

Lyon 2006 - Keynote Speeches

EIN Summer University & European Ideas Fair

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I am pleased to welcome today all those attending this EPP meeting: not just members of parliament and campaigners but also academics, company directors and all the active participants in our European society who have come to Lyon.

To me, this is a historic step forward in democratic Europe, firstly because it represents an important political trend in every European country, bringing together groups with different views who respect each other's differences,

Its strength is that it has its roots in the political, economic and social history of every Member State.

It has succeeded because it has been able to join together and unite a powerful political movement, emphasising everything we have in common.

What the EPP is managing to do in each Member State is to give concrete expression to a political ambition for the Europe of the future, in which Europe's citizens all have their place, committing themselves individually and jointly to a plan for the future.

What a long way we have come in 60 years! There have been the political founders of Europe like General De Gaulle and Konrad Adenauer. There have been treaties, such as the Treaty of Rome, then the creation of Community institutions, and the whole consolidation of major economic and monetary unification policies.

But what seems necessary now is for European citizens themselves to follow up the work done by governments and the European institutions in the democratic debate. You, ladies and gentlemen, are a living example of that. The European political debate must not be confined to specialists, experts, politicians and senior officials.

That time has passed.

It must be carried on amongst academics, company directors, representatives of every occupation, every organisation, all active participants in society. No one must be allowed to monopolise it for their own ends.

I believe that when the French voted against the referendum, it was not a rejection of Europe by a majority of French people, but a reaction to the failure to involve citizens and give them enough information.

What we need now is to bring the democratic debate alive throughout Europe, by involving citizens more in the discussion and formulation of proposals and specific projects.

I have held that view for a long time. It was at the root of my political commitment. I was one of the people who campaigned for the opening of a debate, a forum for joint proposals between the Gaullists, the Christian Democrats, the Centre, the Liberals, the reformers all over Europe.

We have made a great deal of progress, because we have learned to think and act together and always to reconcile the interests of all sides and the interests of Europe.

The same thing has happened in France: the UMP has managed to unify all points of view and the constituent parts of the presidential majority. It is the leading political force in our country and is also making a practical contribution to European integration.

The future of all our countries lies in Europe.

I. My experience of Europe in my work in the Ministries of Justice and Transport

I have had day-to-day experience in my work as a minister. Everything leads to Europe, because it is our future, our source of peace and democracy, the most effective way for us to protect our interests in an increasingly globalised world and to make sure that our world vision is taken into account. Because it is also a way to preserve our differences. It is a wonderful asset.

All the fundamental issues in the economy, industry, social security systems, the environment and society that relate to man's place in the world are European issues. But it seems to me that our citizens are not sufficiently aware of that. Too often they are kept out of debates that do, after all, concern them directly.

The rejection, dismissal and scepticism can be attributed to the lack of debate and transparency; the way issues are dealt with is too technocratic.

I have had experience of Europe as a minister in two completely different fields, with very different operating rules and decision-making processes. I would like to tell our citizens about this and let them share my experiences.

I want to talk to you about two areas: justice and transport.

These have shown me how, with the necessary pragmatism and flexibility, national and European action could be coordinated.

Justice: this is the third pillar, an intergovernmental area.

My view is that national governments should remain responsible for justice, although more cooperation is desirable.

I have come to believe, from my experience, that judicial cooperation is preferable to a European justice system.

Transport: this is a key aspect of the first pillar, a Community area.

Europe is everywhere in the transport and equipment sector: in aviation, road transport, railways, shipping, river transport, space travel, rules on social security, safety, the environment.

Sometimes Europe backs bilateral or multilateral cooperation between states; sometimes its role is that of a catalyst, reformer or harmoniser.

So in the transport sector I have observed that Europe is often ahead of the Member States. It allows them to coordinate their action by supporting them and speeding up the reforms that might have been difficult in a purely national context.

I believe that the relationship between the governments and the European institutions is complementary. But it must be organised flexibly, leaving the initiative sometimes to the national governments, sometimes to Europe.

And it has to be supported by a debate on the basic ideas and by strong political action that is equal to the challenge.

Those issues must be brought to the fore. Europe's citizens must become intellectually involved in the debate.

The politicians, the campaigners, in the EPP and the UMP have a role to play here!

We need to bring Europe alive, strip it of its technocratic image, which is not its true face.

So we have to ensure that information channels, the press, are also intellectually involved in these debates, which we must stimulate and make even more comprehensible to the general public.

There is still a great deal to do in that area as well.

II. My experience of Europe as an elected local representative and my view of Lyon and the Rhône-Alpes region in the enlarged Europe

First of all, your meeting today, bringing together national and European parliamentarians, Members of the Commission, and men and women from civil society, is a great moment for Lyon.

It is the cities and their activists that will build Europe. Lyon is a major urban centre. It fits the description of a 'European city', a concept that is very important to me, as Minister for Town Planning, because it is our common cultural and historical heritage. The idea of a European city is a reality. It creates a way of living together that enriches us, gives us quality of life throughout Europe.

As an elected local representative, I have also had the opportunity to work towards making the European city into a centre for know-how and quality of life in a resolutely and necessarily European network.

One of Europe's finest successes from a political, democratic and cultural point of view has been the willingness and ability of European cities to join together, right from the end of the Second World War, to establish new forms of governance and exchange skills. They cemented Franco-German reconciliation through student exchanges and town twinning, and later brought together the Latin and Anglo-Saxon cities of Europe. In doing so, they have developed our democracies whilst respecting their differences and promoting local democracy. By forming themselves into networks, European cities have strengthened Europe culturally, economically and politically.

But Lyon needs to aim higher in Europe.

First of all, it needs to take its rightful place in the network of major European cities. It has obviously lagged behind in that respect. We must ensure that it can give as much as it receives - culturally, socially and economically.

It must draw its inspiration from its most successful and ambitious achievements in transport, protection of the environment, schools and universities.

It must have more regard for the life and character of its neighbourhoods.

It must pay more attention to the different communities that live there.

It must rely on them.

Lyon must increasingly attract Europeans from all over Europe, as well as the immigrants that have successively moved there from other European countries and elsewhere. I am counting on those Europeans to contribute to the debate on Lyon's future. I want to hear their views.

Let us say that Lyon must start to compete. It is not enough any more for it to offer everything that other European cities offer. It also has to offer what other cities cannot.

To achieve that, we need democratic debate and discussion at local level, on the same scale as at European level. That is why I am basing my plans for Lyon on dialogue and listening and on suggestions from the local community.

I aim to lead Lyon and its region towards sustainable development, by coordinating protection of the environment and the development of transport infrastructures and housing. By promoting quality of life through culture, education, a better relationship between the generations. By emphasising the special character of its neighbourhoods. By helping local businesses and universities to develop European strategies.

A plan like that cannot be designed or implemented without a wide-ranging debate. My aim is to start a local, national and European debate here in Lyon.

That is why I am proud to see that the European People's Party has succeeded in uniting the values of Christian Democrats, Liberals and Gaullists all over Europe.

That is why I am proud that it is represented in France by the UMP, the leading political force in our country, whose creation and development I worked hard to achieve.

The UMP is the local EPP in Lyon!

This is an opportunity for Lyon, because it now brings together all the viewpoints in the presidential majority.

I shall bring them together in the same movement, uniting them but at the same time respecting their differences.

That is my aim for the future of Lyon; that is what I am banking on for Lyon. It is, of course, a natural part of the European ideal that we all share.