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**Dr Jürgen Rüttgers (D), National Chair of the North Rhine Westphalia CDU,
Welcome address to the Congress of the ESCU on 29/04/2004 in Bad Godesberg (D)**

[Rendition of the welcome address based on a tape recording dated 28.04.2004, edited by Prof. Walter Paul (A) / ESCU]

Mr Conference President,
Bernhard Worms,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my pleasure to extend to you a warm welcome to North Rhine Westphalia this morning. You are in Bonn, the former capital city of the Federal Republic; you are in North Rhine Westphalia, the largest federal state in the Federal Republic of Germany. You are in a country which perceives itself to be a core region of Europe in the tradition of Konrad Adenauer. You are in a beautiful - I sometimes say *the* most beautiful - federal state of Germany, but of course that is debatable. This state is a strong state with its historical towns situated here on the Rhine, the cathedral of Cologne - one of the most potent symbols of Germany -, Bonn, Düsseldorf, our state capital, and Aachen with its imperial palace and the cathedral of Charles the Great. It is a state with a great tradition in the Westphalian region and in the south-eastern part of the Teutoburger Wald surrounding the city of Münster, with the town hall in Münster bearing witness to the 1648 Peace of Westphalia marking the end of the Thirty Years' War. You are in a state with a great industrial tradition on the Rhine and Ruhr rivers, with the steel, coal and chemical industries, a state which is now preparing to advance from an industrial society to a knowledge-based society. And you are in a state which is on the brink of serious political upheaval. We are looking forward to the European elections in a matter of weeks which, as far as we are concerned, is more than a mere confirmation of our commitment to Europe. Rest assured, the CDU will do all it can to effect a brilliant election result for the CDU here in the state and therefore for the European People's Party. Why? Because we still need a clear majority for our EPP in the new European Parliament so that in future Europe will still have a future.

Local elections are due to take place here in a few months time in September 2004. Every policy has its origins in the towns. Five years ago we achieved a magnificent election victory with over 50% of the votes. 30 of the 32 rural districts and 13 of the 23 cities have CDU Chief Administrative Officers and Lord Mayors; indeed everywhere you go you will find a Lord Mayor or a Chief Administrative Officer from the CDU. Not content with merely repeating that success, we want to improve on it, and all the opinion polls indicate that the prospects are good. And in May of the coming year North Rhine Westphalia will host the elections for the state parliament. As experienced politicians you will all be aware that opinion polls do not constitute election results. Indeed, there is nothing worse than a party being over-confident, claiming to have already won the election and being too complacent to fight. Nevertheless I cannot alter the fact that the opinion polls are sensational, the last one showing 52 % for the CDU, and that was against the background of the fact that the CDU has been the opposition party for many years now.

This change in mood, ladies and gentlemen, has something to do with the fact that we do not simply put up a united front with clear leadership structures but that primarily we have discovered through sheer hard work in recent years which goals we want to achieve. You will no doubt remember from the last elections all over

Europe that it is not altogether easy these days to predict election results. Election results in Europe have not always been favourable in recent weeks and months for our party family either.

Sometimes it just has something to do with the fact that those who are in power at the time are being penalised by the people for what they are doing. But we all know that we are living at a time when an enormous amount is changing and Europe has to change!

There are three great challenges which we have to face:

The first challenge is globalisation. We wanted - and Christian Democrats all over Europe will put their hands up to this - a Europe with open borders. We all knew that Europe always has something to do with peace, and peace always has something to do with friendship and getting acquainted, and getting acquainted is only possible if the borders are open. That's why I say to everyone all over the world - irrespective of whether it is the candidates for the American presidency or anyone else for that matter who think that the answer can only be found in a return to protectionism and separation - "No, Christian Democrats want these open borders!" We are in favour of a unified Europe, we are in favour of globalisation and we are confident that we can also shape this future!

The second great challenge is the transition from an industrial to a knowledge-based society. In former times when we still had an agrarian society in Germany - 200 years ago - 85% of the people worked in agricultural production. Now that figure is only 3%. In the golden age of the industrial revolution - just over 100 years ago - 65% of the population worked in industrial production. In Germany this now accounts for 22% of all employees. Everyone else works in knowledge-based sectors, in the service sector and in the tertiary sector, all proving that our systems have to be adjusted to accommodate this change. Our pension system must be equipped to meet the demands of the future. Our health service must be reformed. Collective bargaining and labour law systems must be adapted. The fact that these tasks are, to take an historical view, tasks of herculean proportions is very noticeable, at least here in Germany in the way people talk about their future. The worst case scenario in a situation like this is if people lose faith in politics. This is the situation which we now face here in North Rhine Westphalia and the situation which we now face here in Germany. People have lost confidence both in the Schröder government and in the government here in the state of North Rhine Westphalia. This is the reason why we will win the elections. I am quite sure about that. But this means that we have to meet people where they are; it means that we are not talking about some new reform every day, but rather that we are talking about goals, that we are talking about trust and that we are shifting paradigms into the bargain. In Germany, for example, this means having to put the message across loud and clear that we will have to work more and work harder again in view of this change. No country in world history has ever solved its problems by working less - on the contrary, when there are problems, people have to work harder to turn the situation round and people have to be told this. I am quite sure they will understand. And measures have to be taken to dissociate the social welfare systems from the factor of employment. Someone is too expensive? - at least in Germany! And plainly speaking this means that people must be given security in old age by means of a pension system that is not directly associated with jobs and labour costs exclusively. This also means, however, that people are given confidence that they can rely on the assurance given by the pension system - and that is why it is profoundly unfair that the reforms of the red-green government in Berlin mean that people who have for 20 or 30 years relied on the fact that a word is a word when making personal decisions are suddenly being told, "No - now we're doing things differently". Yet people are no longer in a position at the age of 50/55 to alter their pension schemes. Decisions like "now we're doing things differently" are taken at 25 or 30 years of age. So they cannot now turn round and say, as has been the case here in North Rhine Westphalia, that company pensions are suddenly being devalued by 7.5% because they are laying down new premiums and new costs. You will realise what this is. This is a radical departure aimed at winning people's confidence. I believe that Christian Democrats can do this because we of all people are not afraid of expecting something of people and telling them that you can only build a society based on effort, hard

work, punctuality, diligence, commitment to others and in the absence of any widespread belief that people can line their own pockets at the expense of others.

This brings me on to the third great challenge - the demographic challenge. Unfortunately, here in Germany we decided some time around 20/25 years ago that children were hard work and that children cost money and that it might be better to leave all that to others. We will pay a high price for this decision in the years to come. Our society will diminish, the population in Germany will decrease from its current level of 82 million to around 65 million and the proportion of elderly people will increase. This is a source of great alarm to many people. It is more than just a social problem. Helmut Kohl, of whom you had the pleasure yesterday, often tells the story about the Brazilian Cardinal Arndts who, when asked what he noticed on his visits to Germany, would always say, "There is no children's laughter in your country"! This has become a major problem. The problem, however, is not that there are suddenly fewer people living in this country. That wouldn't be a problem at all. Rather it is an economic problem which hinges on the issue as to whether our societies and how our industrial and knowledge-based societies can manage to maintain their prosperity with fewer people. We will have to be more conformist – everywhere – in Germany as in Europe. We will have to find a new understanding of dealing with each other. We have to put a stop to this obsession with youth which is still prevalent everywhere here in Germany. How can we say that people who have reached 65, 70 or 75 years of age are no longer old these days and yet say in the same breath that they are no longer needed? We cannot continue to have 51-year-olds here in Germany being told that they are being given early retirement and that this society can no longer use them. No, we will need everyone, regardless of his or her age. Everyone has a part to play in building a decent future for this country.

When the foundation charters of the European Community were signed in Rome in 1957, Robert Schuman was 71 years old, Jean Monet was 69 years old, Alcide de Gasperi was 76 years old and Konrad Adenauer was 81 years old. These people laid the foundation stone for our continent's most sustained era of peace in the last few centuries. This is why it is high time that people who are only 53 years old like me start to say that this society has to understand that it cannot sideline 30%, soon to be 40 or 50%, of the population and treat them as if their vast experience of life is of no use to this society, and this is why there must be an end to this obsession with youth and the attitude that the only thing which is of any consequence is being able to look young. This is why there must be an end to the message conveyed by the press that people who have face-lifts and who run around in certain clothes are the only ones who count in this society; instead we should be looking into the hearts and minds of our people again. This is where we will find our future wealth and resources. The experience of those who know how to cope with problems. That is one of the points which we will have to change in this country - enough of this obsession with youth – it's time young and old joined forces and worked hard to shape the future together!

This is why, ladies and gentlemen, I am pleased that you are meeting here today as representatives of the European Senior Citizens' Union with your President Bernhard Worms. I am thankful that you are visiting our country and I am already looking forward to reading your resolutions!

It only remains for me to wish you good luck!