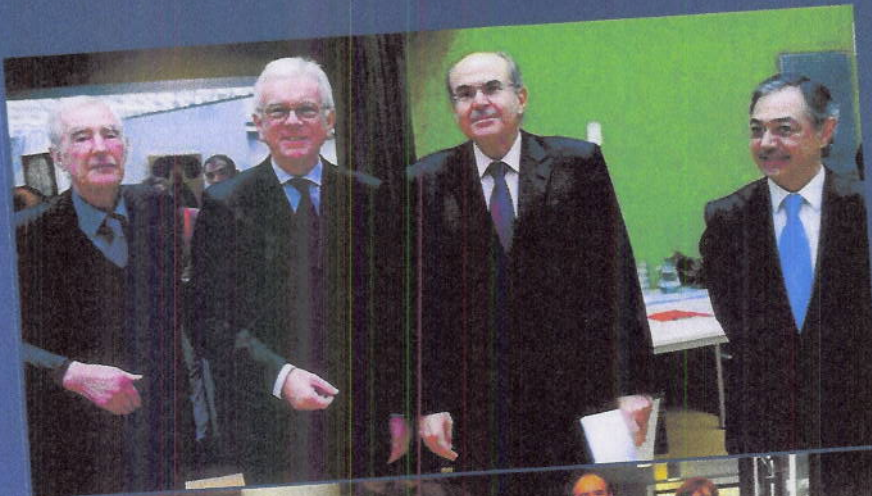




LIFE AND WORK IN THE EUROPEAN COURT OF AUDITORS

VIVRE ET TRAVAILLER À LA COUR DES COMPTES EUROPÉENNE
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«THE EUROPEAN PERSPECTIVE :
VALUES, POLITICS, THE ECONOMY
Dr. Hans-Gert Pöttering, President
of the European Parliament at the
Bridge Forum Dialogue

By Rosmarie Carotti

The conference took place on 12 March 2009 in the premises of the European Commission in Luxembourg under the chairmanship of Mr Vassilios Skouris, President of the Court of Justice of the European Communities and one of the Vice-Presidents of the The Bridge Forum Dialogue. Mr Vítor Manuel Da Silva Caldeira, President of the European Court of Auditors and Mr Philippe Maystadt, President of the European Bank, the President of the Board of Directors being Mr Yves Mersch, Governor of the Banque centrale du Luxembourg are also Vice-presidents.



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President Pöttering, whose term of office as President of European Parliament will soon come to an end, recognised in the audience many companions-in-arms and felt free to talk about the many things which move him. He shared his strong personal convictions, always distinguishing though between the institutional position and his personal beliefs. This gave the conference a unique touch.



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Dr. Hans-Gert Pöttering finds it marvellous to be able to live in a Union which Walter Hallstein, first president of the European Economic Community from 1958 until 1967, had called a "Rechtsgemeinschaft", a community of law.

The future of the European Union, its values, politics, economy, is for him a very challenging subject. One of the greatest successes of the European development after World War II is the creation of a community of values, where values mean building on the dignity of the human being, on human rights, democracy, legal order, freedom, peace and the principles of solidarity and subsidiarity.

The European Union with its 27 countries, with almost 500 million people, is not just a geographic entity but a community based on these values. They need to be defended in Europe and in the world, for example when young students in exile from Byelorussia come for a visit to the European Parliament or when a resolution is passed demanding that the Tibetan people can live freely their culture and religion.

President Pötering looks back with pride at the moment when, together with the President of the Commission and the German Chancellor Angela Merkel, the then President of the European Council, he had the honour of signing the declaration commemorating 50 years of the Treaty of Rome, a declaration in which is written "Wir sind zu unserem Glück vereint" (We, the citizens of the European Union, have united for the better")

200 million people more than in the United States of America live in this European Union. This shows its complexity and the need, and this is something which also has to do with the values, of respect for each other. Europe has to be very careful to respect the identity of all its nations, big or small, and of its entire people.

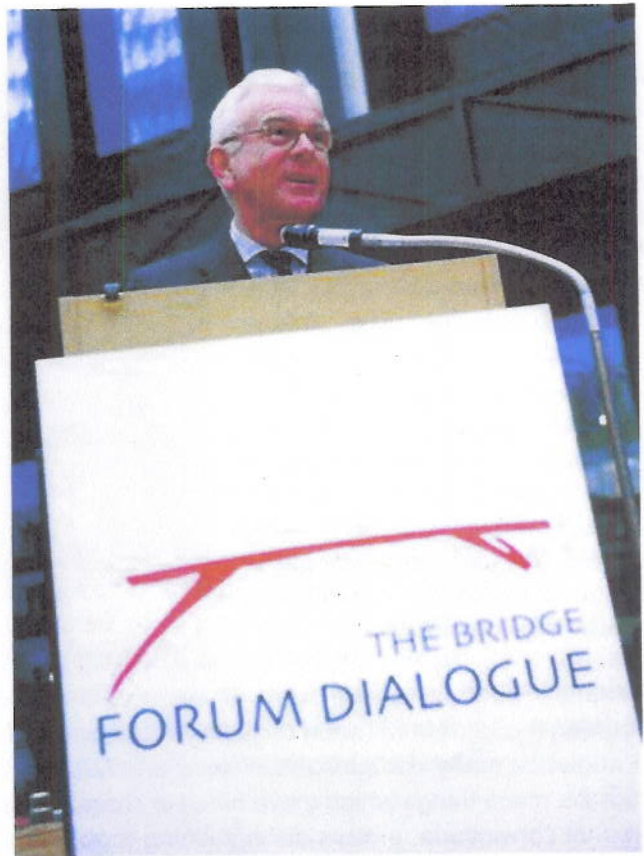
On 27 December 2007, the borders of Poland were opened to the Schengen area. It was a historical moment. The totalitarian systems had failed and each person remained responsible for himself and the community.

Thinking back, many things have evolved. As late as 1980 or 1981, the European High Court decided that a decision taken by the Council without consulting the European Parliament was not valid. Now European Parliament is a codecision legislator in about 75% of the legislation and it will expand this right further with the Lisbon Treaty. A strong will is the key to success.

What are the great challenges for the future?

President Pötering is deeply convinced that the future in the 21st century in Europe will depend to a large extent on how good relations with other cultures, especially with the Islamic world, will be. But this dialogue of cultures must be based on mutual tolerance and cannot be a one-way road.

For the Middle East he hopes in a peace solution based on two States, Israel and Palestine. He sees no enlargement of the EU, with the exception of maybe Croatia, if the Lisbon Treaty is not ratified. Enlargement is a political question and the European unification process cannot be based on mere economic considerations.



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He is very sceptical about a membership of Turkey despite the majority of the European Parliament being in favour of it, while he considers the relations with Russia vital for the future. After the recently experienced problems in energy supply, he pleads for a diversification of sources and suppliers of energy, whereby he does not exclude nuclear energy.

Then there are the economic and financial challenges. Europe should always keep in mind what its principles are. Europe does not stand for the capitalistic system, the Lisbon Treaty in fact speaks about social market economy and this means that the market has to serve the people. And it is important to preserve freedom within the Single Market. Subventions which are not

agreed by the European Commission will therefore harm the Single Market and Europe's competitiveness in the world. The stability of the European currency, which the Eurogroup under President Jean-Claude Juncker is defending very well, will also be a decisive factor in confirming Europe's position.

Of course, solutions for the banking system, more control, and more transparency are needed. For this very reason, President Pötinger has strongly supported the request of Gordon Brown, the British Prime Minister, to speak before the European Parliament to present his ideas for the G-20 on April 2, in London. This shows that there is a development at the level of the European leaders who realise that they have to go together.

To close, President Pötinger goes back to what was said in the beginning, that Europe is a community of law which has to defend its legal system because it is the basis of the European unification process.

But there are different levels of politics, there is a national and there is a European level. And then there is a local level. In the Lisbon Treaty there is an article defending the "kommunale Selbstverwaltung" (administration at local level). Therefore, let's not harmonize everything for economic reasons but let's defend what has been developed over decades or even over centuries at the local level. If a balance is found between the different levels, the citizens will hopefully understand what the institutions do in the European Union.