

## European Union, European citizens, Europe Day: ever closer together

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In May we celebrate Europe Day, May 9. It is a good occasion to revisit the history of the European Union, talk about Europe's symbols and find out what has made us closer to each other as European citizens. In this edition of the series [Now &ndash; Interacting with the European Parliament](#) Radio Bulgaria, Gateway Europe and the European Institute are offering a radio-bridge spanning Europe's past and future accentuating the role of the European parliament.

&bdquo;France has always had as her essential aim the service of peace. A united Europe was not achieved and we had war. Europe will not be made all at once, or according to a single plan. It will be built through concrete achievements which first create a de facto solidarity.&rdquo; LISTEN IN OTHER LANGUAGES - [SERBIAN &nbsp;](#) This recording with the voice of then French Foreign Minister Robert Schuman takes us back to the remote 1950. The day was May 9. In a speech inspired by Jean Monnet's idea for creating a supernational European institution, he suggested a union of France, Germany with other European countries willing to join, so that they could put together their coal and steel resources. The idea to pool the key industries of France and Germany to form the basis of military industry, emerged as a guarantee of peace in the continent in the aftermath of the world war. This proposal known as the Schuman Declaration has been recognized as the beginning of building the European Union. In this way, almost a year later in Paris, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Luxembourg and Belgium signed up a Treaty for the establishment of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC). Six years on, in 1957 in Rome, two new treaties were signed &ndash; the first treaty established a European Economic Community (EEC) and the second one - the European Atomic Energy Community (Euratom). Integration proved so very successful that Denmark, Ireland and UK decided to join the three communities. This took place in 1973. In 1981 Greece too joined the Communities, followed by Spain and Portugal in 1986.

In the early 1990s, on 7 February 1992 the Treaty of the European Union was signed in the Dutch city of Maastricht. It boosted significantly the powers of the European Parliament. By the introduction of a procedure for joint decision-making, the Parliament became a partner in the law-making process and was given the right to veto in key areas of the European Union legislation.

The fourth enlargement of the European Union was in 1995 with the accession of Austria, Finland and Sweden. Shortly after that Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, Slovenia, Cyprus and Malta applied for membership. The fifth EU enlargement is associated with the accession on 1 May 2004 of 10 of the quoted countries and with the entry of Bulgaria and Romania on 1 January 2007.

Europe Day May 9 is one of the symbols of the European Union apart from the flag, anthem, the slogan

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and the Euro. The day when the first step was made for the unification of the European countries that later produced the EU is the right occasion for various campaigns and celebrations that bring European peoples closer together. In 1985 the Ode to Joy from Beethoven's Symphony No. 9 was declared the official anthem of the European Union. In the universal language of music this anthem is an expression of the ideals of freedom, peace and solidarity that Europe promotes. The EU flag representing the blue sky with 12 stars arranged in a circle, is another expression of solidarity and harmony among the European peoples. By tradition the number 12 symbolizes perfection, completion and unity. United in Diversity is the slogan of the European Union summarizing the idea that through EU the Europeans are united in their joint efforts for peace and justice and that Europe's abundance of various countries, traditions and languages is the continent's major advantage. Since 2002 the Euro emerged as United Europe's new symbol. It became the single official currency in the countries, who join the so-called Eurozone. There is hardly a European unaware of all this. The Treaty of Lisbon signed at the end of last year however, avoids any analogy with a federal state. This clearly shows in the terminology used in the Treaty. The EU symbols such as its anthem, flag and slogan that could lend a federal quality to the Union have been omitted from the Treaty too.

"Europe's present-day symbol, I believe, is tolerance among people and respect for their uniqueness and identity", Gergana Nedeva says. "I guess there should be symbols, because symbols are the carriers of spiritual values, she points out. "More notably, spirituality has the power to defeat the forces that obstruct human development. Good, the desire to help others are things that support you and are the source of hope for tomorrow. I think that symbols are something very good."

"Of course, a community needs heraldic symbols, however I personally am against the community's association with the symbols – flag, coat of arms, anthem and others, that every state owns separately," Slavi Panayotov says. "I'd rather accept as EU symbols some buildings, specific lifestyles, ideas for co-existence of different cultures and nations, rather than fabricated, though necessary to a certain extent symbols such as coat of arms, flag and anthem."

What has necessitated the absence of the widely accepted symbols of the European Union in the Treaty of Lisbon was the question we put to Mr. Toon Streppel, director of the Information Office of the European Union in Bulgaria.

"Well, I don't think that the European flag and the anthem will disappear because of some opposition from some member states – they could disagree to put it in writing that they will be there forever, but I really think that we are going to use the well-known European flag and the hymn in the coming years."

As a directly elected body the European Parliament is closest to citizens, and strengthening its role implies, according to Mr. Streppel, a greater influence of citizens on the Union's policies:

"Under the Lisbon Treaty the European Parliament will be involved in all types of legislation. The

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role of the European Parliament will be strengthened very much. This means it will be more interesting for the citizens too, to be in contact with their own members, because through them they can try to have an influence on the new legislation. Secondly, in mid-next year we will have European elections in all member states and due to the Lisbon Treaty we guess that the strongest party in the European Parliament can decide on the new color of the new president of the European Commission. So the result of the elections in all member states will, so to say, color the political role, it will color the EU being a little bit more socialistic, or Christian-democratic or green and so on. The European party that is going to win the European election will be stronger than before

How will formats and ways of cooperation between the European Commission and the European parliament change from 2009 on?

There I don't expect many changes. As I said, the role of the European Parliament will be strengthened, but the system of working together will more or less be unchanged. Well, next year will be difficult year in the sense that there will be no legislation projects introduced before the elections by the old European Commission, because they know that they are leaving office, and after the European elections it will take time to start up the procedures. So, I don't expect changes for 2009, but I think that from end-2009 and the beginning of 2010, the new cooperation between the new European Parliament and the new European Commission will start, and I guess that the pressure from the European Parliament to get things done could be even greater than it is nowadays

Since 1989 Mrs. Doris Pack has been Member of the European Parliament from the Christian Democratic Union/European People's Party. She has known the European Union since the time before its enlargement into the East. Apart from a growing number of member states, what have been the other changes in EU?

EU today is more diverse. The present-day EU gathers many more different opinions under the same roof, and this is no easy job. That is precisely why we need the Treaty of Lisbon so that we can transform the European institutions, and make them efficient in the environment of an enlarged union. At present they are de facto no different from the time when the bloc had only six member states. It is high time to get reformed!

How do you see the future of the European Union after the Lisbon Treaty is enforced next year?

Under the Treaty of Lisbon the European Parliament acquires significantly greater powers — as much as 95% of the law-making will be concentrated in parliament. This, I think, is of exceptional importance, because for the time being, the European Parliament has been kind of isolated from its basic function, notably law-making. Currently, we are simply a deliberative body

How will the work and responsibilities of MEPs change in a parliament with strengthened powers?

The European Parliament carries huge responsibility, because it is the law-making body of the European Union, and law-making is the job of deputies. Law-making requires huge responsibility, but it

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also requires competence. In the future we should not be that dependent on lobbyists as it is now. Instead we will need more assistants who are competent in different areas. The reason is that we will be making laws that will be enforced in all 27 member states. For this responsible job we will need better opportunities for work”;

Since 2004 you have been working with colleagues from the new member-states, and since last year with Bulgarian and Romanian deputies. Can you spot any difference between the MEPs from the old and from new member states?

”The only difference is that sometimes we approach certain issues in different ways, from a different view point. The reason is that in the West we have for quite some time looked upon East Europeans with pity and when enlargement happened, we forgot that those people bring with them a different past that cannot be wiped out overnight. We cannot turn a blind eye to the simple truth that in the years when the EU was being created, on the other side of the Iron Curtain time had stopped. Those were the years of the Soviet Union domination, years of dictatorship. This should never be forgotten. Today it is inadmissible for EP declarations on the occasion of the end of World War II to omit a mention of what the socialist countries had to go through in the aftermath of 1945. I mean that our colleagues from the new member states have opened their eyes for the conduct of the West after the Union started to enlarge. I think that a process started in 2004 of rethinking the past by West Europeans, which continues to date. It was easy talking about our poor brothers and sisters in the East, and light candles on our windows as a token of solidarity. However working together, rethinking our past together was sometimes a large pill to swallow for us, deputies. Especially our colleagues from the leftwing parties find it difficult to call the outrageous acts of communists in the past decades with their true names”;

Biliana Raeva is from the young generation of Bulgarian members of the European Parliament. She is from the ALDE group. ”We were elected with the direct vote of citizens and it is unthinkable not to have a direct contact with them”;, she contends.

”Apart from information offices – I myself have ten such offices in Bulgaria – we carry out plenty of other activities, explains Biliana Raeva. ”We organize seminars, conferences; invite various groups to the European Parliament such as students, opinion leaders, journalists etc. Contact with smaller towns and villages is more difficult, and for this reason I go and visit them, if there is a problem or an idea of European relevance”;

What do you think should be today’s symbol of United Europe?

”I gather this symbol is Europe without Borders. For quite some time we stayed outside Europe’s borders, across the border. We still remember the time when we had to queue for visas, unaware whether we would be admitted to the cherished Schengen space. You said I’m a young politician, but there are even younger ones, who do not remember such things – lack of opportunity for free movement and study abroad. Indeed, EU accession is one of Bulgaria’s foremost achievements. I think that very soon we will be able to benefit from the opportunity to work across the Union. More Bulgarians will be able to work abroad, and return to Bulgaria with enriched

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professional experience”;

Talking to Financial Times in 2005 EU Enlargement Commissioner Olli Rehn said that Europe’s frontiers stretched as far as Europeans’ awareness stretched. Enlargement he added is a process of expansion of the zone of European values, the key among them being freedom and solidarity, tolerance and human rights, democracy and the supremacy of the law.

Dear listeners, this program is broadcast by Radio Bulgaria, RFI – Romania and Yvelines Radio, France, media partners under the project Now – Interacting with the European Parliament, carried out by the European Institute, the Center for Policy Modernization and Gateway EUROPE.

Your questions, suggestions and comments are welcome to our office, as well as to our e-mail address [info@europe.bg](mailto:info@europe.bg) For more details, look up the new web portal <http://parliament.europe.bg>

***Written by Romyana Tzvetkova, Daniela Konstantinova, Vessela Vladkova and Elena Karkalanova***

***Translated by Daniela Konstantinova***