

*Romania and the European Union.*

*Managing Expectations*

Ladies and gentlemen,

Thank you for your kind words, Mr Chairman. And thank you for inviting me. It is good to be back in Romania, the third time already as Minister for European Affairs.

Yesterday I had very good talks with my colleague Alexandru Farcas, chief negotiator Puscas, Minister of Foreign Affairs Geoana, Prime Minister Nastase and President Iliescu.

The topic that occupies everyone present here today, is the accession of Romania to the European Union. During my two-day visit, I have discussed this with many people. The Dutch EU Presidency has a special responsibility to guide the accession of new member states. Certainly now the European Commission has stated its point of view, it is the turn of the member states – and then especially the Presidency – to closely monitor the accession process. The continuing efforts of Romania will, of course, be essential.

Once Romania and the Netherlands already were part of a united Europe. But that was an incredible long time ago: almost

eighteen centuries! At the time Europe was ruled from Rome by Emperor Aurilian. From the Eternal City he manfully attempted to preserve the outer provinces for the Roman Empire. But his attempts were in vain. In 271 A.D. the Romans were forced to abandon the province of Dacia.

Now that Europe returns to Romania, its face has altered unrecognisably. Barosso in no way resembles Aurilian and Brussels is no modern version of Imperial Rome. The most important difference with the distant past is that this time conquest – if we can use that word in this context – occurs out of free will. If something is being conquered at all, then it is Europe itself. More and more countries have the ambition to join the EU.

The European Union has succeeded in reconciling arch-enemies France and Germany, and in uniting East and West. Its role as the binding force of our continent is unprecedented.

But today the paradox is that the popularity of the European Union among its citizens shows a downward spiral.. Despite its great merits, the Union has failed to make its citizens committed Europeans. Yesterday's self-confidence is giving way to doubt. Is dissension once again gaining the upper hand in Europe, at the expense of hard-won community spirit? Is the

Union about to disintegrate, as during the reign of Emperor Aurilian?

For Romanians euroscepticism must be difficult to comprehend. Among all the candidates for membership, your country has always shown the highest level of support for EU accession. Estimated at around eighty percent, this level of support has been constant from year to year. “What on earth has got into those Europeans that they can’t see the advantages of the Union?” you will be asking yourselves.

Your disbelief is even greater when you think that the Union not only unifies our continent, but has also brought it unprecedented prosperity. Since the abolition of internal borders ten years ago, the internal market has brought additional economic growth of 1.8 per cent in the EU. This corresponds to new wealth of almost 900 billion euros. An estimated 2.5 million new jobs have been created with this money. Knowing this, how can anyone still doubt the value of the Union?

The reality is that although the Union affects every day life, people feel increasingly detached from it. More and more citizens in the present Member States see Brussels as a hijacking the ship rather than a pilot guiding it into port. If we

are to prevent the ship of European integration from capsizing, the crew from deserting and the passengers from being swept overboard, action is needed. And candidate Member States like Romania also have a role to play.

“But what kind of action?” you may ask. I think that part of the solution could be summed up as “managing expectations”. I will explain what I mean.

The Union is often portrayed in a distorted light. Expectations about what it can and cannot do are not always realistic. That is bound to lead to disappointment.

Member States have a nasty habit of claiming the successes of the European Union. At the same time, they blame Brussels for any failures. In so doing we are deceiving our people and ourselves. The flaws of the Union are highlighted, but its merits are hidden from view. The real Union is shrouded in mist. And the consequences are not difficult to guess. We all know, after all, that it is not easy to feel sympathy for someone who hides his true face.

Candidate Members States like Romania cannot indulge in this game of “claiming and blaiming”. But they too should take this lesson to heart. Not because they would want to use the Union

as a scapegoat for their own failings. That is not likely. But because they may be tempted to view the Union as a panacea for their problems.

That is just as misleading. Membership of the Union does not mean an end to one's own responsibilities. If anything it means the opposite. Solidarity is not a one-way street. Membership brings with it mutual obligations. The Union can only fulfil its promise if individual member states maximise their own input. Only then is the Union truly more than the sum of its parts.

How important it is to manage the expectations of citizens became clear during the elections for the European Parliament of 2004. Precisely in the new member states the turnout was dramatically low. And that while only a month before they had finally become members of the European Union.

While I can't prove it, I think that the low turnout can at least partly be attributed to overly high expectations about Europe. Citizens apparently thought that, with accession, the job was done. But they soon found out that many rewards still lie in the future. Working in other member states was still subject to restrictions. And subsidies were more difficult to get than expected. Accession was a landmark. But it did not suddenly change their world.

It is an illusion to think that the job is done once membership has been achieved. Europe is work in progress for all its Member States. We should not permit any misunderstandings to arise about this. Especially in Romania, where the violent revolution of 1989 has made people more eager than elsewhere to join the Union. If they set their hopes too high, accession will inevitably turn out to be a disappointment. Chances are that Europe will then be blamed. That is not justified. Because the implementation of reforms is a means, not an end in itself.

Romania knows from experience that the Union sets the bar very high. In the past few years your country has gone to great lengths to meet the Union's criteria for newcomers. The Copenhagen criteria are quite categorical. Prospective members must be a stable democracy, respect the rule of law, uphold human rights, and protect minorities. They must also have a functioning market economy. And finally they must adopt the common rules, standards and policies – the *acquis communautaire* – that make up the body of EU law.

Two weeks ago Romania cleared an important hurdle in the race for membership. On the sixth of October, the Commission published its progress report on Romania. The report was

favourable. Romania has made good progress in implementing the Copenhagen criteria. It already meets the political criteria. And in view of its progress, the commitments made and the preparatory work still ahead, the Commission expects Romania to meet the economic and acquis-related criteria in January 2007. The Commission expects Romania's fellow candidate and neighbouring country Bulgaria to do the same.

As you know, the European Council has in recent years expressed the hope that the accession negotiations with Romania and Bulgaria could be concluded by 2004. The Commission is making a strenuous effort to complete the negotiations by the end of this year. The Commission assesses both countries separately, but with the same intention: signing accession treaties as early in 2005 as possible.

Almost two weeks ago the European Commission presented her progress reports on Romania and Bulgaria. Consultations with the current member states about the decisions to be taken in December are also under way. But whatever the decision on Romania and Bulgaria, it is already clear that the two candidate Member States will have to continue their efforts to reform until the date of accession.

Three important chapters – the environment, competition and

justice and home affairs – still have to be concluded with Romania. And even after a positive decision the implementation of the reforms must be continued. Our goal is to welcome Romania to the EU as an equal partner.

Of course, Romania will continue to receive help to reach this goal. You can count on the support of the current member states and active monitoring by the Commission. The Netherlands is a case in point. We will continue to assist Romania, both bilaterally and multilaterally. By facilitating the social transition; by transferring know-how through companies; and by granting budget and balance of payments support. Because that too is solidarity. The Netherlands contributes every year about € 12 mln to pre-accession support.

Arriving here in Bucarest I saw a giant countdown at one of the bigger roundabouts. Today, there are still about 804 days to go to 1 January 2007. I am impressed by the amount of work that has been done and the progress that has been achieved by the Romanian authorities and the Romanian people. For you, the motto in recent years has been all hands on deck. And that has brought you success. You are on course. The much coveted membership of the EU is on the horizon.

But make no mistake – the work is far from done. And even

once you are safely moored in port, it will still be a hard slog. Because membership demands constant work to make sure our ship remains seaworthy. The implementation of the Copenhagen criteria will remain an asset. But at the same time your share in future developments will be necessary. You will have a hand at the steering wheel quite soon. To avoid disappointment in the future, this reality must sink in now.

When the Romans under Emperor Trajan had subdued Dacia in 106 AD, a 42 meter high column commemorating this victory was erected in the centre of Rome. The column has survived the centuries. A beautifully carved frieze winds around the entire column, depicting the campaigns of Trajan in Dacia.

The frieze on the column tell the story of the war in meticulous detail. One scene records how the Romans seized an enormous amount of wealth from the conquered Dacians. Obviously these spoils were transferred to Rome, the centre of the world in those days.

On 29 October, the eyes of the world will again be focused on Rome. On this day, the heads of government of today's twenty-five Member States will sign the Constitutional Treaty. The Roman empire of Trajan has made way for what Robert Cooper in his book *The Breaking of Nations* has called 'the voluntary

empire of the European Union’.

One day soon, Romania will join this so-called voluntary empire. This empire is not about pillaging legionaries, but about constructive cooperation. Romania will benefit from membership. But it should not expect this to happen overnight. After all, Rome wasn’t built in a day either.

Thank you.