

The President of the Republic at the Riigikogu conference Values and Interests in International Relations on October 30 2006 in Tallinn.

I am extremely pleased to speak at the Estonian Parliament's annual conference on Europe. This tradition began many years ago, when membership in the European Union seemed to us an unattainable dream.

These days, the conference has become a serious international intellectual forum where scholars, politicians and thinkers from Estonia and other European Union member states gather to argue over the most pressing issues facing Europe. People and also countries, which many once doubted whether they even belong in the European Union, turned out to be effective contributors to the building of Europe.

The European Union came together more than half a century ago to guarantee peace and democracy on our continent. The founders believed that these values are self-evident, that we shall always stand up for them. Today, however, these same European values have come under serious pressure inside the European Union, and even more so in our immediate neighborhood. Therefore the theme of today's conference, "Values and interests in international policy" is far more immediate than any of us just a few years ago might have imagined.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

In five months we shall celebrate the 50th anniversary of the signing of the Rome Treaty. The treaty, which created the European Community, brought, or more accurately, created for its members, but more importantly, for its citizens a half a century of peace, security and economic prosperity.

There is, however, another side to this success story. Exactly a week ago, I participated in an altogether different ceremony commemorating a different fiftieth anniversary, that of the Hungarian Uprising. That commemoration reminds us that those European values we speak of here today have not always been allowed or available to all Europeans. Many citizens of today's Europe were denied those values at a time when the European Community was already flourishing. For a cruel fate determined that they live outside the European Community.

In the last several months the press and journals, but also in private conversations with people from the so-called old member states, the EU-15, have revealed disappointment in the so-called new member states because they have not been as constructive and integrationist as had been hoped. We read patronizing articles that say that, well, those democracies are young and just developing, that becoming a mature democracy takes more than 15 years. The new issue of Foreign Affairs, which appears tomorrow, publishes an especially in-depth and worried treatment of this topic.

These observations and articles are uncomfortable to read, but they are in part justified. Yet,

they are written despite the fact that the last enlargement has brought enormous economic benefits to the so-called old members, immeasurably increased their security and brought democracy to a region where as late as seventeen years ago people were repressed for their beliefs.

The Rome Treaty was signed less than twelve years after the end of World War Two. How young or old were those democracies that signed the treaty back then? Even odder to my mind is that virtually all the better-known spontaneous expressions in the name of freedom and democracy by citizens themselves took place in those countries that today are called immature.

The Warsaw uprising in 1944; the 1953 uprising in East Berlin; the Hungarian as well as the somewhat lesser-known uprising in Poznan, Poland in 1956; the Prague Spring in 1968; Solidarnosc in Poland in 1980; the spontaneous night song-festivals here in Estonia in 1988.

All of these were citizens' manifestations in the name of democracy. I shall not begin to remind you of the response of mature Europe to these events--we know what it was-- nor do I want to mention how silence reigned among our neighbouring countries regarding the repressions against Estonians. It suffices for my purposes to recall that in 1980 the Chancellor of the German Federal Republic welcomed the imposition of martial law in Poland and called General Jaruzelski a patriot of his country.

What should we conclude from all this? I submit three conclusions.

First, there is no reason for arrogance or complacency. Democracy and civil liberties are not automatic for any person or country, they are neither self-evident or permanent. We know this because we see the rise and strengthening of forces, regrettably also in Europe, that are xenophobic, as well as those who simply do not like democracy.

Secondly, we have a responsibility to defend and help those who today risk their lives in the name of democracy and freedom. Just as merely a few decades ago Poles, Hungarians, Czechs and Slovaks and Balts risked their lives. We have no right to look down on others if they don't express themselves as well and as diplomatically as we would wish. Just a short time ago in Warsaw, Budapest, East Berlin, Prague, Bratislava, in Vilnius, Riga and Tallinn, leaders were clumsy, sharp and too demanding. The Honeckers, Kadars, Jaruzelskis, Brezhnevs and others like them, on the other hand, represented *comme il faut* stability and dependable partnership.

And thirdly, let us understand that nearby, in Europe's immediate neighborhood today are people who risk their lives and their freedom in order to defend fundamental European values. They are threatened by forces that are stronger than they, forces that are more stable, with whom it is always easier to strike a deal, invite to our country, and to whom we can sell our goods. The Walesas, Havels and Nagys are always more difficult and troublesome, because democracy is perforce more difficult and troublesome. But we have also learned that the onetime poorly dressed furnace stoker might turn out to be a successful President, parliamentarian or minister, if democracy is allowed to prevail.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Before we do anything, however, we, the politicians of Europe, must become less selfish. Both in the so-called “new” as well as in the “old” member states. It is true for all of us. For those who defend their country’s internal market by torpedoing the Services Directive while enjoying the free movement of capital. And it is true also for those for whom the European Union simply means huge injections of money from the “Brussels” budget.

The countries that joined the EU in 2004 must realize that the continued development of the Union assumes also their contribution, their creativity and acting. Instead of going slack, avoiding risk while enjoying the fact that taxpayers from elsewhere are sending money to fund their projects.

But the so-called “old members” also need to realize that the departure from their Eastern borders of the tank divisions of the Warsaw Pact does not mean that what happens on the other side of the border of the European Union no longer concerns them.

I sincerely hope that today’s conference, taking place as it does in the capital of the most pro-EU member-state – if we are to believe the statistics of the past several months – will help us, that is to say the European Union, to return to our values and our ideals. Those values, after all, are valued most there, where they are in short supply, and where they are suppressed.

Thank you.