

“Europe and Freedom”

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Public speech by HE Jerzy Buzek, President of the European Parliament.

Aula Magna, Sofia University “St. Kliment Ochridsky”, Bulgaria, March 3, 2010.

(Extracts)

Dear Mr. Rector, Madame Tsacheva – President of the Bulgarian Parliament, dear colleagues, dear friends, but specially – dear students,

When I asked few minutes ago some students if it’s a free day [3 March 2010], they answered “Yes, it’s a free day”. If in every free day there are so many students at the Sofia University, I congratulate you. But first of all, let me congratulate all of you for your national day, the Day of Freedom, the Day of Liberation of Bulgaria. On such a day we realize very well what “freedom” means. Fortunately, students are young enough not to remember any other category in their own country than freedom. But we know that we always should pay a price for freedom, this never ending story. We must keep the freedom carefully that because it could easily disappear or fade away. You know, in history it happens very often that we are having freedom and we are losing it because we were not careful enough, did not take care about preserving it.

We know that it is not easy to be free. Why? As freedom is the basis of our values, a basic, core value. But freedom has got limitations, restrictions. It is mainly freedom of other persons. If I am a free person, doing something which is against the individual freedom of another person, it would become a factor that puts limitations to it, to freedom in general. So it is so difficult in our free, democratic society to find a proper way because very often it happens so, that our freedom could be against the freedom of another person. Let us try to illustrate this with a simple example. Well, probably you, the young people here, like to party very much?

There’s no reaction… so you don’t like parties, OK? Well… it could be; sometimes it happens. Anyway we like to have fun, to party we wish to feel good and to make the right atmosphere for that. When is the best atmosphere for the party – at night? Of course late at night. We should think however about the neighbor next door or next floor who wants to sleep, as he has to go to work early next morning. We should think of our party as a threat to his desire.

It is a very simple illustration of the freedom of another person and the disagreement with another person, which is important as well. It is quite simple to respect it and we can of course easily solve this

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situation.

We must remember that [individual freedom] all the time. It is not less fundamental than for example the freedom of speech. Let me clarify what I am mentioning freedom of speech: because the dignity of another person is an extremely high and important restriction and very important limitation for freedom of speech. It relates to the responsibility of journalists, of politicians and also of the ordinary people – students, professors. And you must take care of our dignity!

When we are fighting for freedom, we are also fighting for dignity for every person.

I can remember very well when, in my country, I started my public life – not political life yet, but public life, in 1980. “Solidarity” emerged in my country. It was a Communist country like your country some 30, 40, 50 years ago. We know out of our own experience what freedom means, what occupation means; we know what dictatorship means.

We belong to an experienced society.

I can also remember one of the most important slogans of “Solidarity”, which reads – “No freedom without solidarity”. Solidarity is necessary if we want to be free. It means solidarity with another person; it also means responsibility. Without responsibility of every single individual person, freedom would not be freedom. And we should also, all of us, stand guard over dignity.

Well, I must tell you, I have been member of the “Solidarity” independent trade union and its activist in various events for almost 15 years, so I’m very experienced in trade unionism. It was, of course, an unusual trade union. It was rather a social movement against Communism – so I am experienced also in this. Therefore, if I start in few minutes to talk about liberal economy, you should not be too surprised.

And let me say: what does “freedom for the poor people” mean? It is another problem with our freedom and aspects that are limiting and restricting it. What does “freedom” mean for poor people? Some of them would even prefer, instead of being so free, to have something to eat. So here comes a very important slogan which we should relate to freedom – namely, fighting for prosperity.

Prosperity is a very difficult task. We cannot achieve it within one or two decades. Our partners, our friends from the Western part of Europe – those on the opposite site of the Iron Curtain, have been building their prosperity for five, six decades. We here are a bit late but we must go ahead. It is of vital importance. And they are giving us a solidarity signal; they are bringing such a solidarity signal also to you, to Bulgaria.

Solidarity. This is the message that I am bringing to you today straight forward from Brussels.

What does it mean? We are just in the process of building our strategy against the crisis. For you, the

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Bulgarian people, it is important first of all to be in Schengen. It is important for the movement, for the mobility of the persons, for students as well – maybe first of all for them. The Eurozone membership is another utmost priority for you. For you it can be an excellent possibility – Bulgaria to probably become the first country to join the Eurozone after the crisis. I would like to be the one to congratulate Bulgaria for having achieved this goal; It is possible! It would be great for you.

We need a common approach to a common – single market. We must build it; decide about it, once again, because not everything is solved in our single market. We also need to prepare our budget for the next seven years after 2013. We have two big parts of the budget, two big thoughts. One is for the competitiveness of Europe. Why is it so crucial? Because our objective is to bring more jobs to the market, as of course jobs are priority number one for our citizens and for the Bulgarian citizens. If we have more jobs, we are automatically fighting against poverty and social exclusion. Unemployment is the most dangerous enemy for us. So, if we are competitive, we have more jobs. How to be more competitive? The answer is, to be more innovative!

We must have new ideas, new technologies; we must build them. Can we be more innovative without research? No, it is impossible, research is necessary. If anybody would like to be a researcher, is it possible without education? No, not at all. So, you see, it is a triangle of knowledge – education, research, innovation. If we want to be competitive, we must guard knowledge, starting from the universities. Congratulations to you, young people, but also to the professors, for being here in this very important, famous university of Sofia – as far as I know the best university in this country. Am I right? Congratulations!

We have specific programmes and a lot of money to improve our triangle of knowledge. During the past years, I was rapporteur for the so-called Seventh Framework Programme. The next one will be Eight Framework Programme. The one for which I was rapporteur amounted to EUR 54 billion: can you imagine? Resources for roads, for cleaner atmosphere, for rivers, for research, for development, for the new technologies; an enormous amount of money – EUR 54 billion! For the next financial perspective, this money will be more.

In other words, this is a concrete proposal to the Bulgarians, to your institutions and enterprises, to your companies – an encouragement to go ahead with innovation, new technologies and research in order to be more competitive.

However we need also something else if we want to be competitive. What do we need? We need to unlock the potential of our regions. We have many regions not so much developed yet. We have them mainly in the Central and Eastern part of Europe, also in Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary, Latvia and Poland. We should unlock the potential of this region. We need the Structural funds and we must find the balance in the budget between the Structural funds – which are of utmost importance – and the money for competitiveness. We should participate in the competitiveness, as well.

They are waiting for us; we are waiting for you – the Bulgarian people and the rest of Europe, to be together. Often we are using the expression “European added value”: when we are

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doing something together, it has a European added value. “Airbus” is a good example of that. Today “Airbus” produces the best airplanes in the world. The biggest ones, as well.

So, goals like this one are achievable and we can do it – together, with the joint activities of the people in the whole European Union.

When building our future with common efforts, we have one basic challenge, namely, how to overcome poverty. The other element is the economy, the common market - which means more liberalization, no protectionism; To be sure, going freely ahead with our economy and free market is not that simple because we must consider the social dimensions, as well as the environmental aspects.

Having mentioned the possibilities to provide more prosperity to our countries, I would like to make another point – the energy issue. We know that everything is grounded on energy. With this respect you are a very experienced country – last winter in January, as far as I can remember, you suffered severely from oil cut downs and shortage of gas supply.

Well, let us be honest about what our citizens can understand really well: they can understand perfectly well what it means to cut down the gas supplies; they do not understand the Lisbon Treaty or care about the institutional work.

We must do everything to answer their expectations – including the energy field. You are in an absolutely crucial place here in Bulgaria from the point of view of energy supply. And the European Union is taking care about that. The European energy community must have its say because our citizens must feel safe when it comes to energy supply. They want their energy to be as cheap as possible. In addition, it will influence our competitiveness because all costs are based on the energy costs.

Well, it is very difficult to stop me earlier than an hour and a half because of my long academic experience; But I will respect the agenda of your President of Parliament and conclude in a few minutes.

Let me finish by going back to the topic of freedom. What is necessary? Of course, if you want to get the best of freedom, you should also foster the social prosperity, grounded on all the organization and efficiency of our society that is free. The civil society, the subsidiarity rule, the self-governance on the local and regional level – everything means that we are free. We should concern for others, for every single person from: the people surrounding us, our families, the different and specific groups of people; This is the core structure on which our free society, our democratic society is built. Article 54 of the new Chart of Fundamental Rights guarantees other basic freedoms: dignity, freedom of rights, freedom of speech, freedom of expression, freedom of assembly. Let me tell you one reason why I am saying that – because it is in the Lisbon Treaty. The Treaty itself is of course not interesting for the majority of the ordinary citizens but you should know about it. It is our common obligation.

We should not lose our feeling of freedom and the possibility to fight for it – neither inside, nor outside the European Union. We are engaging ourselves in the Eastern partnership and in order to understand how important it is today, we should think of the past and remember how important it used

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to be for us at the times when we were fighting for our own freedom. So today we must put ourselves on the other side and not neglect countries such as Moldova, the Ukraine, Belarus, etc., but help them. Some of these countries are doing quite well in development, better and better. Looking beyond the continent towards the rest of the world is also among our obligations as Europeans – to be concerned of what is happening in regions such as the Mediterranean, in Latin America; of course the contacts with the United States.

From a democratic perspective, in the fight for freedom and for the human rights, the most important institution in each Member State is the Parliament. A Parliament is directly elected in every single region. It is quite similar to the European Parliament. We in the EP are elected in all the European regions to work directly in Brussels and Strasbourg in cooperation with the national Parliaments. It is today the main point with the entering into force of the Treaty of Lisbon and I am absolutely convinced that we can – together – fight for the freedom, care about the freedom and bring more prosperity to our citizens.

This is the main message I brought from Brussels to Sofia and to Bulgaria.

Thank you very much!