

Europe Day - 9 May 2015

Address by Marie-Anne Coninx
Ambassador of the European Union

A warm welcome to all guests, speakers and musicians!

Today is the 8th May. Exactly 70 years ago, World War II ended, a war that devastated the European continent. The end of the war was a day of liberation. On behalf of all Europeans, I wish to thank Canada for its tremendous contribution to that liberation.

Only 5 years later, on 9 May 1950, the French Minister of Foreign Affairs Robert Schuman made an historic Declaration. He called on the nations of Europe, to unite and make war on our continent impossible. This Declaration laid the foundations of today's European Union. This is why we celebrate every year, on 9 May, Europe Day.

There is much reason to celebrate. Indeed, we are proud of what we have achieved: We are the world's largest peace project. Over the years, our Union has grown from six to twenty eight Members. We have become a continent of security, justice, freedom and prosperity. A Union based on deep commitment to fundamental rights, democracy and the rule of law. As such, the dreams of our founding fathers have become a reality.

But we know that our achievements of peace and prosperity cannot be taken for granted. They are constantly challenged: from developments within or outside the Union.

Looking at developments in our neighbourhood, the threat of war has returned to our continent. And we have to react, react in unity and in close cooperation with partners/allies such as Canada. Indeed, when international law is broken and human dignity is treated, we have a responsibility to stand up and to protect fundamental values and interests, and to lend all our solidarity, to assist our partners in our neighbourhood and elsewhere in the world.

Unity and solidarity is also needed to face internal challenges. The good news is that we are again achieving economic recovery. We have now a new Leadership at the helm of the Union, which has set out a clear and strong priority programme, to make this recovery sustainable. Strong measures are being taken to stimulate growth, investment and employment - especially youth employment - in the European Union. And we continue to stand by our Members who face difficulties. Because, as I said last year, we are a family: we act as a family; we might have our

fight and differences, but we stick together, because "Unity makes strength."/ "l'Union fait la force".

I want to mention a particular challenge, a crisis that is taking place at our southern border: Thousands of people - refugees and irregular migrants - attempt the dangerous crossing of the Mediterranean Sea. They hope reaching Europe's shores and a better life. Most are victims of criminal traffickers, who sell death and call it hope. Tragically, many - too many, end up losing their lives.

It is our duty to prevent more tragedy. It is our responsibility to address this crisis comprehensively. We must act in unity and in solidarity - as we always have in difficult times - to address the challenges posed by illegal migration. But let me stress: Europe is not a fortress. The European family will not reject people who need help.

Our unity is also key in addressing other challenges. That is why we are united in fighting extremism; terrorism and international organized crime; tackling the negative impact of climate change; and securing our energy future.

In addition to unity, addressing global challenges requires strong partnerships. We are very pleased to have a robust Strategic Partnership with Canada. Our alliance is becoming stronger all the time. This was the clear outcome of EU-Canada Summit in September 2014, which included: the ambitious economic trade agreement known as CETA; the equally ambitious Strategic Partnership Agreement or SPA; and strengthened cooperation and dialogue in key areas that are continuously expanding. For example: we just had our first Dialogue on Security and Defence; and next week, we will be initiating a comprehensive Dialogue on Energy. And we aspire to achieve much more, such as promoting youth mobility and student exchanges between the EU and Canada. After all, these are our young ambassadors, who are tomorrow's future leaders.

We want to continue to learn from each other and exchange experience. In this regard, we count on Canada to be a strong partner in fighting climate change and being our ally in Paris. Each continent, each country on the globe, has the responsibility of making Paris a success: the Americas, Asia, Africa and of course Europe.

We are proud that we have also excellent relations with the Provinces and Territories of Canada. Indeed, knowing Canada, is knowing the Provinces, all its important players and regional authorities as well.

Hence, I am particularly pleased to welcome today the Premier of Nova Scotia and la Ministre des Relations Internationales de Québec.

Premier Mc Neil, your Province Nova Scotia in the East of Canada/ the Maritimes, is very close to the European Union, both geographically and in terms of our historic trade and cultural ties. I had the pleasure to visit Halifax twice and enjoyed the meeting that we had.

De même Madame le Ministre Sint Pierre. Je suis très heureuse que vous soyez parmi nous ce soir. Le Québec est aussi très proche de l'Union européenne. Nous avons des liens très forts, liens historiques, culturels et commerciaux.

Et les perspectives de renforcer ces liens et la coopération avec vos Provinces - Nouvelle Ecosse et la Québec, sont très prometteuses.

Ladies and Gentlemen.

Europe Day is a day to celebrate. To celebrate that for the past 65 years, our family have been living in a home. A home, a house which is "in working progress", adapting to the evolving needs of our growing family. Europe a home, a family, which binds us together, with common history and values, with common present - a challenging but exciting one, and with a common, promising future.

Today we celebrate a milestone project, which must be nurtured and protected. This we owe to our founding fathers, to our future generations, to our close partners and friends, such as Canada. We owe it to ourselves.

With that, Ladies and Gentlemen, I will conclude, by thanking everyone for their contributions tonight.

Thank you/ Merci!

Vive le Canada -Vive l'Union européenne!