



9th May 2007

9 May, or “Europe Day”, is the anniversary of the Schuman Declaration. Speaking in Paris in 1950, Robert Schuman, then Foreign Minister of France, proposed a new form of political arrangement for Europe, whose aim was to make war between Europe’s nations unthinkable.

His vision and foresight were confirmed earlier this year when we celebrated on 25 March the 50th anniversary of the European Union, the body created as a result of that famous Declaration.

It has undoubtedly been a tremendous success. For fifty years its members have enjoyed unprecedented levels of peace, prosperity and stability.

Over the years it has evolved to be much more than a simple trading bloc coordinating members’ trade policy and setting common tariffs. Today the European Union is a political and economic project bringing together 27 European countries and over 490 million people.

Its citizens can study, work or live in another EU country with a minimum of red tape and they can enjoy health and social benefits everywhere. Travel across Europe is increasingly passport-free and the majority of its citizens share a single currency.

The EU is active in all the areas that pose the greatest challenges to society in the 21st century. We are a strategic partner for countries around the world on issues as varied as international terrorism, climate change, HIV/AIDS, and resolving the world’s most entrenched conflicts.

Our prosperity has grown out of a particular form of regional cooperation which has developed hand in hand with a deeper commitment to democracy, human rights and the rule of law. It is this experience, the secret of our own success, which we seek to offer to others.

We are still developing our common European foreign policy. But we are already the world’s largest donor, providing 60% of the world’s official development assistance. The European Commission alone gives over €7 billion every year. We are one of the largest donors in the Pacific region.

We aim to tackle poverty and provide humanitarian assistance wherever it is required. We build up trading and investment partnerships. And we deploy our unique set of skills in assisting countries in transition to ensure others benefit from our own prosperity and stability.

We believe that it’s only through partnership that solutions to the world’s problems can be found. That’s why we put so much value on our relations with our partners around the globe and it’s also why we are so committed to multilateralism.

The European Union has a dense network of formal agreements and over 130 delegations around the world to cooperate with countries on issues like trade, energy, climate change, human rights and international organised crime. We opened a Delegation in New Zealand in 2004 and continue to see our relationship grow from strength to strength as we work cooperatively on these issues that concern us all.

We are also developing police and military missions. We have deployed over 60,000 military personnel and civilians around the world delivering support in crisis situations in the Middle East, Africa and post-tsunami Indonesia.

In the years ahead we will continue to work with our friends and partners on the major issues confronting us all: climate change, energy security, conflict resolution and managing the forces of globalisation. We will also work to promote the values we hold dear and which we believe hold the key to our own prosperity – respect for human rights, democracy and the rule of law. We know that New Zealand is of a like mind and also believes strongly in these core values.

On this symbolic day we reaffirm the objective we set ourselves for the next 50 years: using the achievements of the last 50 years - our wealth, peace and experience – not only to maintain our own standard of living, but also for the benefit of others.

Benita Ferrero-Waldner
European Commissioner for External Relations and Neighbourhood Policy