



Hendes Majestæt Margaretas tale i forbindelse med Dansk udenrigspolitisk Selskabs og Tænk tanken Atlantsammenslutningens seminar under titlen "Royal Diplomacy within the framework of the Romanian Presidency of the Council of the European Union"

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Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

My late father, King Michael, came to this capital and spoke before this institution exactly 17 years ago to the day - on the 29th of April 2002.

Our main struggle then was to be accepted as a member of NATO and of the European Union. I remember that period well, including the frustrations of being repeatedly told that our country was simply not ready, as well as our occasional personal doubts as to whether our effort made any sense. But my father had experienced much worse pressures in his long life, including the dark years of the Second World War and the dark decades of the Cold War, so he never doubted that we would succeed.

And succeed we did. Who would have imagined then that not only would Romania become a member of the European Union and NATO, but that by 2019 it would hold the Presidency of the EU? Yet this is precisely what did happen at the start of this year, and I am proud of the hundreds of our officials who took over the duties of arranging all the EU's agendas and summits, including the politically tricky task of shepherding the Brexit details.

My first duty today is to thank you, and all the other nations of the EU and NATO member-states for accepting our country's initial plea that Europe would be neither complete nor stable without our participation. I know it was not easy. I know that it was not always politically convenient. And, yes, I know that enlargement was not cheap. But I think that we can all agree that it was the right thing to do. It's also worth mentioning that, whatever one may say about the Union, its abilities to heal Europe's historic divisions and erase the scars of the past remain formidable.

However, this commendable process of European integration which once seemed both so productive and so deft in erasing the continent's Cold War divisions, is now coming under threat. The former communist countries are full members of the European Union, yet they feel increasingly alienated and are often censured for their supposed failings. With a few notable exceptions, many new member-states are now regarded in many western European capitals as an ungrateful bunch, a collection of nations eager to enjoy prosperity but unwilling to abide by the "rules of the club".

I am not arguing that any country should benefit from a special status, or should be immune from criticism; we are all members of the same family, and we should be able to talk freely, as members of one family. Yet



it is questionable whether the unremitting criticism is either useful or productive. And by tarring what are very different nations facing vastly different experiences with the same brush, the criticism tends to ignore the extent to which civil society in countries such as mine remains both vibrant and quite capable of pushing back against authoritarian tendencies which, I hope you don't mind me reminding you, are not exactly confined only to the former communist nations of Europe.

What is happening in a number of central European countries has more complicated reasons. Indeed, there has been phenomenal economic growth, and my country is one of the fastest-rising economies in Europe. But that has not erased the significant wealth gaps between the eastern and western halves of the continent. Three decades have passed since the end of communism, but we probably need another three decades to erase entirely the noxious effects of communist dictatorship and mismanagement. In short, an entire generation will pass before we are truly and fully united, and almost none of those who were mature people when the events of 1989 in my country removed the communist dictator, may live to see the day when Europe's East-West economic divide completely disappears. I point this out not to find excuses or to allocate blame, but simply to explain the sense of frustration felt in many new member states.

We also have different perspectives on social life and customs. We are more religious, more patriotic and more suspicious of high levels of immigration. It may be that some in the West don't like this. But to dismiss our feelings as just 'racism and xenophobia' or to divide everything between 'progressive' – by which we mean Western – and 'reactionary' is clearly counter-productive. It is also clearly wrong to argue that our values are not European values; they may not be fashionable in some parts of Europe, but are values which belong to the continent.

I repeat: none of this is to suggest that the new member states should be let off the hook, regardless of what happens in their countries. The fight against corruption, for instance, should continue unremittingly. The fight against anti-Semitism and other forms of racism should be intensified.

But the starting point for all activities is to stop patronising the new member states, and to avoid threatening them by artificially-extended conditionality clauses. Various proposals to use political conditionality in the disbursement of funds from the next seven-year budget of the Union in return for certain political concessions are not only illegal under existing EU treaties, but also guaranteed to divide rather than unite Europe.

Without in any way attempting to put a gloss over my country's problems, I still prefer to look on the positive side. We are almost three times wealthier today than we were when we shook off communism. Our commitment to the European Union and to NATO remains unwavering, and not only because we benefit from these institutions, but because there is a national consensus in my country that there is no other place Romania can be but at the heart of these institutions. Unlike you, we don't have the luxury of being surrounded by stable EU member states; we are, and are likely to remain, on Europe's exposed Eastern frontier, precisely where Russian troops are occupying territories of other nations, and continue to encourage more instability. Guarding Europe's stability is one of our duties, and one we accept with enthusiasm and dedication.



In short, we are making our own contributions, perhaps not in ways which are readily perceived or understood in other parts of the continent. We are doing so not because we wish to not because we wish to appear good and well behaved in your eyes, but because it is in our interest, and in the interest of all our allies. And we are doing so because we believe in the European idea. Indeed, I often notice that the true idealists are in the eastern part of the continent; the real cynics are often in the West.

So, today I think we all deserve to congratulate ourselves for what we have achieved in the past two decades, and how much the continent has changed for the good since my late father stood before you in 2002.

But we also need to accept that the real task facing Europe today is to complete the physical integration of the continent with the inner or let's say "psychological" one. And that means embracing the new member states and accepting that they don't have to think or behave exactly like the west before they can be considered as equals.

An event like the one tonight means much to us. It gives us the possibility to put forward our perspective, to understand each other better, and to broaden our knowledge.

Thank you very much.