

**“Enlarged EU: Moving Towards a Political Union.”  
Address of H.E. Aleksander Kwaśniewski,  
President of the Republic of Poland,  
Delivered at the Stockholm School of Economics  
Stockholm, 10 May 2001**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am enormously pleased to speak to you hours after the Day of Europe was celebrated across the continent. There is some magic about this timing. In the first days of May, the Second World War ended with the defeat of the worst evil our European soil has ever seen. Five years later, Robert Schuman presented a plan we consider the founding stone of European integration. A year ago, Minister Joschka Fischer lay before us his personal blueprint for a federal European Union. Placing those three events side-by-side will convince the most hardened sceptic how far we have travelled in these 56 years. It is not only those who remember the apocalyptic days of the war that will have little doubt about this distance. And yet euro-enthusiasm is not the order of the day. East and west, north and south of the European Union, the integration project is up for critical debate.

There are good reasons for encouraging this creative ferment. There are eight months to go before the euro notes and coins are to be used for the first time in the euro-zone. There are fourteen months to go before the envisaged date of closing negotiations with the most advanced future new members. There are twenty months to go before the European Union will have at its disposal a 60 thousand-strong rapid reaction force. All these are momentous developments that would make the founding fathers most proud of their heritage. At the same time, the European Union has been better at forging ahead with new projects, than at selling them to the publics. The blame cannot be put on the failings of political marketing alone. The European Union is not and will not be an easily sellable product. There are several reasons for this but perhaps the most important one is that European integration is a constant search for the middle ground. It doesn't overstep what some members perceive as the red line. Hence it almost

naturally breeds disappointment. The Treaty of Nice is a good example of that. As a result, we are still searching for a magic formula to make our citizens embrace the European Union the way they once embraced the nation-state, that is as a normal arena of political discourse.

The post-Nice discussion began before the ink dried under the new Treaty. The scale of the debate is a new phenomenon and one which we should welcome very strongly. What is also new is that the discussion is solely devoted to governance. We are not talking of new projects. The ones on the agenda – like the monetary union, enlargement or security and defence policy - are challenging enough. We are discussing the way the European Union is governed and the way citizens can make an impact. I am confident that this discussion will lead to a better functioning and better understood European Union. Each of the four main areas to be discussed are likely to carry much weight.

The Charter of Fundamental Rights is a unique document in the history of the European Union. It goes a long way towards defining values to which member states are committed. It strengthens the position of the EU as a normative community. All that is extremely important. Gone are the days in which we could have spoken of European integration in strictly economic terms. We are now in the political phase of integration. The European Union needs to be firmly anchored on a reservoir of values to which all member states pay heed. It needs to give protection to the rights of individual Europeans. After all they are the citizens of the European Union. Having said that, there is much distance to cover before the Charter can become a preamble to a future European constitution. We should not make shortcuts only because it would be useful from the point of view of winning over the public opinion. Writing a Constitution cannot be merely a public relations exercise. Our societies need to understand the rules of the game in the European Union. They need to be able to read through the treaties and understand the various foci of responsibility. But calling this exercise a constitutional process will do us all harm in the longer term.

Poland takes much pride from the fact that it tabled Europe's first constitution on 3 May 1791, four months before its French equivalent. It was a modern document which in 11 articles removed all the abuses of the *ancien regime*, offered citizenship rights to the bourgeoisie and extended a system of general law to the peasants. Edmund Burke wrote of the Polish constitution that it was probably the purest form of the public good that the human kind had ever taken share of. European press called it a miracle. The 210 years of Poland's constitutional history is an obligation. The Supreme Act is of more than order-inducing character. The term constitution is not sacrosanct but it is also not to be devalued. The constitutional process is not a mere drafting exercise. Good drafts of the European Constitution have been produced already but it does not make them a Constitution.

I am saying all that not to sound discouraging. In my view, we will have a European Constitution at some point in the future. We will need to have a constitution as the European Union becomes more political in nature. However, it has to be a proper constitution – one to which all the member states would subscribe with a good deal of conviction. Enhanced co-operation is not the way to proceed on constitutional matters. Let me suggest to you what I think are the necessary steps forward. In my view, we should set in motion a proper constitutional process although without imposing any deadlines as to when the final product will be due. This would have to be a three-tier process. The most fundamental debate is to take place in member-states, both current and future ones, on the desirability of a European constitution and its compatibility with the countries' own Supreme Laws. This role is best to be fulfilled by parliamentary constitutional committees. Chairmen of parliamentary constitutional committees should then consult between each other on regular basis at the European level. They should also arrive at an agreement concerning the main body of the text. Both of these tiers should be as open as possible to interaction with expert circles, political parties and the wider public. The final stage would be the convening of an intergovernmental conference to resolve the outstanding disagreements and enact the constitutional treaty. The proposal which I have just outlined originates in the belief that no constitutional development at the European level is possible without adequate

democratic legitimacy. And the latter can only be provided by national parliaments. This proposal would add another layer to the ongoing post-Nice debate without replacing any items which already have a firm place on the agenda.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Every constitutional process is in its very essence a deeply political one. This is also very much what the European Union needs nowadays. Following decades of the primacy of economic issues, we are at the stage when politics should regain lost ground. Not to intervene but to lead and to account for what the EU is up to. Let me draw your attention at this point to the divergence of vision and reality which was observed over the course of last year. On the one hand we had the grandiose pronouncements as to what the EU should look like some twenty years from now. On the other, as if to get the balance right, there was much fierce debate over realpolitik issues: number of votes in the Council and seats in the parliament. As a result we are facing a paradox of the staunchest supporters of further integration calling for the rejection of the Treaty of Nice on the grounds that it doesn't make a sufficient progress. I do not share the reasons for this frustration. Arguments over the levers of power take place everywhere, from the locality, through the national level, up until the European one. This is nothing unusual in a democracy. At the same time, the EU cannot afford too many squabbles because it is such a fragile structure politically. The European Council does not meet very often and when it meets it should provide leadership. This is what European citizens expect. What they also expect is to have an impact. There is one answer to these expectations and that is forging a political union.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Candidate states face a challenge that often escapes the attention of EU decision-makers. It is trying to explain European politics to our publics. It is trying to ensure that the parliaments are more than mere voting machines, taking in EU legislation without much of a debate. It is trying to prevent importing a democratic deficit from the European level. Therefore the debate on the future of Europe is a timely one. It attracts much attention from the side of the public. The means and the ways to reach a

political union should in my view be one of the subjects for discussion. Such a discussion would look at the nerves of policy-making in the European Union. It would get down to the essence of the democratic mandate for decisions taken in Brussels.

The starting point for discussion of the political union lies in the member states themselves, old and new. They will in my view remain the primary source of legitimacy of European integration in the foreseeable future. Obviously nation-states themselves are not there from time immemorial. They once also had to be encouraged. But this does not mean they will soon have to give way to another form of statehood, a supranational one. If some of us are visionary enough to foresee it in twenty years time, I would not object - provided a number of transitional phases take place and provided this is what our people want. Whether we have a federation of European nation-states in twenty years time or not will depend on a number of factors. Above all, however, it will depend on the extent to which we will foster political unity at the EU level. In my view, the way to achieve that is threefold.

First of all, we need to start with the nation-state and bring European policies closer home. European issues are generally not qualitatively different from domestic issues. We should therefore not draw a rigid distinction between the EU-level and the home territory. Political debate and rivalry needs to cover both the domains. Otherwise, politicians and the public will disengage. This effort has to be made by all: by political parties, by governments and parliaments. Already today, there are countries – and Sweden is a prime example - where consultations between the government and the parliament on EU issues is a standard practice. This is the right way to proceed. There cannot be democracy at the European level before EU policy is not debated thoroughly by the nation-states.

Secondly, more needs to be done to instil political competition at the EU level. Experience of our democratic nation-states should certainly offer guidance but it cannot be the sole source of inspiration. We simply cannot model the European Union after all that is best in our own backyards. We are not at the stage of nation formation.

We cannot give and take freely. In December last year, I called for bridging of the divide between advocates of the intergovernmental and the community method. After the experience of Nice, I am still confident that governments should offer leadership and the community institutions should be given a larger role in governance. There is too much subsurface fear of how powerful the European Parliament and the European Commission can get. I believe we should give them a fair chance.

The way I see it is for the nation-state level and the European level to be closely tied to each other for the sake of efficiency and above all accountability of European policy-making. One way to seek the common ground would be to assure full transparency of the work of the Council in its legislative capacity, just as in national legislative bodies. Another way would be to stimulate an interwoven presence of national and European issues in both the domestic and European parliamentary elections. Democratic legitimacy of European integration would be additionally strengthened if the European Parliament gained the right to select the European Commission, including the Commission President. I believe the European Parliament should also decide about spending the community budget, very much as Chancellor Schröder has lately suggested. Governments, however, would still be able to cap the size of the budget as ultimately responsible for fiscal policy in the Union.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The debate on the future of Europe is now in full swing. The future has always been debated but at no time before has the discussion run such a wide circle. Politicians and NGOs, government officials and independent experts, established authorities on the subject and interested citizens – everybody is making their voice heard in this debate. In Poland, I chair a Reflection Group on the future of the European Union which includes representatives of the entire political spectrum as well as independent experts in the field. A couple of weeks ago, Warsaw hosted a successful conference on this subject organised together with the Swedish presidency of the Union. It is enormously important therefore that the candidate states are debating the future of the European

Union hand in hand with the current members. The future has united us already. We have to make reality unite us as well.

Thank you for your attention.