

Lyon 2006 - Opening Speeches

EIN Summer University and European Ideas Fair

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As you know, the EPP-ED group is the largest political group in the European Parliament bringing together some 45 national parties in the strongest political alliance in our continent. European Ideas Network is the think tank that we have created and have pleasure in sponsoring as the motor for new policy thinking on the centre-right of European politics.

We launched the network just four years ago in Oxford. Since then, thanks to the inspiration of James Elles and his colleagues - we have created something really unique. The first political think tank on a genuinely Europe-wide scale, way ahead of anything our political competitors enjoy, and well focused on real practice issues that concern our people.

We met exactly a year ago in Lisbon, in my home country, for three days in what I considered a very successful event. And I also recall that the big issues we tackled then were mostly economic reform and the opportunities of globalisation. In that same meeting, we had the pleasure of hearing an address by the former prime minister of Portugal, Aníbal Cavaco Silva, who a few weeks later became the Head of State.

Well, this year's event promises to be no less impressive. We will be over 300 participants from nearly 30 countries. So decision-makers, opinion-shapers from across Europe have a unique opportunity to be together.

I'm also delighted to see a splendid array of think tank representatives. They are joined by representatives of the 35 centre-right think tanks and political foundations across Europe, which now work together inside the EIN. They have seven task forces, which have been researching a series of topics, and they will be contributing actively to our discussion. Politicians, academics, businessmen, think tankers, journalists, political advisers, all of us here in Lyon are brought together because we believe that getting policy right really matters, whether in the European Union or in our individual countries.

As members of the European Parliament, the European Ideas Network Summer University has a special place in our hearts, because it represents a kind of crossroads between our valuable work as European parliamentarians and the advice and insight we seek from our friends in many walks of life. We value your input greatly and we take it very seriously indeed.

There are many ways in which we can evaluate change. From my point of view, one of the easiest and perhaps the most successful is to go back to the media of 10-20 years ago and see how the world was seen then, what were the prospects and difficulties. And when we realize that a decade ago ideas such as the digital economy, ageing, Islamic fundamentalism or globalisation can rarely be found in print. And two decades ago - just two decades ago - we didn't think of the internet; mobile phones were nonexistent; and the Soviet Union and Comecon were still very much alive. In contrast, other issues appeared then, twenty, ten years ago, and even

now. I'm talking about the future of Europe. Perhaps some of you recall that in the early 80s, we could read articles talking about the "eurosclerosis." Then, at the end of the 80s, early 90s, it was "fortress Europe" that was in the headlines. Well, the making of Europe was indeed at the core of many reflections, and quite rightly. Because Europe is unique, it has to continue and has to be unique, and to change continuously and adapt to new circumstances.

This is not always easy, especially for my generation. My generation, that is those who were born after World War II, have always lived in a circumstance, and with a prospect, of increased quality, increased revenue, increased security. A view that the future would always be better. I call this the 'well-being generation', which is not ready to change, even less ready to make sacrifices. Yet we have to be prepared for a very difficult future ahead in which perhaps some sacrifices will have to be asked from every one of us. Once again we are at the crossroads regarding the future of Europe and the World, and perhaps topics such as the reform of the public sector, or European governance, or job creation, or even sustainable farming, can be dealt with using existing and traditional references to left and right.

But where does the left and right approach lead us when dealing with issues such as the geographic limits of Europe, the digital economy, terrorism and security, global warming, energy security and its global management, or globalisation? And where does left and right stand when we need to communicate and revive Europe? Well, these are the questions that EIN, as a leading body, has been addressing these last few years. And the reason why it is successful is because it has addressed these difficult issues. Once again, we want to address them and we want to make sure that there is food for thought for those who have to decide and for those who have to intervene in everyday life.