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THE PRESIDENT**



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**Herman Van Rompuy  
President of the European Council**

**Speech to the Parliament of Romania  
Joint meeting of the Chamber of Deputies and of the Senate**

It is a privilege and pleasure to speak in this House. A Parliament where so many debates are held, and so many voices are heard – voices, today, from the full spectrum of Romanian society. And I thank you for this invitation to join my own voice - a European voice - to this chorus, in my first public speech in Romania.

It so happens that we are meeting here today exactly 7 years after Romania, Bulgaria and the then Twenty-Five signed your Treaty of Accession to the European Union, on 25th April 2005 in Luxembourg. It gives me great joy to be able to congratulate the Romanian people on the anniversary of this milestone, right here in Bucharest. *Le hasard fait bien les choses!*

Five years of membership, and all the preparatory work that led to it, have changed your country beyond recognition. But already long before that, through the bonds of culture, history, and geography, Romania fully belonged to the European family. For most other nations of the Union, this is self-evident. Your country joined only five years ago, but already we cannot imagine our Union without Romania.

I visited your country for the very first time in 1974, with a delegation of young politicians from my party. I was 26 years old. Although I had told myself that I would not visit any communist countries, this was the one exception I made until 1989... Without going into the details, it was an intriguing trip. We had some ‘official discussions’ with young Romanians: I learned just as much from what was not said than from what was said...

**P R E S S**

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Dear colleagues, I was too outspoken for my hosts, so the official visit ended after two days in an exile on the shores of the Black Sea -- far from Bucharest, but close to the poems of Ovid, the famous Roman poet, who lived there two-thousand years ago.

I came back in 1990, as an observer of the first free presidential elections. I felt the enthusiasm for freedom, but saw also the evidence of extreme poverty.

Ever since these visits, your country has occupied a distinctive place on my mental map of Europe. As a country at the cross-roads of cultural influences. Between central Europe, eastern Europe and the Balkans. In earlier days, between the Austrian, Russian and Ottoman empires. And unique in the region for the heritage of ancient Rome, not least in your language.

As a young man, I also read the famous book by the Romanian author Virgil Gheorghiu: "The 25th hour", which left a deep impression on me.

En fait, j'ai lu ce livre en français: "La vingt-cinquième heure". A mon avis, il y a peu d'œuvres dans la littérature européenne qui décrivent de façon aussi impitoyable la cruauté de la première moitié du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle, où la valeur de l'individu ne pesait plus rien face aux grandes forces de l'histoire.

This book was published in 1949. The merciless world described in Gheorghiu's novel was precisely the one to which Europe's founders wanted to put an end. The adventure began in 1950, with statesmen from 6 countries in Western Europe. Each had a different culture, a different vision on politics, they spoke different languages. Yet they shared something essential. The European project was born out of the idea that we would not be prisoners of our history, but that we could move beyond it and, together, build a new future.

Making peace to build the future: this is what France, Germany and others started, three generations ago. Substituting the bloody battlefields with negotiation rooms in Brussels. Putting age-old rivalries about borders or minorities to rest, and replacing them with a will to live together, to belong together.

These principles are still at the core of our Union. They still form a powerful force for change. Today we stand reminded by the determination of countries such as Croatia and Serbia to cast away the shadows of the past, and live up to their European vocation.

Your country has greatly benefited from accession to the European Union. It is in the shared interest of all Twenty-Seven today to continue this process with countries that meet the necessary membership criteria. We must put an end to Europe's remaining dividing lines, notably in the Western Balkans. I am confident that any bilateral issues can be solved in the spirit of good neighbourly cooperation.

In this respect, the agreement that you reached two months ago with Serbia was a start. All European countries have sensitivities, often related to their history. I know it very well. Yet European civilization is also built by putting those sensitivities to rest. The entry of the Western-Balkans into the Union will seal an end to the last civil war in the long history of Europe; no more, no less.

Ours is a Union of rights and values. Only through mutual respect and tolerance can we preserve that feeling - that conviction - that we, as Europeans, in our diversity, do share a common destiny.

Tolerance and respect: between countries, and also within countries. It is the duty of each government to make sure that no-one -- no member of any group or any minority -- is treated as a second-class citizen.

Regrettably, the winds of populism are affecting a key achievement of European integration: the free movement of persons within our borders, with respect for the conditions. I know that many Romanians attach a high importance to it. I agree. Freedom of movement of labour and services is more than a component of an economic Union. It is about a space of freedom and rule of law: a sign of civilization. In that space, there is no room for stigmatisation of foreigners, as happens in certain countries nowadays.

Romania's entrance into Schengen is one of the issues I discussed this morning again with President Băsescu. In fact, all European leaders have underlined more than once in our meetings that all legal conditions for accession have been met. At our last meeting in March, the leaders made progress: we urged the Council of the Ministers of Interior to take its decision on the accession of Romania and Bulgaria in September. I welcome that your country is taking confidence-enhancing initiatives, for instance in the field of border control where real progress is made and police cooperation. This will ensure Romania becomes a safe entry point into the Schengen area. I am aware that border controls require investment and substantial means and that this is not always easy in difficult budgetary times. However, such choices are necessary to live up to the standards and to assume the responsibility of being a member of the Union.

Let me say some words about the economic and financial crisis – about the work we have done in Europe to overcome it, but also about the impact of the crisis on the image of the European Union.

Since its eruption two years ago, the debt crisis has determined the EU's work at the highest level. Our priority was two-fold: overcoming its immediate effects through emergency action, such as the setting up and improving of rescue funds in the Eurozone, while also putting together, step-by-step, a new economic governance to avoid future problems.

The debt crisis in the euro area has revealed and accelerated the political and economic interdependence of our countries. Faced with a challenge of unprecedented proportions, European countries acted step by step, but resolutely. With responsibility and with a sense of solidarity.

Romania has played its part, remaining united with the other members of the Union and bearing its own responsibilities at home. Not least, you have stood for the euro, which in line with the Treaty will become your currency too. Early last month, along with 24 other countries, Romania signed a Treaty for more budgetary discipline. It is important for the Union as a whole. Romania's participation is highly appreciated: as a sign of trust and a vote of confidence in the future. Rapid ratification by all signatories is crucial now and I count on this Parliament also in that respect. It will contribute to prevent future debt crises and it shows our political determination to overcome the current one.

Earlier this morning, President Băsescu presented to me the measures that Romania has taken over the last years to turn the tide of the crisis. Courageous decisions to restore market confidence, to consolidate the budget and to engage in structural reforms. These decisions are producing results. After a sharp recession, growth bounced back and is expected to continue this year and next. Crucially, unemployment has gone down. I should like to encourage the government in its further efforts -- including the reform of state-owned enterprises, and I hope this Parliament will support these efforts.

Romanians have accepted the efforts requested by the EU and the IMF with resilience. Yet understandably there is also anger and frustration. That is why it is important that economic reforms are driven in a spirit of fairness, with honesty and courage.

Economic situations across Europe are very different, yet we all have to adapt our models to the changing global economy. That is why in the European Council, we have continuously given priority to boosting structural growth and jobs. There are no easy answers. Since the budgetary situation in many Member States is tight, stimulating growth through "deficit spending" is not the solution. Yet we can still do much. We can further deepen Europe's single market as a tool for growth – and we are doing that.

We can push for structural economic reforms in each Member State – and we are doing that. Such reforms take time, but they can yield impressive results.

We can ensure that the national and European budgets give priority to expenditure on areas which lead to more economic growth, for instance investing in connections in energy, in telecommunications or transports – and we are doing that. Romania is already actively engaged in setting these priorities and at the Union level we are doing it too. This is one of the keys to the upcoming negotiation on the EU's central budget for the years 2014-2020.

For Romania, here lies a particular challenge. Making good use of the EU funds is key. More progress is needed to be able to claim and process the Funds which are destined for the country in the EU budget. Addressing weaknesses, especially as regards government effectiveness and the reform of state-owned enterprises, will require further work. Of course, continuing the fight against corruption is not only an economic necessity, something you do to increase competitiveness and attract more investors. It will also strengthen the society as a whole: increasing the respect of the public good, and reinforcing the sense of justice and of fairness.

It is my conviction that if each Member State tackles its own issues head on, Europe can continue to be the most attractive continent in which to live and work, create wealth and to spend it, for all citizens in a democratic society.

But we politicians, we must work hard to convince people that this is possible, also in today's rapidly changing world. It is not only about the measures and reforms themselves, but also about gaining public support, getting people on board. This is a challenge, as elections results and opinion polls all over Europe confirm. Nationalist and extremist movements are on the rise; many of them blame "Brussels" for bad news.

There can only be one response. Telling the truth, telling things as they are, is the only option to remain credible. All over Europe, there are people who believe their country can survive alone. In a globalised economy, it is more than an illusion: it is a lie! Politics is not about slogans, not about misleading people, not about exploiting a fear of the unknown. Nothing was ever built on fear.

Today, more than ever, we must turn fear into hope. Hope for the next generations, for a better future. Overcoming the current crisis will give people a brighter perspective, unleashing positive energy.

Politicians must lead the way: showing a sense of the general interest, of the common good, of the longer term. Thinking not only about the next elections, but also about their place in the history books, and the impact of your action -- or inaction... -- on future generations.

For decades, the word "Europe" stood for hope, it was a synonym of peace and prosperity. Despite the difficulties, we need to preserve this equation. It is the task of our generation of political leaders to restore Europe again into a source of inspiration, a symbol of hope, remaining true to the Union's anthem we just heard, a passage from Beethoven's "Ode to Joy".

And it has been a privilege to deliver this message to you here in Bucharest ! Thank you

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