

Kommissarin Danuta Hübner
Europa-Forum Wachau, Stift Göttweig, Juni 2, 2007

Dear Hosts and Excellencies!
Ladies and Gentlemen!
Dear Friends!

It is indeed for me a great pleasure to be here with you today. I must privately admit that I have been looking at Stift Göttweig for decades from the road when I was going from Poland to Tyrol for skiing and I was always looking at this beautiful place and I never thought that I'll come here, I will be given the opportunity to come here as a member of the European Commission, Commissioner of the Union, that is indeed a great, great pleasure.

Especially that the topic you have selected for this year's Europa-Forum Wachau is very close to my heart and I believe that we would all agree that Europe is also about emotion, it is about passion, it is also about compassion and that is why I think it is worth from time to time to talk about issues which are important, which are close not only to our minds but also to our hearts.

This year we celebrate 50 years of the signing of the Treaty of Rome and in this room there are many of us who didn't have the chance to be in Rome 50 years ago, but who have today the right to celebrate the 50 years of the European Integration. Today 50 years later we clearly have a vast area of peace and stability in Europe across the continent. We have democracy very firmly anchored throughout Europe. The European Community of six in 1957 has become a Union of 27. It is surely a historic triumph, and in fact I believe that this enlargement of the European Union from six to 27 is the most successful example of peaceful political change mankind has ever witnessed. Normally we have been enlarging our territories using slightly different instrument.

I also think that when celebrating achievements of the 50 years of integration we confirm our commitment to come on European values. Of course we have the Common Market, Common Market which has become the

single market with 490 million consumers, we have common currency already in thirteen and with Cyprus joining next year we will be 15, Slovakia is also nearly knocking at the door. All that contributes to our prosperity. The Schengen-Agreement was already mentioned. We are indeed preparing to extend it, but I can insure Dr. Pröll that the Commission is working with member states to make sure that this will be a real extension of security and safety, a territory without adding to the risks.

Also in the global scene and that was, I think, elaborated by Minister Ursula Plassnik, the Union has become an important actor in global politics, but also we are the biggest world trade power, which we sometimes forget.

But ahead of us are many challenges and also many opportunities, and challenges are certainly generated by globalisation, they are generated by demographic processes, by aging population of Europe. The list that we normally present in those days of challenges is certainly not complete, there will be many new coming in the years ahead of us, but it is also sometimes good, I think, to realize that even as the Union of 27 we are still a small continent. It is enough to look at the map or at the globe. Both, in terms of surface and of population, in the years to come our relative size will be shrinking, because we know that there are a lot of emerging competitors who grow much faster, in terms of GDP-growth, but also whose population grows much faster than ours.

The number and the weight of all those problems whose solutions require a Europe-wide response, will only grow in the future. In the Union of 27 member-states we have 268 regions; some of them are bigger than Niederösterreich, but there are many who are much smaller than Niederösterreich. And the distance between the poorest and the richest remains significant across the continent and recently this is mostly due to the fact that the last enlargement has brought to the Union a club of much poorer countries and a group of much poorer regions than on average in the Union.

Today we still have 70 regions whose level of development is below 75 % of the EU-average, but more than half of those 70 regions are in the new member states. There are many regions at this level of development

still in the EU-15. But the catching-up process is awkward, we have just published this week in Brussels, we had the launching of the Cohesion-Report which clearly shows that catching-up on convergence across Europe is awkwarding the high growth. Fortunately or unfortunately, I don't know, the high growth in the new member states is mainly driven by the productivity growth. We have a lot of cases, where this high growth produces no new jobs and if you want to be serious on Lisbon-Agenda, and I think we are committed to Lisbon-Agenda, we will have to produce, to generate across the Union in the years to come 24 million jobs to reach this target which we have for ourselves of 70 % of employment rate. We must also increase the innovative capacities of Europe even though, even in Austria we have regions like Steiermark, that have the research to the GDP-level of the research much higher than on average in Europe.

The new challenges must be taken seriously and many of them Mrs. Minister mentioned, certainly I would add maybe a few words on demography because sometimes we attend to forget that round 2020 the population of the European Union will start to decline. Already today we are at a level close to zero, with 0.1 % of the population growth and 86 % of Europe's population growth is due to migration today. We have regions, many of them, 85 regions that today experience, already today experience absolute population decline. Most of them are in the new member states, but you have also reasons like this in the EU-15 and not only in Germany.

Also the aging of the population demography means that the so-called old-age dependency-rate is deteriorating in Europe. We have in several member-states, mostly in the EU-15, we have a situation, where we have two people in employment for every people that is above retirement-age, which is quite a challenge, and this is deteriorating not improving. On all those challenges the globalisation is producing all those competitive pressures that come from emerging economies, from the global world. We have a lot of discussions in Europe. But, again, when you look at some national and regional level, we can see that we have tens of regions with still very strong concentration on those industries within which the competition coming from the newly emerging powers in the world economy where there is a strong concentration of this type of industries.

Also the climate-change which was mentioned. Today at several times it is a challenge for Europe. It is one of those challenges with which we have to cope through acting together. But it is important to see the asymmetric impacts of climate-change. It is not even across Europe, and we have territories in Europe which are much more heavily at risk coming from plagues, the analysis show that since the 60ies in fact, every decade we had an increase with the number of floods and there is no reason to expect that it will not continue like this in the years to come. So the size, the number of the population, the number of European citizens that live in areas at high risk of flooding is relatively high. I think today there is no need to convince anybody to face many of those challenges. We need joint actions, and the climate change is certainly such an area, where Europe needs joint action to be efficient.

But what is encouraging is that it was the EU, it was the European member-states that made us key-player in Kyoto-Protocoll negotiations. It was the combined strength of the member states and the Union leadership that secured the final agreement and now we have made as you know additional commitment on behalf of the European Union to cut emissions by at least 20 % by 2020 and Europe is prepared to go further provided others will join us. And this is not that clear today. Also energy, which was mentioned is a clear Europe-wide challenge and I know that for Austria that is a particular challenge in the area. Working together we will be better able to cope with all the aspects of this challenge with higher prices, we will be able also to renew and rationalize our infrastructure to reduce our dependency on imported hydro-carbons.

Through a joint effort we can also increase our energy efficiency in a more substantial way. We plan to triple our renewable energy used by 2010. What is important is that only if we join, if we pull resources, we can also increase energy research budget and we plan to do it by 50 % before 2020.

And again, if you look from the global perspective because Mrs. Minister was talking about the word “who is needing Europe” and indeed if you even just look on climate or on energy you can clearly see that we are taking as a Union a clear global lead in this essential areas.

These are just a few examples of that the European Union acting together can be the right answer in the decades to come. And what is, I think, important and here I would like to refer to what Dr. Pröll was saying, that in the Berlin-declaration in March this year we, the Union, acknowledged the importance of regional and local authorities and also the need for sharing tasks and between all the levels of governance in Europe – the Committee level, the national, the regional and the local level.

Within, let me say, as I am the Commissioner indeed for the regional policy in Europe, that within the frame of Co-European regional policy we have been involving partners at local and regional level in the design and implementation of European policies for decades now, and the ownership that naturally results from this direct involvement of the people greatly increases the effectiveness of what we do, because I think people, European citizens, they want to feel ownership of European policies, I think, they want to feel responsibility for them. They don't want to take instructions as you said. I think, we are not starting from scratch – we are in this mood, in this process, and actually Niederösterreich is an excellent example for this. The quality of your participation in European regional policy is highly appreciated but you have the presence of Europe here, because by the end of 2006 in this current financial period 2000–2006 we had in Niederösterreich nearly 1800 projects which were run together, which were supported also by Europe within the Austrian program and this led to very sensible and visible investments, what is, I think, the very exceptional, I would say, still in Europe, in Niederösterreich is something we called not very nicely the leverage effect, because here always the small amounts of funds that come from European budget you are extremely efficiently attracting other financing and you convert money that comes from the EU-budget into much bigger investment in the period 2000–2006. The ratio between the general value of investment which was triggered by a contribution from European Union policies was like 3 : 1, but the project, the program for the 2007–2013 in Niederösterreich is envisaging this ratio the level of 6 : 1. This is one of what we say of the value of the European presence at the regional level because it increases the attractiveness of the local and regional community. I am, let me remain maybe at the Niederösterreich-level for a second, I would like to say that we are very happy that we will continue the corporation with you here and

I am pleased to say to those who don't know this, that Austria was among the first four member states who have completed the negotiations of the national programs and it absolutely differs from member states for whom the Commission adopted the operational regional program. On the force of May we had this big event in Hof in Bavaria, that was very visible and I think we all were very proud of this.

The most important are the targets, very ambitious targets, that we see here in this region for the years to come. There is a plan, in fact, to create 1.800 new jobs with the involvements of European policy and more than 10 % of those will be in the sector that you all like to invest in, which is the research and technology development-sector. There will be, there is a plan in Niederösterreich to connect additional 10.000 citizens to broadband-internet. There is an intention here also to invest quite heavy in the renewable energy, in the decrease of the gaz-emissions. So, these are all priorities which are European priorities, which are Austrian government priorities and which are also priorities here in Niederösterreich.

This is certainly a very ambitious program, but knowing your commitment to turn Niederösterreich into a model region with strategic competence with creativity I am sure you will succeed.

Let me just on this line say that I am personally convinced of the importance of well-function in multi-level governance in the European Union, allowing partners at all levels to bring their expertise, to bring the commitments to the process of carrying out the European policies in a wide range of those policies, in a wide range of the areas.

I think, I agree with you that in doing so, taking Europe down also through the involvement of the people we can better contribute to make the Union more efficient, more transparent, more democratic and this is in fact what this meeting today is about, in fact, transparency and democracy in Europe.

I started my speech by referring to the achievements of the 50 years of European integration and I think we indeed have a good reason to celebrate this anniversary but I agree with what was said already here, that what really matters today – is the future, the future of European inte-

gration. Today our short-term objective is to give, the Union is to give the European citizens a new legal basis, a new treaty to be a place, to be put in place before the next parliamentary elections in 2009, so that we can have those elections and during those elections we can discuss really the Europe, that we can have on the basis of the new legal framework.

So the months to come will be indeed very important for the European Union and I am convinced that the declaration of Berlin has brought us closer to the new treaty-settlement but certainly we are not yet there, the European Council in June must be the next decisive step in this process and I trust that especially may be coming from Poland I trust that all our member-states those who ratify this Treaty among which Austria is, those whose citizens decided to say “no” to this Treaty and also those who have frozen this process of ratification, I hope that they will all find themselves enough courage but also enough responsibility to complete this process. I think this will be a firm, a strong confirmation of the unity, of the enlarged European Union. If I look for the most important sentences today that we need a thinking Europe, the sentence will be “just do it” and I hope that we will make it this time.

Thank you very much.