

Speech by the Prime Minister of the Netherlands, dr. Jan Peter Balkenende, at the Centre for European Studies of J. Nehru University, New Delhi, India, 20 January 2006

EU and India: Unity in diversity

Introduction

Ladies and gentlemen,

I am delighted to be your guest today and to spend the next hour with you. Getting to know your beautiful country is a fascinating experience. Both in Bangalore and here in New Delhi I have been struck by people's openness and warm interest. People are keen to learn from one another. And that makes me feel at home.

I find it stimulating to be amongst students. Not only as an ex-professor, but also as a politician. You represent the new generation and it is interesting to exchange ideas with you.

As the Prime Minister of a European country, it is meaningful to be visiting a Centre for European Studies here in New Delhi – ten thousand kilometres from home.

I am pleased that you are interested in Europe. And I am pleased to have this opportunity to tell you something about the guiding principles behind European cooperation and its importance for the twenty-first century. I would also like to look at the relationship between the European Union and India, which is rapidly gaining importance.

Historical outline

Let me begin by telling you something about my own country: the Netherlands. It has many lakes, rivers and canals. It is densely populated. And it is in the northwest of Europe.

The Netherlands has always been a trading nation. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries Dutch ships were already sailing the seas in search of new markets. We had close contacts with many countries, including India. Ten thousand Indian

weavers, for example, did good business with the Dutch. Even today, the Netherlands is the world's sixth biggest exporter and we still have close economic ties with India.

For many centuries, the Netherlands has also been a free country. People from all over the world have settled there. So our society is very diverse. With its many cultures and religions, the Netherlands is rather like India on a smaller scale.

It has long been a Christian country, with a prominent Jewish community. Now it has a growing Muslim community. Ten per cent of our population is Muslim. A well-integrated Hindu community adds to our cultural diversity.

The Netherlands has been washed by the waves of European history. During the Second World War, it was occupied for five years and many people lost their lives. That terrible period has left deep scars.

Why am I telling you all this? To explain why the Netherlands has firmly supported post-war European integration from the very beginning. Economic openness, freedom and security are vital for a country like the Netherlands. But - as we have experienced at first hand - the conditions needed can only be created in partnership with other countries. That is why our country was one of the six founding fathers of the European Union.

European cooperation began in the late 1940s.

At that time, Europe was slowly recovering from the devastation of the Second World War.

A survey of European history reveals a whole range of splendid achievements in art, culture, philosophy and science. But also an endless series of bloody wars and conflicts. Again and again the peoples of Europe turned to violence to impose their will on others.

The historic and heroic achievement of the founders of the European Union is that they put an end to that. For sixty years, a large and growing part of Europe has experienced peace and prosperity.

How was this done? The key has been to *link* economics and politics.

It all started on a very small scale. In May 1950 the French foreign minister, Robert Schuman, presented a plan to unite the coal and steel industries of Western Europe under a single, independent, supranational body. At that time you needed coal and steel to wage war. Linking these industries together would make it more difficult to start a war.

Six countries took part: France, Germany, Italy, Belgium, Luxembourg and the Netherlands. In doing so, they transferred a small part of their sovereignty to a supranational organisation.

A small step, which later proved to be a giant leap.

This model worked so well that countries soon wanted to work together in other areas. The aim was to create a common market for goods, and later for services, capital and people as well. In 1957 the European Economic Community was formed, the forerunner of the European Union.

Cooperation steadily intensified. In 1979 the people of Europe elected a European Parliament for the first time. Since 1995 European citizens have been able to travel freely throughout Europe. In 2002 a single currency was introduced. In 2003 the member states adopted a common security strategy. I shall say more about this later. The European family has expanded considerably. Of historic importance was the accession of ten countries in Central and Eastern Europe on the first of May 2004. Fifteen years earlier, many of these countries were still living in the grip of the Soviet Union.

Today, the European Union has 25 member states. And a population of 450 million people. It accounts for a quarter of the world's GNP and plays a constructive role on the world stage.

What has been achieved?

Ladies and gentlemen, the European project is unique in world history. Never before have so many countries joined together peacefully and of their own free will in a way that benefits them all. The European Union does not impose its values on others through force. Instead it seduces them to join.

European cooperation brings Europeans more prosperity, more jobs, more freedom, more security, more legal certainty and more opportunities to live their own lives. I think it is fair to call European integration a success story. After joining the EU, poor countries like Ireland and Spain, developed within a few decades into powerful

economies. On a continent once divided, a framework has been created in which countries can work together constructively.

The EU is a success. That is why so many countries want to join it. But this, in turn, has revived the debate on where its borders lie. A debate that is in full swing.

There is one key lesson that we have drawn from more than half a century of European cooperation. To be successful, you have to do certain things together.

That was true in 1950. And it is even more true today – at a time of rapid globalisation.

- We can only combat terrorism and international crime by joining forces.
- We can only secure jobs and prosperity through economic cooperation and by making rules that create the same opportunities for all.
- We can only avoid the dangers of climate change and rising sea levels by taking joint action.
- We can only tackle air and water pollution by acting together. To give one example: most air pollution in the Netherlands comes from neighbouring countries. And some of the air pollution that we produce ends up elsewhere. Countries cannot solve this problem on their own.

Unity in diversity

The European Union has achieved major successes. But there is also another side to the story. It's important to understand that there are great differences between the member states. Differences in culture, prosperity, form of government and the role of religion. Finland is very different from Italy. Poland is very different from the United Kingdom.

There is also a high level of diversity within European countries. I've already mentioned the many different cultures and religions in the Netherlands. These differences sometimes go hand in hand with tensions.

You cannot expect 450 million Europeans in 25 different countries with 20 different languages to feel closely connected with one another. That takes time. What's more, many people are afraid that the Union has too much influence over their daily lives. Many have difficulty identifying with an expanding European Union.

These factors may undermine the European Union from within. That is why we Europeans are giving careful thought to what binds us.

In the second half of 2004 – when I was President of the European Council – I set up a series of international conferences which focused on this theme.

It became very clear that the European Union, despite all its diversity, has one foundation. That foundation consists of a set of common values: liberty, equality, respect for human rights, democracy and solidarity.

These values nourish diversity and enable it to flourish. The essence of the European Union is unity in diversity.

Amitai Etzioni compares it to a mosaic, with many different colours within a single frame.

Our shared values are not something we can take for granted. They are under attack from small groups of radicals who abuse their faith to terrorise others and spread hatred. We have experienced this in the Netherlands. You have probably heard about the murder of the Amsterdam filmmaker Theo van Gogh by a young Muslim extremist who didn't agree with his ideas.

It is not religion that is the threat. The problem is not religion. It is small groups using religion as a pretext for terror.

A number of guidelines for action emerged from the conferences we held in the Netherlands.

- One: European governments and the European Union must take a firm stand against any individuals or groups who attack our rights and the values on which they are based.
- Two: We must strengthen the vital role of education in transmitting values and improve mobility in Europe. People, ideas and knowledge are still not circulating enough.
- Three: there is still an urgent need to 'communicate Europe' to our citizens.

All these issues are currently high on the European agenda.

The great European Bronislaw Geremek once said: 'We have Europe. Now we need Europeans.' We have learned that this takes time.

As you know, in 2004 EU heads of government signed a constitutional treaty. All the member states had to ratify it before it could enter into force. In some countries the population was asked to vote in a referendum. The majority of people in both France

and the Netherlands rejected the treaty. My European counterparts and I then decided to take time out. In June we will discuss how to proceed.

Some people have concluded from the French and Dutch 'no' votes that European integration has come to a standstill. Personally, I don't believe that at all. The majority of Europeans – and this includes the no-voters – support European integration. Polls have shown that, in many areas, EU citizens want even closer cooperation than their governments are ready for. For instance, in the fight against international terrorism. There is no room for doubt: even without a constitution the EU will continue to exist and seek solutions that serve the interests of its own people and the rest of the world. Fortunately we are still managing to make progress on key issues. Last year, for instance, we agreed on the European budget for the next seven years and on beginning accession talks with Turkey.

Subsidiarity

Ladies and gentlemen, unity in diversity typically raises the question: 'What should we do separately and what should we do together?' There is an ongoing debate in the European Union on where the boundary lies between the responsibilities of the Union and those of the member states.

The European Union consists of 25 independent countries. They have adopted common European legislation and transferred parts of their sovereignty to supranational institutions.

But the European Union is no 'superstate'. It is based on the principle of subsidiarity. This means that decisions are taken at the nearest possible level of government to the public. Wherever possible at local or national level. And only at international level when the scale of the problem calls for joint action.

If effective action is possible at local or national level, the European Union does not need to be involved. It only needs to act if a transnational approach offers the sole solution.

So the European Union does not concern itself with the content of education, social security and tax policy.

But it does deal with state aid to businesses and environmental standards for cars. In a common market, these issues transcend national boundaries.

The Union also applies the subsidiarity principle in its contacts with other countries. Our basic premise is that all the countries of the world are independent and equal. But we also take the view that if we can only resolve issues collectively, we must tackle them collectively too. That is 'the European way'. And one which we also put into practice in our relations with India – one of our most important international partners.

The EU in the world

Europe is growing up. It wants to play a role on the world stage that matches its economic status, its knowledge and experience, and its ambitions as a community of values. We have something to offer the world. Look at how the European Union has achieved and spread stability and prosperity over the last fifty years.

Does the European Union want to become the next superpower? No, that is not our aim. We are convinced that no superpower can solve global problems alone. Poverty, climate change, energy shortages, the threat of terrorism, hatred between cultures – all these issues demand constructive cooperation on a global scale. The European Union wants to continue playing a leading role: setting the pace, mediating, inspiring and facilitating.

That is why we emphasise effective multilateralism.

The key threats of our time are terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, in combination with bad governance and social injustice in many countries.

The European security strategy is very clear. We must not shy away from military force when necessary. But none of the new threats can be tackled by purely military means. More must be done to make the world truly secure. We must prevent conflict, promote the spread of good governance, foster democracy and economic reform, and strengthen ties within international organisations.

The world's major powers bear a heavy responsibility. These powers include the EU and India. Your country accounts for a sixth of the world population. It is the biggest democracy in the world and one of the fastest growing economies. Solutions to global problems are impossible without India.

The relationship between the EU and India has grown stronger and stronger over the past ten years. Political contacts are very close.

We see India as a strong partner that works on the basis of the same values as we do: democracy, freedom, respect for human dignity and solidarity. Europe greatly admires the way this very large country has succeeded in uniting so many different cultural groups in one democratic system. It has done so with ups and downs for the past sixty years. That makes us feel close. It reminds us of our own history.

Our economic ties, too, are growing stronger year by year. The European Union is India's biggest trade and investment partner.

Close cooperation between the EU and India is crucial. It is with good reason that the European Union has concluded a strategic partnership with India. The central question that we are addressing is: 'How can we contribute to the development of a secure and just world order that offers sufficient opportunities for all?'

It is not true that a bipolar world is emerging in which everything revolves around the US and China. The world will no longer allow itself to be split into two camps.

Our world must be a multilateral world. A world in which there is plenty of room for diversity. In which people and countries are allowed to have their own character. In which cultural and religious differences are seen as something to be cherished.

But also a world in which we join forces to tackle problems that we cannot solve by ourselves. A world in which we learn from one another. In which there is respect for valuable traditions, but also room for dynamic change.

Ladies and gentlemen, that is the kind of world that the European Union wants to work towards – in partnership with India and other countries. Nobody is perfect, but by working together we can make a real difference.

I have told you something about 'the European way'. I am confident that we can make one another stronger. Despite all our differences, we are one in our conviction that we cannot do without each other.

Thank you.