

Gentlemen Prime Ministers,
Ladies and Gentlemen Ministers,
Ladies and Gentlemen Members of Parliament,
Ladies and Gentlemen Councillors,
Ladies and Gentlemen Party Leaders,
Ladies and Gentlemen,
Dear friends,

Meine Damen und Herren,
Liebe Freundinnen und Freunde,

Meine sehr geehrten Damen und Herren, Ich freue mich sehr Sie zu dem 30. Geburtstag der ELDR Partei hier in Stuttgart willkommen zu heißen. In jener Stadt, in der unsere Partei am 26. März 1976 gegründet wurde. Gerade einmal neun liberale Parteien aus 8 Mitgliedstaaten der Europäischen Gemeinschaft ergriffen 1979 die Initiative und stellten sich zur Wahl des ersten direkt gewählten Europäischen Parlaments. Vor 30 Jahren hatten wir nicht einen liberalen Premier Minister und nur einen einzigen liberalen Kommissar. Liberale Parteien agierten hauptsächlich in der Opposition oder waren die Juniorpartner von Regierungen der wenigen EG-Mitgliedstaaten. Die Europäischen Gemeinschaften, wie sie damals genannt wurden, umfassten neun Mitgliedstaaten. Dänemark, Irland und das Vereinigte Königreich hatten der Gemeinschaft kaum ein paar Jahre vorher beigetreten. Zu dieser Zeit war Europa noch durch den Eisernen Vorhang geteilt und die Welt befand sich in den Fängen des Kalten Krieges. Paul McCartneys "Silly Love Songs" and Elton John's Hit " Don't go breaking my heart" waren Nummer eins und zwei der Pop-Charts und bewiesen damit, dass sich zumindest manche Dinge nicht so schnell ändern wie die EU. Wenn Sie erlauben, werde ich nun auf Englisch weiterreden
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Ladies and Gentlemen,
The men and women who gathered in Stuttgart to establish the European Federation of Liberal and Democrat Parties had great ambitions both for Liberalism and for Europe and spelled them out in the aptly called Stuttgart Declaration; they all remain fully valid and some even remain unfulfilled to this very day.

“The supreme task of the European Union must be to guarantee human, civil and political rights on the European level; the European Union needs a free democratic constitution based on the principles of division of powers, majority voting and protection of minorities; the European Union must assure steady and balanced economic growth, thus creating for its citizens the conditions for effective social protection in the vicissitudes of life. The European Union also

needs a common foreign policy covering the external relations of the European Community and designed to serve the freedom and security of Europe and peace in the world, side by side with our partners in the Atlantic Alliance, notably the United States and in the United Nations. Finally, the European Union must be founded on the common conviction that the freedom of the individual, equal opportunities for all and the free competition of ideas and parties are indispensable elements of a democratic society.” , thus reads the Declaration.

It was adopted in 1976, and remains as I said fully valid, based as it is on the values of freedom, democracy and sustainable economic growth combined with effective social protection. It has served us well. It has served Europe well.

The ELDR became a European political party in 1993 and is now the third strongest party, consisting of 47 member parties from 30 EU and neighbouring countries.

As the peoples in Eastern and Central Europe freed themselves from communist rule, their liberal parties were soon able to lead or to participate in the governments of several countries that joined the EU in 2004 or are about to do so. To this very day, we Liberals remain among the staunchest supporters of the enlargement of the EU because we continue to believe that it is the single most powerful instrument to spread democracy, freedom and economic growth across the continent, ensuring stability and peace for its citizens.

It is therefore with great pleasure that I salute the presence here of Calin Popescu Tariceanu, Prime Minister of Romania, and of Simeon Saxe-Coburg Gotha, former Prime Minister of Bulgaria.

Liberals today lead four EU governments and I am very grateful that Anders Fogg Rasmussen, Prime Minister of Denmark is among us. Liberals participate in several more governments, and have significantly increased their votes all over Europe.

And this, to our great joy, includes Germany. Not only has the FDP returned in force to the European Parliament; the FDP has made great progress in the last federal elections and I hope that our presence here today will help you to do the same in the regional elections that take place in two weeks time.

Finally allow me to stress the fact that six EU - commissioners are avowed and acknowledged liberals. If we measured the progress of the EU by strictly liberal standards, we would have many reasons to rejoice.

All, however, is not well in the state of the Union.

Referenda in two of the founding nations have painfully revealed to what degree the EU has lost its original lustre and appeal. To make matters worse, the debates surrounding the Constitutional Treaty did not concern the institutional novelties but centred on the very four freedoms that are at the heart of the European Union. Citizens nowadays critically question the soundness of the freedom of movement for people, for capital, for services and even, albeit to a lesser degree, the freedom of movements for goods.

National governments, parliaments and political parties increasingly view the institutions of the EU not as partners, but as rivals. Instead of strengthening the European Single Market as the best possible answer to the worldwide competition, they seem bent on carving up that market in smaller, and therefore inevitably weaker national (or even regional) submarkets. All of these are worrying developments because they could trigger a race to the bottom rather than the only kind of race we want, the race to the top.

Ladies and Gentlemen, it might very well be that the magnitude of the political, demographic and social changes of the last thirty years fills the majority of European citizens with apprehension, if not with plain fear. But, I tell you, undoing what has been done is not the answer.

Carving up the single market is not the answer, closing our borders is not the answer, and slamming the door of the European Union in the face of those who are so eager to join us, is certainly not the answer. All of that has been done before, in the first half of the last century, and the result has been worldwide disaster and terrifying misery and tragedy.

Our founding fathers and mothers who gathered here thirty years ago were not as strong as we are today, and the European Community was a far cry from what the Union has become.

But, I ask you, are we still as liberal as they were or as we ourselves were thirty years ago? Do we still fit the sixth definition of the adjective "liberal" in the Oxford English Dictionary? It reads as follows; "given, used or giving in generous amounts". Are we still giving in generous amounts? Are we still willing to generously share our precious values with others, both within our own borders, and across our borders? Are we offering generous access to our markets, are we generously welcoming freely moving capital, services, goods and above all, workers?

Are we, in short, sufficiently liberal in that sense, willing to share, willing to give, and prepared to do it generously? We might still believe that, but we are deluding ourselves: each debate over new financial perspectives has seen more money pinching and Euro crunching than the previous one. Now, mind you, I am not pleading for spending just for the sake of it. I am actually arguing that generosity in giving and sharing presupposes confidence in oneself, hope for the future and trust in the others.

Might it be that we had more confidence, hope and trust thirty years ago than today? And mightn't it be that those were the qualities that appealed to increasing number of voters? Why did confidence erode, hope weaken and trust decrease? Is it due to maturity as opposed to youth (I am referring to ourselves), is it due to the horrors of 9/11, to globalization, is it due to the reality check of power exercised rather than dreamt, or is it due to a mixture of all of these? Whatever the answer, it is hard not to feel that the very successes of Liberalism have eroded some of the qualities that make liberals so endearing. Endearing, not just to ourselves, but also to our voters.

If we allow further erosion of self confidence, hope for the future and trust in others we stand to lose the support of European electorates. Why indeed, would women and men vote for candidates who do not exude confidence, hope and trust? Why would they trust parties that convey explicitly or implicitly that their worst fears about the future, the world and the European Union are correct?

Over the last few months I have watched Euro scepticism grow in all political groups in the European Parliament. Our own group, I am happy to say, is largely untouched by this sorry phenomenon. It has now become politically correct in the European Parliament to question the soundness of further enlargement; to declare that the Constitutional Treaty is as dead as can be, and to call for the re-nationalisation of for instance agricultural policy.

Ladies and Gentlemen, we, Liberals, cannot and should not follow the same path where there is precious little room anyway, because it is crowded by Greens, Christian Democrats and Socialists all of them busy reconnecting with their voters, meaning that they are espousing their prejudices, fears and worries.

Mesdames et Messieurs, je continuerai en français, à l'intention de nos partis membres francophones et de tous ceux et toutes celles (dont je suis) qui aiment la langue de Voltaire et de madame de Sévigné.

Ce que nous Libéraux avons à faire, c'est de dresser l'inventaire des mérites de cette Union que nous avons construite au cours des dernières trente années. L'Europe aujourd'hui est unifiée, stable et pacifique; nous avons connu trente années de croissance durable, nous bénéficions d'une protection sociale élevée, et notre influence dans le monde va croissant. L'Union, qui est une construction éminemment politique, nous procure un environnement qui nous permet d'adapter nos économies, nos marchés du travail et nos systèmes sociaux à d'incessants changements et cela, sans trop de heurts et dégâts

L'Union nous permet aussi d'entrer en compétition les uns avec les autres dans des conditions sensiblement équivalentes, sans pour autant nous sauter à la gorge. Elle ne nous protège pas cependant du monde extérieur, des poussées de la globalisation, ni des défis que constituent les avancées d'une évolution technologique qui va s'accéléralant. Ce qu'elle nous offre, par contre, c'est la possibilité de nous lancer dans une course au sommet; c'est l'émulation des expériences les meilleures, la chance d'apprendre les uns des autres, et enfin, le partage des connaissances et de l'expertise.

Armés de cet argumentaire, il nous faut dorénavant aller à la rencontre de nos électrices et électeurs et ouvrir avec eux un dialogue tourné vers l'avenir et qui prend en compte leurs soucis et préoccupations que nous devons prendre très au sérieux.

Mesdames et Messieurs, ce dialogue, nous devons l'engager avec assurance et confiance, forts de ce que nous avons construit au cours des trente dernières années. Oh bien sûr, nous n'avons pas été seuls à le faire, mais tout au long des trente années écoulées, nous libéraux avons été à la pointe; nous libéraux avons montré la voie et nous l'avons maintenue.

Notre anniversaire nous offre une occasion unique de redécouvrir la sixième définition (anglaise, mais elle existe aussi en français) de l'adjectif LIBERAL et de renouveler notre engagement à redynamiser l'Union Européenne pour les trente prochaines années et au-delà

Annemie Neyts-Uyttebroeck
Leader of the ELDR