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The European Union – a committed partner for New Zealand and the Pacific

Check Against Delivery
Seul le texte prononcé fait foi
Es gilt das gesprochene Wort

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Chancellor, Members of Council, Vice Chancellor, Distinguished Guests, Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, Tena koutou, Tena koutou, Tena koutou, katoa, Good morning.

Thank you to all of you for giving me such a warm welcome here today. It is a pleasure to be here to deliver this Europa Lecture and I thank the Europe Institute of the University of Auckland for organising this event.

The University has just awarded me an honorary doctorate in law – a tribute and honour I hold in great esteem. I see this honour as a way of reflecting the close relationship between New Zealand and the EU. I feel at home in the university environment, and I must say I already feel at home in New Zealand too, though I have only been here a short time.

I am privileged to be here among you in this historic and world-leading university – the biggest in New Zealand – with its long-standing tradition of openness towards other cultures, reflecting the cosmopolitan nature of the city of Auckland with its mix of Maori, European, Pacific and Asiatic heritage.

This openness is exemplified by the European Union Centre Network, which I am pleased to see represented here today by its board.

In today's multi-polar and interconnected globe, reaching out to our closest partners is not just important, it is fundamental.

Today the European Union and the countries of the Pacific Region enjoy multifaceted partnerships. Not just politically, but economically and culturally too. Those interlocutors include the 15 Pacific Island Countries signatories of the Cotonou Agreement, four EU Overseas Countries and Territories, as well as New Zealand and Australia, whom we consider close and like-minded partners.

New Zealand clearly plays an essential role in the region. Indeed, you are uniquely positioned to foster sustainable development, economic growth, regional integration, good governance, democracy and human rights across the Pacific. The European Union endeavours and aspires to be your partner in that.

It is almost 30 years since a European Commission President has visited New Zealand. Since then, global geopolitics has dramatically shifted. From the fall of the Soviet bloc to the spread of information technology, and more recently accelerated by the financial and economic crisis since 2008. In essence, power has been dramatically rebalanced.

The new geopolitical order will no longer be divided between developed and developing nations, but between multiple poles of economic influence.

In this context, sharing values with like-minded countries will be increasingly important. In this new reality, commonality of basic principles and long term objectives will carry far more weight in foreign policy than geographical proximity.

Today I would like to expand on this by elaborating further the values and aspirations that Europe shares with the Pacific and New Zealand and to outline how they will be of critical importance in the 21st century. Important not only in further cementing our relationship, but also in shaping the new world order.

Both our regions have a tradition of being open to the world and an aspiration to seek shared and sustained prosperity for their citizens.

The financial and economic crisis that has shaken the world since 2008 has had a major impact on Europe. It has put into question many of our economic and fiscal policies and made us rethink some of our past choices.

But this does not mean Europe is in decline. Seen in its full context, our situation is quite strong. The transformation of Europe compared to 60 or even 20 or 10 years ago is extraordinary. We have not only built the world's largest single market and trading bloc, and created the world's second-leading currency; we have united a continent and stayed true to the values of our social market model. Four of our Member States belong to the G8, and we are key players in other international fora such as the G20 and UN. For these reasons we will remain a key global partner for a long time to come.

The very fact that the European Union is a grouping of 27 Member States is a signal that we are open to others, flexible and ready to adapt to the times.

We know that we must be more than the sum of our parts and that regional integration and interdependence can help us prosper amongst fierce global competition. These are premium attributes – ones we share with this great nation I might add – that are assets in a fast-changing world.

In terms of our immediate economic challenges, I want to assure you the European Union, and our Member States, are putting all our efforts into solutions. We are committed to improving not only the headline figures – we are also addressing some of the structural issues that have led some of our Member States into difficulty.

We have agreed assistance packages to the countries facing sovereign debt problems, we have set up a permanent crisis mechanism whose reserves will be larger than the IMF, we will adopt proposals to reinforce economic surveillance in the European Union, with a stronger focus on debt sustainability and more effective enforcement measures, we are strengthening our banking system, we are deepening our Single Market and we are exploring our growth-boosting potential.

Those who think that the Euro will disintegrate are not fully aware of the dynamics of our Union. Every time Europe has faced a crisis, we have moved towards deeper integration. The debate in Europe is a strong one, but it is a debate about how far to integrate, rather than whether to undo integration.

So it must be remembered that the Euro is not only a monetary construction; it is also a political project which embodies the will of Europeans to share their future. This oath is not in question; we will come out stronger from this crisis, I can promise you that.

Part of the answer to overcoming the current situation includes keeping our economy open and investing in innovation, science and technology. That is not easy in a time when fiscal consolidation is also needed in many countries, but these are the smart investments we are determined focus on in the coming years.

Here, the European Union and New Zealand share a particular success story. We are research collaborators of the highest order. With 23 organisations participating in 26 joint projects, New Zealand is the 7th largest partner in our current Research Framework Programme.

Our collaboration is already helping New Zealand to enjoy the cutting-edge of innovation, but the European Union would like to deepen the current Science and Technology Cooperation Agreement we share. I am speaking here of areas where there is a strong mutual interest, such as in food, health and climate change. And I believe this work will provide a strengthened platform for our trade and investment partnership.

With economic prosperity comes global responsibility. The European Union takes its global responsibilities very seriously.

Our partnership with the Pacific region is an example of how exercising that responsibility can be mutually beneficial. More than ever, there is scope for the two regions to work together on the global scene.

The global dimension of our partnership is reflected in our weight in international fora.

Taken together, the Pacific Island Countries, New Zealand, Australia and the EU Member States account for 42 votes in the United Nations. We all stand to gain if we use this collective weight in the right way.

It is now undeniable that countries across the globe are closely meshed together on an industrial, economic, environmental and - especially - a financial level. Today, working together for solutions is essential for each to prosper

We must all think globally. Politics must step further out of national arenas and towards international priorities and responsibilities.

Let's take the example of climate change. We have but one world, and of course citizens in both the Pacific and the EU share concerns and aspirations about tackling climate change.

Over the last 20 years in Europe, 'green' or environmental issues have become part of the political mainstream and part of people's daily lives.

The European Union has adopted the world's most stringent set of climate and energy targets to be met by 2020, known as the "20-20-20" targets:

- a reduction in EU greenhouse gas emissions of at least 20%;
- a minimum of 20% of EU energy consumption to come from renewable energy;
- and a 20% energy efficiency target.

But, I would like to commend New Zealand for being one of the first countries to join us in taking action against climate change, namely through its Emissions Trading Scheme; through its pioneering role on renewables, especially hydro and increasingly wind power; and for having championed the Global Research Alliance on agricultural greenhouse gases.

Climate doesn't have to be, and should not become, a partisan topic. And indeed in Europe it is not – the left, right and centre all acknowledge that action is possible and necessary. So I say to you that the scientific evidence is there, and the responsibility to act belongs to all of us.

This mainstreaming of environmental issues in Europe naturally takes on a global dimension, reflecting the impacts of climate change.

There is increasing understanding in Europe that the Pacific Ocean is of vital importance for the future of the planet.

If I may echo the words of the writer Arthur C. Clarke: "How inappropriate to call this planet Earth when it is clearly Ocean!"

Yesterday I met with Prime Minister Key and leaders of the Pacific Islands Forum to discuss our joint approach in the run-up to the 17th UN Climate Change Conference in Durban this year and to the UN Conference on Sustainable Development in Rio next year.

These events offer great opportunities for our two regions to join forces in support of common objectives and to shape the international debate.

This region is historically among the least responsible for causing climate change. But it is the first to suffer its consequences. And these are predicted to intensify in the coming years. The EU is a key ally of the Pacific in this regard, and is working closely with Pacific partners to ensure that a fair share of international climate funds can be allocated to this part of the world, and that they can be used in a just and effective manner. Yesterday when I met with the leaders of the nations of the Pacific islands they told me exactly what could happen to their states, and I told them that we need to hear their voice – the world must hear more of their voices – in these debates.

Climate change in this region moreover aggravates the already substantial challenges to creating sustainable economic development in certain Pacific states. We are determined to play its part in redressing this. We are, after all, the second largest donor to the Pacific and we are now bringing together our development and climate change support to maximise coherence. We are also enhancing our coordination with New Zealand and Australia to help ensure that aid is delivered in a way that is adapted to the capacities and needs of Pacific countries.

This coordination is of great importance to us given the special role that New Zealand and also Australia play as regional donors.

Development cooperation is a central pillar of the Cotonou Agreement, which governs the European Union's relations with 78 African, Caribbean and Pacific countries, including the 15 Pacific Island countries. Cotonou is the world's largest financial and political framework for North-South cooperation, amounting to a total of 720 million euro over the period 2008-2013.

But Cotonou is not just about assistance. It establishes a comprehensive relationship comprising political and trade components, as well as human rights, democratic principles, the rule of law and good governance.

These are values that the European Union actively promotes and defends both within our borders and when engaging in relations with non-EU countries.

If these core human values are not respected, the EU cannot turn a blind eye.

In the Pacific context, I must refer here to Fiji. Fiji is a long-standing partner of the European Union as a Cotonou signatory country. I remember visiting Fiji in the late 1980s as a Foreign Minister of Portugal.

However, with the 2006 coup, Fiji violated its obligations under Cotonou. As a result, the European Union was compelled to suspend 80 million euro of development assistance to Fiji.

We have, however, been able to continue providing assistance to the Fijian people to the tune of 600,000 euro per year, in particular through direct support to civil society, channelling it through the NGOs.

The European Union has pursued this approach in close consultation our partners, as part of the international community's united stance to exert pressure on the regime.

Today we see little, if any, positive developments. The repressive regime remains in place and the socio-economic situation has worsened. Against this background, there is an evident need for fresh thoughts, and to support the Fijian people while keeping pressure on the regime. And we will continue our search for a solution that returns democracy to the people of Fiji.

We believe strongly that the people of Fiji, who already suffer enough from mismanagement and oppression, should not fall victim also to side effects of our sanctions. We therefore intend to increase the targeted support we are providing to the population, without involving the authorities.

Allow me to contrast this negative example in the region with a much more positive and encouraging case. Timor-Leste, or East Timor, has overcome formidable challenges since it gained independence in 2002. Its past included underdevelopment, civil war, occupation, but also an awe-inspiring demonstration of the power of the people's will, democracy and dialogue. Now it is joining the ranks of development success stories: it is among the 10 fastest growing economies in the world and poverty has been reduced by 9% in less than three years.

This success is first and foremost due to the country's own efforts, its determination to find and pursue its path by building a strong and vibrant democracy in very difficult social and structural circumstances.

But the international community has also played a key role, including your own important contribution to peace keeping in Timor Leste. As for the European Union, we have provided more than 800 million euros in development assistance to Timor Leste since 1999.

Allow me here to add a personal note, given that I was personally involved as a Foreign Minister of my country in the efforts to give the East Timorese the right to self determination. I initiated the dialogue with the Indonesian authorities in fact. Back then the doubters said that realpolitik considerations would always prevail over human rights concerns. They were proven wrong. East Timor is the example that there are causes worth fighting for – that the cynics are not always right. That is a fact we are also witnessing and supporting with the events of the Arab Spring in 2011. There again we should keep our commitment to fight for democracy.

I would like to close this address by paying particular tribute to the European Union's relations with New Zealand itself. New Zealand is not just a unique and prosperous economy. It is also a stable democracy of long standing, a pioneer even, when it comes to progress like the right of women to vote, setting a formidable standard in terms of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Our formal relationship today is based on our Joint Declaration of 2007. This frames our relations in development policy, education, environment, trade and fisheries, and has proved very successful. It is due to be reviewed in 2012 and we will need to decide together what we should put in its place. I hope we will both aim for a strong and ambitious partnership – one we pursue bilaterally and in multilateral fora.

Moreover, your support and cooperation on specific regional issues, and with the European Union's police mission in Afghanistan, is invaluable.

That is why the European Union also stands ready to assist you whenever possible, as we did by mobilising our Civil Protection Mechanism following the Christchurch earthquake.

Let me finish by thanking you – for the past sacrifices New Zealanders have made to secure peace and freedom in Europe; for our strong alliance today; and for an even stronger partnership based on our many shared values and interests in the future. Europe and the European Union will continue to be your close and friendly partner.