

EU Council Presidency (November 29, 2006)

Abstract

In late 2006 Chancellor Angela Merkel introduced her program for Germany's six-month EU presidency, which was set to begin on January 1, 2007. Merkel emphasized the need for Europe to adapt to its new larger size and a changed international situation. Above all, she stressed the need for a new EU constitutional treaty, which she believed would "reinforce the foundation of the European house" and provide for "better protection of fundamental rights as an expression of Europe's value system." She also expressed a desire to see progress in other areas, so that Europe's voice would be strengthened around the world.

Source

Values-based European Politics

Challenges for Germany's Council Presidency

Only a short period of time elapsed between the historic EU-enlargement celebrations in 2004 and the referendums on the constitutional treaty in France and the Netherlands last year. And for that very reason, the European Union was thrown onto an emotional roller-coaster. It is obvious that many Europeans have not approved of some of the steps taken in European politics in recent years. And for that very reason, one of the most important tasks of all politicians in Europe is winning back people's trust in European policy [*Europapolitik*].

Europe's integration process is an unrivalled success story. Robert Schuman's initiative to found the European Coal and Steel Community revolutionized relations between the countries of Europe. For the first time, the people of Europe yielded voluntarily to a common order.

These fortunate developments of the last fifty years were possible because, despite all our differences, we Europeans are fundamentally connected. Europe is based on common historical experiences and on the desire to make our future better together. Above all, Europe is based on values that we share, on freedom, justice, democracy, the rule of law, and respect for human rights. These fundamental values developed in Europe over centuries. They are rooted in particular in Christianity and the European Enlightenment, in Greco-Roman antiquity, and in Judaism. European cooperation will have to remain tied to these values in the future if it is to endure.

As eminently important as the Single Market and the Euro and many other things might be for the European Union, it is first and foremost shared fundamental values that connect Europe at its core.

Foundations of the Community

Next year marks the fiftieth anniversary of the signing of the "Rome Treaties." This anniversary, which falls during Germany's Council Presidency, offers an excellent opportunity to reflect on the foundations of the Community. I have invited the EU heads of state and government, and the presidents of the Commission and the European Parliament to a summit in Berlin. This summit will be entirely focused on moving from a period of reflection and self-assurance to a joint resolution to fulfill the expectations placed upon us. I hope that this will be reinforced in the form of a joint "Berlin Declaration."^[1]

The Union was built over decades, each with its own special focal point: from coal and steel in the early

days of the Community to the economic and monetary union to overcoming the division of the continent. Today the task at hand is further adapting the European Union to its new size and a changed international situation. This includes the economic and social modernization of Europe as a necessary prerequisite for our self-assertion in the world and the reform of the internal “constitution” of the EU. These will also be the focal points of Germany’s Council Presidency, which begins on January 1.

Self-evident Prerequisites

Economic vitality and international competitiveness are self-evident prerequisites for the future viability of Europe. Only if Europe also succeeds economically will it be able to assert and promote its values. Much of this is the responsibility of the member states and should remain as such. But if all governments commit themselves to the necessary structural reforms for greater growth and employment, this will lead to stronger economic dynamism throughout all of Europe. Current data on the budgetary situation and growth in Germany show that we are on the right track. We need to stabilize and build upon these positive developments.

Our work in the EU should focus on reducing bureaucracy and improving legislation, gradually completing the implementation of the Single Market, focusing research subsidies on excellence, and cooperating in the area of energy policy, in order to consolidate Europe’s weight and bring it to bear effectively in talks with producing and consuming countries.

We must ensure that Europe will continue to be able to persevere in a rapidly changing world, even with the twenty-seven member states it will soon have. This will only succeed if we reinforce the foundation of the European house before we add additional stories. Otherwise, there’s a real danger that the entire building will falter in the end. Therefore, my position on the constitutional treaty has not changed. We need a new treaty. Such a constitutional treaty contains important institutional innovations. It provides for an improved protection of fundamental rights as an expression of our European value system. It establishes a more clear-cut division of authority and responsibilities and strengthens the role of the national parliaments. It advances Europe in the areas of justice and domestic policies, as well as in foreign policy – especially by creating the office of a European foreign minister. This is why we treat with great seriousness the European Council’s June 2006 request that we probe how we might move forward on this issue during our Council Presidency. After comprehensive consultations with all partners, we will be able to decide in the end what is possible and what is not. Until that point is reached, we must have above all the courage to be patient and exercise restraint. For any premature public commitment will only make it harder than necessary to reach agreement.

No New Commitments

Without doubt, restraint is also advisable when it comes to the question of future EU enlargements. At the European Council in December, we will wrestle with the question of the European Union’s ability to integrate new members. My position is clear-cut: We will respect all standing commitments, but we cannot make new commitments regarding prospective membership in the foreseeable future. There will be no more automatic implementations in the future. Only when conditions are fully satisfied can the process of accession to or affiliation with the European Union move forward. The citizenry will only support an enlargement process that is politically structured in such a way.

We are very interested in having stable and economically successful neighbors. Accession to the EU or the prospect thereof certainly cannot be the only way to achieve this. Therefore, we need to develop a serious and convincing neighborhood policy. This policy must support reform efforts in countries in our direct vicinity without making any false promises. Many custom-made forms of cooperation are conceivable in this regard.

If we wish to shape globalization according to our European value system, then we must throw our combined weight onto the scales – be it during World Trade Organization negotiations, when it comes to environmental protection, or with regard to the Common Foreign and Security Policy. Our partners are right when they expect that Europe and the Europeans will assume a level of international responsibility commensurate with Europe's importance. Europe cannot afford to be pre-occupied with itself. In the coming year, Germany would like to contribute to strengthening the voice of the European Union in an ever-shrinking world.

NOTES

[1] The text of the Berlin Declaration can be found at:

http://www.eu2007.de/en/About_the_EU/Constitutional_Treaty/BerlinerErklaerung.html
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Source: Angela Merkel, "Wertegebundene Europapolitik. Herausforderungen für die deutsche Ratspräsidentschaft", *Die politische Meinung* 51, November 2006, pp. 5–7.

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