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5<sup>th</sup> Congress of the European Senior Citizens' Union (ESCU)  
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Speech made by Prof. Dr. Hans Gert Pöttering, President of the European People's Party, the  
EPP, in the Parliament of the European Union in Brussels at the 5<sup>th</sup> Congress of the ESCU  
on 29/04/2004 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]

**Esteemed President,**

Esteemed President of the European Senior Citizens' Union,

**Bernhard Worms,**

Dr. Schroeder,

Esteemed colleague, Ruth Hieronymi,

Dear friends,

Chers amis, liebe Freundinnen und Freunde, cari amici, beste frinden, I'm afraid I cannot say it in  
Greek, I'm a little unprepared otherwise I would have said it in Greek too.

**Highly esteemed ladies and gentlemen,**

**It is a pleasure to be with you today. To be with you is to be with a generation which has  
accomplished such an incredible amount for the unification of Europe!** And I am grateful to you for  
vesting over 98% confidence in your President, Bernhard Worms. Congratulations, not only from me  
personally, but also from our EPP-ED party - and best wishes for our continued collaboration.

- **You have chosen a splendid motto** for your Congress; *“responsible”* – the word smacks of  
experience, but then *“bold and uncomfortable”*, indicating that you are combining that  
experience with youthful engagement and, to use a term just attributed to this programme by  
Bernhard Worms, *“nimble”*.
- **I would like to assure you that** in the procedures over which we can have an influence in  
putting together the programme, **we make no decisions without having consulted the  
President, the Committee and the Senior Citizens' Union of the European People's Party  
beforehand.** Of that I can assure you! I would like to work with you, we want to work with you  
when it comes to shaping our joint future.
- If in 1979 at the first European elections someone had said that on **May 1<sup>st</sup> 2004** membership  
of the European Union would be taken up by Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, the Warsaw Pact  
states, i.e., the states of the military alliance of Communism, Poland, the Czech Republic,  
Slovakia, Slovenia belonging to Communist Yugoslavia, our reply would have been that it is a  
nice vision. It is a nice dream. **It is a bold hope but we are afraid that it will not become a  
reality in our lifetime.**
- **Yet it is becoming a reality in our lifetime** and that's why we say, **“Welcome to the nations  
from Central Europe, a warm welcome to our union of common values, the European  
Union!”** It was our proposal, and also that of Malta and Cyprus, and **it would not have been**

possible without the will of the people for civil liberty. Together we have always championed freedom and democracy and we are grateful to the peoples of Central Europe for waging a peaceful war on Communism and throwing off its yoke, and for the unity we can now enjoy in the European Union! We must also remember our Pope John Paul II. It was the Soviet dictator, Josef Stalin, who demanded in the nineteen-forties, *"How many divisions does the Pope have?"* And this Soviet dictator said it with contempt. The Pope had called and did call to his fellow countrymen in Poland in the eighties, *"Do not be afraid!"* These were not divisions in the military sense. But they were divisions of moral, spiritual and religious fortitude, and that is why it behoves all of us to thank John Paul II as well for his historic contribution!

- Then, of course, **another essential consideration is whether the European Union can keep on and on expanding and adding new states.** And there may well be very different views on this. But I think we have to exercise great caution and very great respect - also vis-à-vis our Turkish partners - in answering the question as to whether the European Union can sustain the admission of Turkey as well. Even within the European People's Party there are widely differing views on the subject. In the coming weeks, months and years we have to answer the question as to where the borders of Europe are, the borders of the European Union - and not every country which leans towards European politics need necessarily also become a member of the European Union. And to this we must find an answer.
- We have great tasks for the future ahead. We agreed that we have to fight terrorism but we also agreed that we have to form a stable partnership with the Arab and Islamic states. And those of you who come from France or Spain, Portugal or Greece, you know how important the Mediterranean region is. We have to look to the South as well. The countries of North Africa form the southern border of the European Union. And we want to avoid this *"clash of civilisation"*. It can also be whipped up by rhetoric, ladies and gentlemen, but we want partnership, and if possible, friendship too, with the Arab and Islamic states and that is a huge task for the European Union in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.
- **Now to our relations with the United States of America:** No doubt everyone has his or her own opinion on whether the war in Iraq was justified or not but that's not what I want to talk about here and now. My point is that our current experience with the new member states teaches us that **if we build and understand Europe differently from the United States, then Europe will be divided**, because the new countries which have had to bear 50 years or more under Communism would immediately be on the side of the United States of America – and Europe would be divided, and so **for this reason it is important that we shape our politics in the European Union in such a way that we are equal partners with our American friends.** We do not want America to be dominant over us. We want and have to be equal partners.
- Now, dear friends, this Europe, **the European Union with 455 million people as from May 1<sup>st</sup> will only be held together if we have a large clip and this is why the European Union needs a constitution.** And it was our party which insisted that the future of Europe should not be discussed behind closed doors in government meetings, calling instead for a convention, a meeting, attended by members of the European Parliament, the national parliaments and the governments, **a convention where there is open and public discussion about the future of our continent.** And so this convention was set up. It was highly fortuitous that one of our own, from our family of EPP parties, namely the former French President, Valérie Giscard d'Estaing, was the President of this convention. And we hope that we will come to an agreement about the constitution under the Irish presidency, before this presidency comes to an end, by the end of June. **Why is this constitution important?** In the first instance, it is

important because **our principles, our beliefs and our conviction** will now become established in the European Constitution **in the preamble and in the charter**. And the most important thing, dear friends, is that the **focus** is put on the **dignity of humankind**. And dignity of humankind means that **man is responsible for himself, but he also has a responsibility to the community and to society** and **this is the Christian concept of man**. And this is what it says in the Constitution as well because man is defined there as a person. **Our principles are also enshrined there - family, solidarity, subsidiarity, the ban on cloning - and it speaks of the cultural, religious and humanist heritage of Europe**. And now there is some **discussion** as to **whether it is not worth mentioning the Judeo-Christian heritage as well**. And I know that even in the EPP there is no standard view on this. **And we knew that it would be very difficult to push it through in the European Parliament**. Yet **“we will not withdraw the motion, on the contrary we want to nail our colours to the mast and, even if we do not get a majority, it is good that we will have impressed on people the principles and convictions we hold.”**

I would like to point out, however, that **the Constitution does uphold many of our convictions** and that **churches and religious communities are guaranteed their legal status**, which is very important in the European Union; **we claimed that we would accomplish this and we did accomplish it!**

- **Europe needs to define its tasks**. Not every task in Europe is a task for Europe. Europe is about **the big issues of foreign, security and defence policy**. It is about **the European Single Market and the free movement of persons, goods, services and capital**. And it is about **the stability of the European currency, for example**. The law must be upheld and this is why **new borrowings must not exceed 3%**. It would be **wrong to embrace another new debt policy**, because then the young people of today would have to pay the money back in the future, which is not entirely ethical per se neither is it economically efficient, and it is **unacceptable for small countries which fail to meet the criteria to be issued with a warning** while turning a blind eye to large countries which fail to meet the criteria. **The law must be upheld across the board**.
- Let's take a look at **the European institutions**: today **the European Parliament already has legislative power in 75% of European legislative matters even without a Constitution**. And that will increase to **over 90% when the Constitution comes into force**. We called for special figures at national level, special ministers – let's call them Europe ministers – to be responsible for European legislation and to have equal powers with the Parliament. Unfortunately this idea has not been approved; instead the **Council of Foreign Ministers will continue to be the European legislator with the Parliament**. However, it is **important that we are informed of decisions on laws**. This is part and parcel of **transparency and democracy in Europe and the Constitution will enforce this**.
- **Moving on to the European Commission**: our aim in the European elections must be to **regain our standing as the strongest force in the European Parliament** and there must not be a repeat of events in 1999 when we became the strongest party but the election result was not reflected in the **choice of President of the European Commission** and so **we are calling for the heads of state and heads of government to take the election results into account when making their nominations for the President of the European Commission**; if the others win elections, exactly the same is true for them as well, but I think that **our chances are good** and the Constitution also states that, in future, the President of the Commission will be able to dismiss a member of the Commission if this member of the Commission is guilty of a grave offence. This introduces a principle which is taken for granted at national level. A head of government may dismiss a minister. And, ladies and gentlemen, the very fact alone that this is

possible certainly has an enlightening effect in and of itself and **at European Union level there must not be less accountability than at national level and, as such, the Constitution also spells out progress in this area.**

- **Two more comments: we must devote ourselves to “international human rights”.** And for this reason we, as the representatives of an order subject to the rule of law, must call for the right of every person who is charged with an offence to have a legal representative arguing his or her case so as to prove his or her innocence where applicable. **We need the Constitution as a matter of course and then the majority will prevail in the democracy.** That is the natural order. Those who win through in votes are the ones who make the decisions – although not everyone has such amazing results of over 98 % like your President, Bernhard Worms. **And yet, dear friends, it goes further than this majority vote. There is something which we might call “the culture or ethics of co-operation”.** And this means how we act towards each other and **effectively why it is unacceptable for a few large European countries to think it is their prerogative to set the direction.** No, we all belong together as far as the future of Europe is concerned. And the small countries also have the dignity and honour to contribute their conviction through their government and through their members of parliament in the same way as laid claim to by the large countries. **Rights, dignity and respect apply equally to all, big or small.**

**Dear friends, your generation above all others knows what Europe means and what we owe Europe** and you know from experience, indeed from your very personal experience, what it means to live in times of conflict. And **figures like Robert Schuman, Alcide de Gasperi, Konrad Adenauer and others have said** that we need to adopt a new approach to dealing with each other. **“We need Europe”.** And this goes beyond the Europe of the co-operation of the governments and states - **“we need a strong roof over the states and nations,”** A strong European Union with strong European institutions. And **“we need European law” and** we are now in the process of giving the European Union **“a Constitution”.** **This Constitution is the basic law, the principal law of the Europeans. Law safeguards peace.** And, dear friends, **the assurance of peace, combined with freedom, democracy and human dignity is the most important thing** that we, that our generation, can do for the generations who will come after us **and this is why peace remains the real central issue of European unification policy** and I would like to express my very, very warm gratitude to you, that you, in your capacity as the Senior Citizens' Union of the People's Party, are taking this course and then we will indeed be able to represent our ideal in the future and to do so in a way that is strong, **“responsible, bold and uncomfortable”.**

Thank you very much indeed and all the best.