

Speech by Federal Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle at the opening of the 24th European Congress of the Union of European Federalists

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--- Translation of advance text ---

The global financial crisis has mercilessly revealed a significant structural flaw in the European Union treaties: A monetary union in which economic, financial and budgetary policy are not closely coordinated cannot function in the long term.

The intensive crisis diplomacy of recent years has led to a series of new instruments and agreements, such as the ESM and the fiscal compact. We have thus undertaken tremendous efforts to prevent the collapse of the eurozone and the "contagion" of EU countries outside the euro area.

The ambitious measures implemented in our neighbouring countries deserve our respect. The adopted reforms are beginning to take effect. There are increasing indications that the worst is behind us. The triad of solidarity, consolidation and new growth through increased competitiveness is bearing fruit.

However, we are not out of the woods yet by a long way. Youth unemployment is unacceptably high in many European countries. We have to generate sustainable growth again and make the EU globally competitive. We still have a lot to do.

The debt crisis has led to an unprecedented crisis of confidence. Many people's faith in the EU's ability to provide effective and viable solutions in times of economic difficulty has been shaken. The danger is that many citizens will lose sight of the value of European integration. The economic crisis could then mutate into a fundamental political crisis.

Next year's European elections will be a crucial milestone for the European integration project. Populist, nationalist and Eurosceptic parties are on the upswing. We must not abandon the field to the Eurosceptics. The ideas populists and nationalists of all shades are now propagating throughout Europe are not real solutions.

If the crisis has taught us one thing, it is that less Europe is not a solution! But a better Europe could be. Only by joining forces do we have the resources and strength we need to overcome this crisis. All parties now have a responsibility to set out how the future of Europe should look.

A high turnout for the elections is vital. This is the only way to prevent the rise in the European Parliament of those who really want to do away with the European project by means of populist arguments.

Yet people will only participate if they can see that the EU is playing an active part in resolving specific major problems. That means that the EU must demonstrate "problem solving skills".

Your Congress's motto is: "Towards Federal Europe". This forward looking perspective is appropriate and particularly important in the light of the European elections. In the long term we must think beyond the crisis if we are to build a "better" Europe and provide "real" solutions.

Over the last two years a group of eleven pro European foreign ministers has focused on the future of the European project. I believe that the following two points emerging from their deliberations are particularly important:

Firstly: Strengthening the economic and monetary union has to be the absolute priority, because our joint economic success depends on the euro. A functioning euro area requires fundamental reforms in all fields with a bearing on the euro: We need progress in the banking union, the fiscal union, the economic union and in strengthening democratic legitimacy.

Last but not least, the relations between the euro states and those EU members that do not yet belong to the monetary union are also an important factor. Germany regards the cohesion of the EU as a whole as a valuable asset!

Secondly: We must not be content with merely strengthening the economic and monetary union. Rather, we have to improve the way the EU as a whole operates. The EU must become a more prominent player on the international stage. This involves developing our network of ties with the world's new centres of power.

We are witnessing an unprecedented phase of globalisation, driven by high speed technological innovation. Our greatest interest, and a Herculean task for foreign policy, lies in shaping globalisation in a spirit of peaceful international cooperation.

No European country can do this singlehandedly.

We need Europe to ensure that our values and interests have a voice in tomorrow's world.

To this end the EU must define its international profile more sharply. We have to become more assertive in our decision making. We need a European External Action Service with greater

political clout. And we need more majority decisions within the common foreign and security policy.

Moreover, foreign policy does not merely comprise common foreign and security policy. We also need more coordinated activity in external economic affairs policy, development aid, enlargement and neighbourhood policy, the management of migration flows, climate negotiations and energy security.

A functioning economic and monetary union and efficient external action should be the hallmarks of a strong EU.

However, it should not regulate issues which could be resolved more effectively at local, regional or national level. In this I wholeheartedly agree with the words of Commission President Barroso that "the EU should be big on big things and smaller on smaller things". The implementation of the subsidiarity principle is inextricably linked to the citizen friendliness we expect from the EU.

The drafting of reform initiatives, including treaty amendments, requires determination and persistence. This task needs to be tackled both within political parties and in dialogue with citizens. I am convinced that you will be sending a strong message at the conference promoting this type of discussion.

The goal of our efforts in what no doubt will be a long process should be a system based on the separation of powers in Europe which can boast effective decision making processes and which enjoys unrestricted democratic legitimacy.

A strong European executive embedded in a true parliamentary system should be our aim.

Europe is more than its institutions, more than its member states and more than a single market and free trade area. It is also far more than a single currency.

Above all else, Europe is a community based on a shared culture and common values. Our shared values are the foundation on which this Europe stands.

They are the legacy of the Enlightenment and of the revolutions for liberty in 1789 and 1989. The ideals that drove those revolutions are still the norms at the heart of our societies today. What we have built on those foundations here in Europe has massive international appeal. We need to protect and propagate that precious achievement.

That is why I have come together with a number of EU colleagues to launch an initiative to ensure better protection of European fundamental values and principles of the rule of law also within the European Union. I am delighted that the European Commission is thinking along the same lines.

Our fundamental values are our trump card in this globalised world.

I am sure that if we prove our credibility in this way, this will also lead to the development of a clearer orientation and restore trust in Europe.

Thank you very much.