

**5. Kongress der Europäischen Senioren Union (ESU)  
5<sup>th</sup> Congress of the European Senior Citizens' Union (ESCU)  
5<sup>ième</sup> Congrès de l'Union Européenne des Seniors (UES)  
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**Speech by Dr. Angela Merkel – leader of the German CDU party - at the 5<sup>th</sup> Congress  
of the European Senior Citizens' Union (ESCU) 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]

Thank you very much indeed for your warm welcome,

Dear Friends, Ladies and Gentlemen,  
Dear and highly esteemed Bernhard Worms,  
And highly esteemed Secretary General, Mr Schroeder, and all Committee members,

- Declaration on senior citizens' politics for the whole of Europe:

I have come here today out of personal conviction because I would like to bring you a short message although we actually have a conference day in Berlin and I am unable to devote as much time as Helmut Kohl has already been able to devote to you. The fact that today Helmut Kohl, the great European, has spoken to you, the delegates of the European Senior Citizens' Union, and also the fact that your gathering is taking place a few days before the expansion of the European Union and that there are already representatives here from the new member countries, all this is quite symbolic. I may have entertained a few private thoughts ten years ago – European Senior Citizens' Union – can it really get off the ground? But Bernhard Worms has always followed through whatever he has set himself to do; he has always enlisted support for his projects and always in such a way that he has also succeeded in finding friends who have lent that support. Dear Bernhard Worms, thank you most sincerely for your tireless commitment!

- Winning the 2004 European elections – our front runner, Prof. Dr. Hans Gert Pöttering

Our front runner for the European election is Hans-Gert Pöttering and has been since the first day of existence of the European Parliament in the European Parliament. He knows its entire history. It was Helmut Kohl who saw to it that there is not only a Socialist International but that the non-Socialist parties are united in one European party. If you know non-Socialist parties – and you all do – this is anything but self-evident! We are proud that the individual counts but sometimes we are so proud of this that we lose the common ground of our political ideals and give priority to our own interests! As good Democrats we are well aware that you can only win if you have the majority and you can only have the majority if you can make compromises. Since we all want Europe to be a non-Socialist and Christian Democratic Europe and to bear our mark, just as we created it, it is right and proper that we are together in the European People's Party. This now comprises over 50 national parties and there has been a real injection of life with the expansion of the European Union. But sadly it is sometimes the case that parties in the same family are also pitched against each other when it comes to domestic politics. However, I can only ask everyone to remember this at all times – if we want to make our common thoughts and ideas capable of winning a majority in Europe then we must regain our position as the strongest party in the European Parliament and, as the strongest party, we will then be able to

have a joint influence on the appointment of the Commission President for the first time. The fact that the European People's Party constitutes the strongest party in the European Parliament made no difference when it came to selecting the Commission. The people in Europe then ask, "Why are we voting? How do we show what we think of our national governments and how do we indicate the direction in which we want to lead Europe?" That's why it was important to push through a clause in the Constitution convention that in future the majority in the European Parliament will also say from which family of parties the Commission President will come. This successful achievement is our doing!

- May 1 2004: Ten new member states in the European Union (EU)

On May 1st: 10 new member states. In my view the accession of these new member states is tantamount to the reunification of Europe. It is not something entirely new but it is the restoration of Europe as it was in the 16th, 17th, 18th and 19th centuries. It was the "Cold War" that was abnormal; it was the "Iron Curtain" that was abnormal. On November 9th of this year we will be celebrating the 15th anniversary of the fall of the Wall and I think it is high time that we can now say to our Polish, Czech, Slovakian, Slovenian and other friends, "You are now a part of us as well. This is the reunification of Europe."

- Numerous reservations

To begin with the reservations: the area of the united Europe will increase by 23% and the population by 20%, but the economic power by only 5%. Needless to say, as we know from the division of Germany and the German reunification, this means that "things that belong together grow together" - but "it will only work if there is sharing". Now you may say, "We all have enough problems of our own, this is not the time to be sharing." There are plenty of arguments to support this view. Anyone who says this, however, must also bear in mind precisely what the consequence is – the consequence will be that jobs are bound to migrate from the richer to the poorer countries. This will not improve matters – on the contrary, hourly wages will become even lower. In this regard the new member states do not abide by the environmental standards. The divide will get wider and more and more jobs will move abroad. Yet it is unacceptable to share the view that the unification of Europe, the common economic area, will cost us more dearly than if we continue to run our own separate budgets and continue to manage our own economies. Of course the old argument can then be reiterated that we had so much ground to make up with German reunification and that by international standards Europe is falling behind anyway in terms of economic growth. And in the negotiations for membership we have acted as we did at the time of German reunification – everyone gets all the laws that have ever been passed in Europe – no deletions. Yet I predict that we will be having the same discussion in Europe in ten years' time as we are having now in Germany. Couldn't the entire law system have been revised again? Is all the bureaucracy really necessary?

But now it is as it is – thoroughly negotiated and all signed, sealed and delivered!

But I would also say this - perhaps we can learn from the new member states. For example, they have developed very interesting tax systems. I must honestly say, "Great system, one flat rate, i.e., just one tax band, no exceptions, maybe we wouldn't mind paying our taxes then either." The Slovaks have done it. And they have obviously done it right. Admittedly, the enthusiasm of the people is limited, to put it mildly, but they have taken a courageous step in saying, "Listen, we don't want to be forever living at the expense of you West Europeans; instead we want to try anything to get on our feet more quickly and to make our contribution to Europe." My constituency, for example, is on the Baltic Sea and I am near the Polish border. They know where you can get something cheaper. It is certainly clear that the people there have problems and that we need to respond to them. And this is why the Christian Democratic

Union has been making constant demands upon the German government to provide aid programmes for people, especially for the border regions where the need is most acute and the differences most marked. However, the German government has failed to act as yet and we will continue to denounce this because such conduct is unacceptable.

- What are the advantages, however?

The single market, the common economic area – yes, they are all important. But the really great hope has now become a reality! If you look at the history of Europe, how have the Europeans solved their problems over the centuries? Today we can say that we have learnt our lessons from our history. For our part we can be sure that we will deal with our problems democratically and in the spirit of civilisation and that we will never wage war on each other again. This is an incredible achievement and should never be forgotten!

I would ask those who say how expensive everything is, and will continue to become, to consider how expensive the "Cold War" was. The "Cold War" was anything but cheap. The vast sums of money invested in arms and in supporting strategic alliances – it was sheer madness. Some people think that now the "Cold War" is over we don't need to invest in anything new, but this is an unrealistic viewpoint in our world. We always have to invest in what we want. Indeed, just as we have fought for decades to preserve freedom and democracy, just as we have fought against Socialism, Communism, oppression and deprivation of rights and just as our political system has now proved to be superior, we cannot expect to get this system in the 21<sup>st</sup> century as well for nothing! We have to continue to exert ourselves to this end. For me the reunification of Europe is also the reason why Europe now has to talk in terms of its world interests! What kind of world do we imagine? What do we want? And to this end we are now strong - or we could be strong. One of my bugbears in relation to the Iraq conflict was that Europe was in fact not strong, but that Europe was divided and that the German government played its part in exacerbating this divide. This means that Germany failed in its duty to try to integrate and that Germany was instead focused on its own issues and contributed to the lack of unity in Europe. This is a separate issue from the fact that errors were also made elsewhere. This includes the Americans incidentally. But first we have to ask whether we did everything in the interests of Europe and whether we did everything to prevent violence and to promote a clear stance towards a dictator, indeed whether we did everything to contribute Europe's strengths. That's why this war and peace issue is not so straightforward. If Europe wants to have a chance to play a part on the world stage then Europe should not be sitting on the edge somewhere giving a running commentary on everything going on in the world, but Europe must be a protagonist, Europe must be proactive. Europe must speak with one voice. This is something for which Europe will have to fight! The European Constitution agreement now contains the chapter "Joint foreign and security policy". But having a joint foreign and security policy also means adopting uniform positions. That's why everything must be staked on giving Europe a voice and an identity after its reunification and on giving Europe clout and if this is what Europe wants then it must be in a position where it is capable of economic strength, capable of military strength and capable of civil strength. We Europeans can and must play a key role in a world where there is still so much injustice – in which we stand opposed to terrorists. I must say the struggle against terrorism is more difficult than the struggle against the Communists. Why? It is more difficult because during the Cold War at least it was understood that neither of the two sides wanted to get killed in the conflict. Everyone wanted to survive. But terrorists are prepared to stake their lives to destroy our way of life. And this presents us with a challenge. It also challenges us to be really clear as to exactly what we want to defend. What matters to us? For what are we really prepared to say, "This we will not tolerate!" This will spark another debate about the value of freedom, the value of open society, the value of the individual's liberty to shape his or her own life, the value of security which the state or which the nation must provide for the individual. The

issue is complex because we want openness in society. This means we have to take account of the fact that those who are not friends of our society are in fact our enemies, are mixing in among us and are flagrantly misusing the rights which we give them to destroy us. And, needless to say, this establishes the premiss for a new way of thinking in domestic politics. It is no longer possible to say that we will deploy the Federal Armed Forces on the outer borders and then inside we know we can rely on the fact that people are more or less willing to live in this country. And that's why we have these debates on "Internal deployment of the Federal Armed Forces". Not because we are malicious but because those who are attacking us are no longer outside our country but, to some extent, live in the country. And then it cannot simply be said that the Federal Armed Forces are just outside. The Federal Armed Forces are in totally different areas of the world because terrorism must be fought there. If there were to be a chemical weapon attack or a hijacking in this country, then we must have access on the domestic front to those capabilities which go beyond those of the police because the enemy might be here. And these are the issues we are having to deal with and to which we initially closed our eyes after the "Cold War" and said, "The Cold War is over now, life will be safer." Then in the middle of the nineties we witnessed the dreadful conflicts in the former Yugoslavia – in our continent, infringements of human rights of the worst order! At the time Europe was not able to deal adequately with Milosevic without the help of the Americans. And the only convention relating to Kosovo is the Dayton Peace Agreement, a convention forged in America. As Europeans we now have to admit once again that it is not working. At the end of the day it is in fact sufficiently bad. If troops had withdrawn from Kosovo, there would be no peace there now. There is a calmness and apparent stability, but not exactly what we understand by peace. As Europeans we must make a concerted effort to muster our forces and to ask how we might solve it. We cannot be spectators in world history but we must act as protagonists of a reunified Europe. Anyone who wants his values to live on must also be prepared to be proactive and to check whether everything is being done correctly. "Making speeches" alone will not suffice!

- The requirements

The first condition is economic strength. It does not make a good impression if the economy is growing at up to 6% everywhere in the world but at only around 2% in Europe and in the largest national economy - in Germany - at probably only 1.4%. It is something of a disaster for the countries in Europe and it is really bad for all the economies in Europe if there is a lack of consumer confidence and an uncertainty as to what tomorrow might bring. It is right that we all have to solve this problem. But we cannot earn trust if we do not know from one year to the next what plans will be dreamed up next, what we will have to cope with, and what we will still have, if anything, in five, six, seven or eight years. If there is a possibility of the cost of health care doubling from one day to the next, then there is a natural tendency to hold on to money and save for "a rainy day". This is quite normal human behaviour. It is not only apparent in elderly people. The younger generation have their worries too and, to a substantial extent, rightly so. We have too few children, we have more elderly people. Dear Bernhard Worms, I have said this on more than one occasion to all the members of the Senior Citizens' Union, senior citizens have also had to cope with problems all their lives, probably the majority of them quite different from those we have to deal with nowadays, but they have worked hard to build up this country and for this reason we must never give the impression that we consider the elderly to be some kind of burden. It is my belief that this would be the very worst thing that Christian Democrats could do! We are pleased that people are growing older and that we have succeeded in increasing life expectancy through our achievements in medicine, technology and many other fields, but we will have to change our ideas about elderly people. Many people still think that the elderly are people who have no more plans in life. But this is an outdated way of thinking. Nowadays the end of working life gives way to a phase in life when many people are able to

fulfil so many of the dreams they have always had for their lives and it is incumbent upon us to allow the elderly to do precisely that, just as we create political structures and conditions for the younger generation. Yes, infrastructure, the demographic factor, health system reform – none of it is simple. One thing which causes me great regret is the fact that we are currently having to cut voluntary services as well, just when the honorary office was gaining a bit more structure, and my foresight tells me that we will need the voluntary office even more in the 21<sup>st</sup> century than we did in the 20<sup>th</sup> if our society is to remain a humane society. These are the problems that we have to solve and want to solve. And I shall see that there is justice between the generations - justice which takes into account and keeps alive the recollection of that which the Federal Republic of Germany has to do today in all its difficulties; justice which does not allow the older generation to be sidelined, the generation which has made major contributions, indeed the most significant contributions, to building up this Republic. I will keep on saying to the young people, "Please remember the 'Gründerzeiten', the period of rapid industrial expansion in Germany from 1871." There is an increasing tendency in society to compress life. There is a real reluctance to talk about death; older people are not wanted in companies, old age actually begins at 50, often people only start their professional working life, if at all, at the age of 30 or more if they have been to university. Surely this is rather a short time span for normal adult working life? There is already some discussion in quality departments in firms as to whether it has not been one of the biggest mistakes to get rid of all those aged 50 or those aged 55, this decision having created a real break in continuity in the understanding of quality, development and other aspects. If they really want to generate maximum output, then they need both the younger ones and the older ones. They may need the fast workers, but they also need the experienced ones. Each age group has its talent and it is my firm conviction that one of the major errors has been prematurely cutting off all the talent in its prime, simply setting a demarcation and saying, "We don't need this, this costs too much". As with all errors, the CDU is also implicated to a certain extent in that we are a people's party and, in bringing in early retirement schemes, we are responsible to a substantial extent for the fact that many large companies no longer employ anyone over the age of 50. Yet as with all errors, when one realises that it was wrong, one needs to have the courage to say, "That was wrong and we have to change it again because it is just leading us astray." If maximum output vanishes, if we are no longer prepared to take risks and run some way with them, if we say, "Chemicals are too dangerous for us, pharmacy is too dangerous for us, gene technology is too dangerous for us", then we will see the countries around us logically seizing these opportunities. No one nation has been granted the prerogative of an internationally vested right in top achievements in economic growth. The Europeans have actually established the economic prognosis - in Lisbon in 2000, all the European heads of state and government leaders - that by 2010 Europe would like to be the most dynamic and booming continent in the world. I'll certainly subscribe to that, I must say. But it's already 2004 and this winter I attended the World Economic Forum in Davos. There was much talk about economic growth, but mainly in China, India, Asia and elsewhere and in America, but there was precious little mention of Europe. I asked people involved in world economy what they liked and didn't like about Europe. And one person said to me, "Do you know," – and this amazed me the most – "I hardly ever think about Europe in the course of a typical year, because there is such a dearth here of anything exciting, interesting and innovative. I have nothing against the Europeans but they don't do anything for me either." Surely this is food for thought. It is not my intention to run Europe down, my message is simply that we have to be careful – and that always used to be Europe's strength in world history - that we remain a place where people come back for another look and visit the museums, not just because of Mozart, Schiller and Goethe, but where people say, "Really significant things are going on here, things which will shape and define the future." And for this we must fight, otherwise we will cease to lead the way in economic growth and lose our prosperity into the bargain. If you look at the history of the 19<sup>th</sup> century – it started with the steam engine - that was invented in Europe. Then there was

electricity, likewise invented in Europe, then the car - invented in Germany. We can get all the way to the invention of the computer - Konrad Zuse was also German - and then there is a jump from there to an era where America is leading the way in developments. Let's take the pharmaceutical industry – Germany used to be the world's leading pharmacist! These days it is all the strength we can muster to keep a handful of chemical firms running. But we have to get back in on the action! We need to be the ones people are talking about, we have to start taking new directions again! New times demand new directions. The trade union policy of the fifties and sixties will no longer do. It has nothing to do with the fact that we are removing the welfare aspect from the market economy! But it is not in the spirit of social welfare when the hurdles keep being erected higher and prevent the unemployed from getting back into working life. If you, the older ones, help to create the climate for this, I will be really grateful to you. You can do this, and you know you can do this, because you have experienced so much change in your lifetime that you can say to the younger people, "Listen, be bold and step out, it may be to your advantage." We need this generation of the 'Gründerzeit', the period of rapid industrial expansion in Germany from 1871, to do this, then there will be competition throughout Europe in the sense that one is good at this and the other is good at that and so we'll say, "Let's learn from one another", then we may achieve something. And this also applies to the relationship of the former member states of the European Union with the new ones. This could be another benefit of this great European reunification.

- Our position as Christian Democrats

Christianity post-Enlightenment – this is the model we live and stand by. That's why, despite all the difficulties, it is still our hope that we can name this Christian body of thought, this reference point in a European Constitution agreement as well. He who cannot say where he comes from cannot have any idea where he wants to go either! Even if we are agreed on these basic aspects there will still be a great deal of effort required in individual cases. Times will not be altogether easy in the next few years. As far as I am concerned, it is important that politicians are honest with people about what is ahead while showing people the light at the end of the tunnel and the supposed destination. And that a bit of trust is in dependability. And these, ladies and gentlemen, will be the issues with which we will also go to the European elections, with which we will campaign for people to have the courage and the strength to say, "Yes, I am going to the polls, yes, I will vote for Europe, yes, I think that this can and should be a Christian Democrat Europe, a non-Socialist Europe, and I want individual people to be able to exercise their freedom and not to have to live in a nanny state, I want this Europe to fight for our right to live in safety and peace in our continent." In this sense there is solidarity between those of you here today. Do not be put off, do not succumb to superficial nationalism again. The thinking used to be, the bigger the country, the better as you can manage alone but, with the benefit of historical hindsight, this way of thinking has always been misleading. Our task in the 21st century is to show that we have learnt something from the past!

A good conference, thank you very much for the invitation and all the best!