees the safety of imported food products for 450 million consumers.

A third example could be East Timor.

Since East Timor's vote for independence in 1999, the situation in this newest of states has improved dramatically thanks in part to large-scale external assistance. East Timor became independent in May 2002 and is now a democratically governed, independent nation with an elected President and Parliament. The EU as one of the largest donors to East Timor has been heavily involved in this process. We have supported programmes ranging from voter education, re-integration of refugees, capacity building of local government and promotion of human rights. More than 100 million euros has been committed by the EU to help an independent East Timor become a stable democracy and viable member of the international community.

As these examples illustrate, the EU or "Brussels" as critics often call it, is actually providing concrete meaning to our common ideals of international solidarity, environmental protection, public health and promotion of human rights.

But as I said earlier, the EU co-operation has had a bumpy ride and setbacks have occurred along the way. Fraud and misuse of EU funds as identified on several occasions by the European Unions Court of Auditors is an obvious and unacceptable example. Corrective measures such as OLAF – The Commission's Anti-Fraud Office – have been put in place. But we should not rest satisfied as long as such problems and the potential for fraud exist.

Progress takes sometimes more time than we would like. But setbacks serve to remind us not to be naïve towards the EU. They should also not be allowed to put our overall purpose and direction in doubt.

[Why values also are crucial internally in the EU]

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The reason why values are crucial in the EU is not just that they frame our external policies and actions vis-à-vis our neighbours and the wider world. They are also crucial internally as the Union expands. We must know from where we came, where we go, and why we move.

Reference to shared values is necessary in any negotiation, when a balance has to be struck between competing rights and interests. Our modern pluralist societies by definition means competition between various rights and interests. And here I return to my opening question. How to reconcile or balance sometimes conflicting political, cultural or moral views? The question is actually posed by the American philosopher, John Rawls. His answer is that it is necessary to build an overlapping consensus across the different groups in a pluralist society. A consensus that is based on a conception of justice, which all reasonable citizens enjoying the same rights and liberties may be expected to endorse.

The emphasis here is on “reasonable”. It is for example not reasonable for one group to take advantage of certain rights guaranteed to all just to suppress the same rights for another group. Such a conception of justice needs to be as detached as possible from specific religious or cultural doctrines. Detached, but not empty of values. Liberty, equality, tolerance and solidarity are still underlying values, but they do not prevent a Muslim, a Christian or a Jew from exercising his faith or to hold political views on any number of issues.

I believe that idea holds merit. It is also what we have worked hard to achieve at

the European level. The fact that the EU is on the verge of taking a final decision on whether or not to begin accession talks with Turkey is perhaps the clearest indication of this development. It is no coincidence that the question whether or not to mention Christianity and to give our values a Christian labelling in the Constitutional Treaty was a difficult one. The final result represents in my view a successful balancing act between remaining sincere about our spiritual and cultural heritage and avoiding a wording that would prevent the EU from being an inclusive rather than exclusive Union. One of our fundamental inherited values is exactly tolerance!

No one can deny that our European values historically originate in Christianity and that the church has shaped our moral judgements for centuries. Europe is, however, ethnically and culturally much more diverse today than ever before. This increased diversity requires us to be open and tolerant. The continuing challenge is to strike the right balance between embracing diversity and being firm on defending our values. As the motto of the EU says, it is about creating “Unity in Diversity”.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

By the end of the 19th Century, the American historian Frederick Jackson Tyler developed the frontier thesis on how the frontier had shaped the American Nation. Tyler’s thesis was that when there were no more frontiers to conquer it closed the first period of American History. A parallel can be made to the EU’s Constitutional Treaty. Over the years the European Union has expanded in numbers and policy areas. We sat out from Rome in 1958 and we return to Rome 46 years later as a reunified Europe.

Latvia and Denmark have gained tremendously from this journey. As two small countries, both with a difficult big neighbour at times, our position and

interests are best promoted through a close but adaptable co-operation within a European framework. The EU is the key institution in this framework, which is why the Constitutional Treaty so important. You might say that the EU is the big countries gift to the small. In the EU, the small countries are no longer intimidated by the big, but are on the same footing. Here, the arguments count – not the number of cannons.

I have tried to illustrate why values are crucial in the EU and how the EU is the platform today to translate our values into concrete policies and actions on the ground. Both at home and in the wider world.

Let me conclude by underlining that we need the EU to be able to do this with the consistency and impact that we would like. We cannot afford to be passive or confuse tolerance with indifference against the challenges in a globalised world. We have to develop our common Europe and enable it to play its part in a world, which – whether we like it or not – is on the move!

Thank you.

Tags

Det Konservative Folkeparti, EU, Politisk tale

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