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**Europe speech made by the honorary citizen of Europe, former Federal Chancellor Dr Helmut Kohl  
on 28/04/2004 in Bad Godesberg (D)**

[Main statements and central themes, summarised by Prof. Walter Paul(A) / ESCU on the basis of his own shorthand notes and excerpts from tape recordings]

**Dear friends from all parts of Europe!**

I must say it is a tremendous feeling for me to have the privilege of talking to you here.

On the way here I was pondering how many times in the last 35 years I have spoken here in this room; my time as German Chancellor alone was 16 years and this was the meeting place for many events. Here in Bonn there was a great deal of discussion about the politics of a united Europe and that is why, Bernhard Worms, I was delighted to accept your invitation here today.

Ladies and gentlemen, we are at the beginning of a new century and also of a new millennium. The year is 2004. **We are currently witnessing a dramatic change in the politics of Europe** and, let nobody be deluded, **it is also a dramatic change in world politics!**

**“The old Europe is a young Europe”**

Soon to be 500 million strong, the European Union is a young continent and the trend here is moving to the future!

This is why I feel it is quite right that you of all people or indeed we, that we realise that in these matters senior citizens can speak up because the things that are happening now did not just come overnight!

This is the work of many years and decades.

Anyone with a vivid recollection, any of us, from any of the countries of Europe, with a vivid recollection of the event we call the “Second World War”, anyone who experienced its beginning in 1939, its end in 1945, the division of Europe into two parts, the East and the West, anyone who remembers walking along the Wall, the command to shoot and the barbed wire, who lived through the events of 1980 and 1990 and witnessed the entrance into uncharted waters, they know what I am talking about! I am not just talking about some “historical epoch”; I am talking, as each of you can understand, ladies and gentlemen, about our lifetime! It was and is our lifetime, it was our era!

Indeed, I echo the words of Winston Churchill to the Germans and the French in his famous Europe speech, the most significant speech of his entire life, in September 1946, 15 months after the end of the war, in saying, “Stop your fratricidal war and unite, we are building the new Europe”. This man knew, as did men like Konrad Adenauer, Robert Schuman, Alcide de Gasperi and many, many more that there is **one thing we never want to see again in Europe:**

**Never again shall there be war in Europe, never again –  
the premise for genuine freedom is peace!**

Believe me – and this too is experience I have gained in these years – peace and freedom can only be preserved by creating a framework, as we are doing in the European Union, a framework of underlying conditions which renders anything else impossible. It has become apparent, and unambiguously so as far as I am concerned, that peace cannot be upheld with nice-sounding words and that a framework must be created in which peace can be upheld. And that is the real point of the founding of the European Union!

We will continue to have our own agendas in this European Union. This is not an amorphous European institution or a centralised European state.

We have dual identity, to quote the inimitable words of Thomas Mann after the First World War,

“I am a German European and a European German”.

Of course you are still a Pole, of course you are still a Hungarian, we have no desire to eliminate separate identities, but we do have “house rules” in that we all live together in the “house of Europe”.

The “house of Europe” is large enough for every nation and every country to have its own apartment in this house and the differences will not disappear; we will always be very different but there is a new set of house rules - in this house of Europe violence and force may never be used again. This is the decisive factor for living in peace and freedom.

And this is why the achievements of the European Senior Citizens’ Union in this last decade since it was founded in Madrid in 1995 – and I say this to Bernhard Worms and Stefan Knafel – cannot be praised highly enough! As it performs its official duties here today, the ESCU has representatives from 19 countries of Europe, almost all of them from the future European Union, a foregone conclusion, as it were!

**On May 1<sup>st</sup> we will witness the largest expansion in the history of the European Union**, the accession of 10 more countries making a total of 25 member states. The EU zone will be enlarged by one third, the number of inhabitants will rise from its current figure of 380 million to some 450 million. Members from 25 states will sit in the future European Parliament!

Ladies and gentlemen, it is my privilege to say this on this occasion:

Many politicians, journalists and members of the general public underestimate the significance of the European Parliament and I say this in respect of the impending elections to the European Parliament. The European Parliament has done some excellent work in its lifetime in the latter years. We all have reason to thank the EU Parliament for its work in latter years. I also say this because the election for the EU Parliament on June 13 2004 is a major event. It will be the first direct election for the European Parliament since the expansion. One need not be a prophet to say that, apart from a few adjustments, the building of this “house of Europe” has been completed. Europe is our Europe and the Europe of all citizens. As Germans or Italians we remain under obligation to our national traditions but naturally there are a number of decisions to be taken on economic issues and monetary policy and in many other fields where common interests can be pursued.

And it certainly makes a big difference whether the concept of Christian democracy is the strongest force; indeed, we were also the ones, some I have already named, Adenauer, Schuman, de Gasperi and others, who were the major driving force behind this work.

One thing we are also keenly aware of in our experience as the older generation is that sacrifices have been made to arrive at this place. Two world wars were needed to bring a modicum of sense into international politics. Two dictatorships we lived through, one brown and one red, and even today we still bear the consequences!

It is a crime to preach timidity! At what time in history have young people ever had more opportunities than they have today? I have always believed and I say it again now in view of modern German history and the division of Germany, that the European Union, the house of Europe, would be incomplete if it were only a "West European house" because central, eastern and southern Europe belong to our Europe!

One thing which I believe is a key point is that we must grasp once and for all that this house of Europe is a house for the economy, for security, for social policy and for employment market policy but it is not least a house of common culture in Europe as well!

**I know that the expansion is bound to bring its own set of problems.** I have always maintained a clear stance and represented the moral view. There will be a moral duty upon those who had the good fortune to land on the sunny side of European history, indeed it is the duty of those whom I represent here today whose landing was thus charted in the course of post-1945 history! The Balts, the Poles, whatever all their names are, and the people in the former East Germany were not personally to blame for the sudden erection of an iron curtain. They found themselves on the dark side of European history. And there were some – we still see it in some small measure here in the Federal Republic – who, in respect of the relationship of the Federal Republic to the former GDR, said in total arrogance, "We do want you to come but we need a bit more time because we still haven't got our own house in order." To me it smacks of politics of the lowest moral order when someone refuses to help those who cannot help themselves!

To take the Baltic states as an example – it was the Baltic states which were the first in Europe to be betrayed by Hitler and handed over to Stalin. Not only did they come under Communist rule but they suffered unimaginably brutal persecution at the hands of Communism threatening the very existence of their families. One of the greatest moments of my life was the day when the three heads of state or prime ministers of the three Baltic States stood before me here in Bonn in the chancellor's office in the early nineties and simply said,

"Federal Chancellor, we are reporting back to Europe!"

Are we to then turn round, we, the fortunate ones, and say you'll have to wait a bit longer? I consider this to be a profoundly unethical stance! I have heard this argument time and time again when people were campaigning for Spain's and Portugal's accession, when Austria wanted to join, when Finland's case for accession was being championed; in all these cases it was always the same old story - if they join we will have major problems which we won't be able to solve! Of course we will have problems; I would be the last to deny it! Yet we do have growth, we have different problems, we must understand that and things won't change overnight, and yet they are problems which can be solved – there just needs to be a willingness to solve them and to do so in humility. All of us in Europe need the expansion, for economic reasons and for security reasons. We share a mutual benefit. I put it this way only last Saturday when I was with some Hungarian colleagues, "Hungary needs Europe and Europe needs Hungary".

It is true for Hungary and it is true for everyone else – and –

**it will be possible to solve the problems!**

**Indeed, it is not long since we shared in the momentous occasion of the introduction of the "EURO" as our currency on January 1<sup>st</sup> 2002, marking a major milestone in the history of the European Union.** The fact that I was there makes me a genuine contemporary witness. Yet there were precious few – in key areas of German politics – who had no misgivings. And this Euro is now the European currency! How did the argument go? Ah yes, "Why do we need a European currency anyway? It will never be able to compete with the dollar. And the Japanese yen is on the horizon as well." The reality is that the EURO is now the most important currency in the world besides, or after, - it is irrelevant which - the dollar and is also far stronger than the Japanese yen. Yes, the EURO has arrived; not without some complications along the way, admittedly, but with nowhere near the amount of difficulty predicted!

**We are now facing another issue in Europe, that of the draft constitution agreement.** It is a draft; whether it will ever become reality is another question entirely. But we must continue to fight in respect of this draft which is, by and large, quite acceptable – although I do find it absurd that it has not been possible and is still not possible to include a reference to our responsibility before God in the preamble. While I cannot understand this, I do know that this basic attitude is widespread among the countries of Europe, and I say this on occasions to our friends in the churches that you have to see how far secularisation has advanced in large sections of the population of Europe.

It was so clearly defined for the Germans in the fifties, and the same can be said for the whole of Europe, Konrad Adenauer said to us at the time, young men and women that we were, "The future of Germany and the peace and freedom of our country rests on two pillars – the unification of Europe and close ties and partnership with our transatlantic allies, our American friends".

It is a historical epoch, rarely does one experience turning-points in history, as we the older generation have done; I spoke of the two world wars and of the Second World War in particular, the consequences and all that goes with it, the experiences of two dictatorships, and we are thankful for what we have achieved in these years and decades with the help of many friends and also, and I say this quite deliberately, with God's help.

**We also know there is still a great deal to do,** but we also know that we have to do it without fear – for fear is a pitiful counsellor in private affairs and fear is a pitiful counsellor in politics. **The problems we have now can all be solved, with common sense, wisdom and with the will to act together, not just saying "I" but also "We".**

**We shall lead the way, training an eye on the rising younger generation. It is quite frankly a terrific generation. I have to say that because they are our offspring after all!** We need not be ashamed of it, ladies and gentlemen, it is indeed true and because it is true we all have reason to have **confidence in this young generation;** they will go their way, not only guided by our rules naturally but probably also by our experiences to a certain extent and, needless to say, we will help them along the way.

In 1945 the world appeared to be doomed. Nobody could have predicted what followed and yet it did follow. We have encountered a great gift, in all European countries, some earlier, some later, and I think we should use this gift by advancing with big and powerful strides and by opening the book of history and entering in bold lettering,

**"This time we will do it" -  
and we need one another's help to get there and I thank you<sup>1</sup> for it!**

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<sup>1</sup> Assumes error in source text. The original German here actually says "...and I thank **them** for it.", but the translation assumes that the "ihnen" should read "Ihnen" and therefore renders the meaning as "you".