

Statement
Marie-Anne Coninx
Head of Delegation of the European Commission
Inauguration
Exposition of 20th anniversary of changes of democracy in Central Europe
University of Tecnológico de Monterrey
Mexico,
5 November 2009

Señoras y señores, buenas días!

Let me first thank the *Tecnológico de Monterrey* – and especially its Center of European Studies - for the opportunity to participate at this important event regarding the peaceful unification of Europe, and the honor given to me to inaugurate this most informative exposition. It is with particular pleasure that I take the floor here today.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Next Monday (9 November 2009) we will celebrate the 20th anniversary of the end of the cold war, the end of the division of Europe. We will remember this really historical event all over Europe, especially in those countries which suffered from the iron curtain, dividing our continent, the center of Europe, for 40 years.

But, representing the European Commission in Mexico, I am glad that those historical days and weeks for Europe are remembered also in Latin America, here in Mexico, by various events, especially by this very important and informative exhibition. Congratulations to all, to whom we have to say “thank you” for this event!

In November 1989 “Europe”, this geographical term, became “Europe” again even in a geopolitical sense, when the wall in Berlin came down and the iron curtain was lifted.

This was the result of a peaceful revolution in Europe, performed by thousands of courageous citizens in Leipzig, in Dresden, in Berlin and other cities in the former GDR and in other countries in Eastern Europe. And this was encouraged by wise politicians such as in Hungary who decided to cut a hole in the iron curtain to Austria and in Prague, who insisted that thousands of refugees from the former GDR could leave the German embassy and head for the Bundesrepublik Deutschland by train.

All of us are aware of quite different, huge challenges we have to face 20 years later, such as, for example:

- Climate change,**
- The financial and economic crisis and**
- Security threats.**

But we should never forget that in 1989 we were relieved from a threat, we had had to face for nearly half a century: the confrontation of two nuclear powers on our continent.

This was the precondition for the implementation of an area of freedom, security and justice by the Amsterdam Treaty, extending these values to 10 new member states from Eastern Europe.

Ladies and gentlemen,

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Allow me to address another important anniversary that we are celebrating - (besides the 20 years of the end of the cold war) -, notably the fact that 5 years ago, the EU undertook its latest enlargement, nearly doubling in size from 15 to 27 Members.

The European Union was founded to reunify the European continent after World War II. It ensured peace and prosperity, through integration, cooperation and solidarity. It safe-guarded our shared values of liberty and democracy.

This is precisely the magnetic pull that the countries of Central and Eastern Europe responded to when they chose to join the EU.

What can we say of the Eastern enlargement, five years after?

EU enlargement has served as an anchor of stability and democracy. It served as a driver of personal freedom and economic dynamism in Europe. It has advanced the rule of law and protection of human rights. It brought about peaceful democratic change and extended the area of freedom and prosperity to almost 500 million people.

Enlargement has increased the EU's weight in the world. We are today the world's largest economy, a global heavy-weight in trade, and a regulatory power. The EU is in the lead in addressing climate change and providing development assistance. And we have substantially increased our involvement in international peace-keeping missions. In all of this, size matters.

Institutionally, fears that a Union of 27 Members would block decision-making have proved to be unfounded. However, there was need to adapt the Union in order to ensure and further improve its ability to function efficiently. This was done with the Lisbon Treaty, which has been ratified now by all the people and parliaments of Member States.

Enlargement has brought clear economic benefits to people in both old and new member states. Trade between the old and new member states grew almost threefold in less than 10 years (from €175 billion in 1999 to approximately €500 billion in 2007). And even more illustrative is the fivefold growth of trade among the new members (from less than €15 to €77 billion in the same period).

Joining the EU has also provided further opportunities for networking within the knowledge economy, starting from the Erasmus student exchanges and stretching to pan-European research cooperation. At the same time, opening our borders and extending our physical networks in transport, energy and telecommunications, equally widens the scope for exchange and economic activity.

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However, all these benefits could not be achieved without the careful management of the EU accession process. Preparations for enlargement require hard work and difficult decisions, in order to meet the Union's demanding standards in virtually all areas of public policy.

No one says that the accession of 12 states comprising 100 million new EU citizens was picture-perfect from the first second. In the few isolated cases where the criteria were not fully met, there have been tools to ensure post-accession monitoring.

However, benefits of the enlargement process were often tangible before accession, such as strengthening the rule of law, increased efficiency of public administration and judicial reforms.

So what should this accession/ enlargement mean for the EU's global role in the years to come? I would draw three main conclusions:

First of all, the EU's credibility as a global actor depends to a great extent, by our ability to shape our own neighbourhood, but also to strengthen partnerships with third countries. In this regard, I would like to mention the strategic partnership between the EU and Mexico, the only country in the world with which we have a Global Agreement, and a Strategic Partnership. This is where we can really make a difference.

Second, the EU's foreign policy must build on our existing strengths. That is, on our single market, legal order, open economy and competitiveness; on our shared values of democracy and freedom, on respect of human rights and fundamental freedoms, and on our comprehensive approach to security.

My third and final conclusion is that, of course, the EU's global role comes with global responsibilities too. This is for example illustrated by the EU' leading role and commitment in the field of climate change, where also Mexico should be commended for pursuing an ambitious programme and policies.

In brief, today Europe is truly united and free. Let us keep it that way.

Thank you for your attention. Muchas gracias!

Declaro inaugurada esta excelente exposición!