

Lyon 2006 - Opening Speeches

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OPENING SPEECHES

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The subjects we are to discuss over the next three days here in the capital of the Gauls cover some of the principal concerns felt by the people of Europe.

I very much hope that the problems discussed here will become the focus of national debate in France. My country is going to have to be very creative and show clear political determination over the next two years.

As we are all aware, two major elections are to be held next spring, in which the people of France will decide the political fate of our country.

The challenge for our political family is that, with your help, we need to show that our values, manifesto and promises are the response that is needed not just to the fears of some voters, but even more importantly to the challenges of the future.

France will also take over the Presidency of the European Union in the second half of 2008, and this responsibility will call for political courage and daring. In a century that began on 11 September 2001, we can no longer afford to leave Europe in the position it has occupied for many long decades, as an economic giant, but a political dwarf.

Today the aspirations of the people of Europe and the expectations of the world around it are converging. Our fellow citizens are calling for Europe to play a greater role in defence and security, in foreign policy, in energy and the environment. Our partners - whether major powers like the USA, India, Japan or China, or groups of weaker countries - expect the European Union to do more on the international stage. These two expectations, from our own democratic grassroots and from the outside world, inevitably lead us to one conclusion: that the EU simply has to modernise.

First of all, we have to talk about the EU's institutional set-up. The Treaty which defines our current structure does not include the necessary guarantees or allow the necessary adjustments to be made for the changes that are now required. We are going to need some sort of new Treaty which enshrines the fundamental advances proposed in the draft Constitution, on which there is broad consensus. The Nice Treaty, which maintains the dilemma between the current institutional capacity and the growing number of Member States, does not give us what we need to be more efficient, transparent and democratic.

Secondly, the Union is in need of economic reform: greater competitiveness requires closer coordination of European policies.

We need more dialogue with the European Central Bank and harmonisation in a number of sectors in order to counter the effects of social dumping, for example.

Likewise, the single market must be completed in order to enable our industry, agriculture and services to reap the full benefit of the freedoms guaranteed by the Treaties.

The euro, the economic symbol of Europe's power, must continue to be a major objective for those that have not yet joined it.

Even more importantly, the EU budget reform, which the national parliaments and the European Parliament are already preparing for and whose new look France will be delivering in 2008, will need to establish a clear economic line for meeting specific targets. The confusion of different types of competences and finances needs to be clarified.

Lastly, and above all, if the EU is to be a global player and if we want to fulfil our own hopes and other people's expectations, Europe must have plans and must be guided by a strong, clear and comprehensive political will.

We must encourage our fellow citizens to reclaim ownership of Europe.

EU was created originally created in order to ensure that war would never again destroy peace in Europe, and the major political undertakings given were sealed by commerce trade. In a few months' time we will all be proud to celebrate 50 years of progress in Europe on the anniversary of the Treaty of Rome.

Beyond Europe's elective affinities, those solidarities which have enabled us to forge a number of common policies over the last half a century, what we need today is to federate our nations and our leaders around an ambitious political agenda.

Our European values, the common thread which has always perpetuated the spirit of the founding fathers and guided those who have followed in their tracks, must be the glue which binds a new European pact, a new leap of the imagination.

Our political family must be at the forefront of this thinking and this policy.