

YOUTH SUMMIT FOR TOMORROW'S EUROPE

OPENING CEREMONY

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UNIVERSITY ROME TRE



SPEECH

BY

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Ladies and Gentleman!

Buongiorno a tutti!

It is really a great pleasure and an honor to be here with you, the young citizens of Europe, at the opening of this Summit which will allow you to express your views, concerns and hopes for the future of our continent.

Allow me just to take a minute to thank the Prime Minister, Mr. Romano Prodi, for welcoming the young people of Europe to this country, as well as my gratitude to the Rector of University Roma Tre for providing this beautiful venue and very friendly reception.

When I received the invitation to attend the Youth Summit, I was very pleased to see, first, that the young people of Europe had decided to celebrate the 50th Anniversary of the founding treaties of the European Union by getting together to contribute to the development of a more structured dialogue between European Institutions and civil society, and, second, that they were to do so at such a symbolic moment and in this historical city.

After all, Rome is the place where 50 years ago the treaties establishing the European Economic Community and EURATOM were signed by the representatives of France, Germany, Italy, Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg.

The project started with six Member States but the vision was always of uniting the whole continent. With a European Union now of 27 Member States the vision of a united Europe is achieved and it is perhaps the greatest accomplishment of the past 50 years.

Young people of Europe! - seeing so many of you gathered here today I am confident that the vision and aspirations that were laid down by the founding fathers 50 years ago are in good hands and that the idea of a united Europe is as strong as ever.

The last 50 years have brought peace, stability and prosperity to our continent and opportunities to young people that previous generations did not enjoy.

These benefits and opportunities are now taken to be so much for granted that it is important to remind ourselves from time to time that they were anything but commonplace in the pre-1957 history of this continent.

However, the world is changing and changing fast and the European Union faces new challenges that must be addressed. They include the fate of the Constitutional Treaty, questions about security, climate change and problems concerning our environment social justice issues and access to education,.

Young people expect these issues to be addressed responsibly by politicians at all levels. This includes the European Union without which solutions to many of these challenges cannot be found.

However, the European Union cannot function effectively if it is remote from, and without the support of, the citizens it serves. It needs the engagement of civil society. We have to involve, therefore, you - European youth and youth organisations - more in the ongoing debate on the future of the European Union.

Your voice needs to be heard in the corridors and the meeting rooms of policy makers.

For in the end, you will be the ones who will inherit this continent so it is up to you to shape its future. We need your active participation in the European Union's political and democratic life.

We need you to build on and develop a common European identity.

The European Union is not merely its institutions or rules and protocols. The European Union is a union of its citizens. And if we want the citizens to understand and feel this we must engage with them in the decision-making processes, we must reach out to them at all levels and show by our actions that a union that has support of its people is a strong Union.

I have no doubt that the delegates of this first ever Youth Summit here in Rome will continue the good work they already began in the Youth Convention two years ago, the January 2007 pre-Summit in Brussels and the follow-up national debates.

I especially want to stress here the importance of bringing into the debate the aspect of diversity and cultural exchange. These past meetings have been a great example of intercultural discourse and dialogue among young people from the 27 Member States, showing us how to be 'united in diversity'. This is one of the cornerstones of the European Union.

Young citizens of Europe, you face, I know, a long day today which will continue into the evening with a programme of celebrations to be held in universities in

Rome. Colleagues of mine from the European Parliament will be joining you at these events.

Tomorrow, you hand over your Declaration to the European Institutions. It will be a text that we in the European Parliament will take very seriously and study very closely. I am sure we will not be disappointed.

Let me wish you a successful and enjoyable stay here in Rome.

Good luck and bon travail!

Thank you very much.