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GALA – KLARA FESTIVAL OF FLANDERS 2007

HERTOGINNEDAL / VAL DUCHESSE – 29 JANUARY 2007

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Thank you for this invitation. I am greatly honoured, surprised even, that you have invited the representative of European business – now called BUSINESSEUROPE – to speak to you this evening.

What unites us here in Hertoginnedal / Val Duchesse is Europe. It was here that the Treaty of Rome was negotiated and signed fifty years ago, coming into force one year later.

Now is the time to pay solemn tribute to all those – including many Belgians – who worked to support this European project, to develop it in many important areas, and to bring it to a successful conclusion.

The European Union today brings together twenty-seven member states and almost 500 million citizens. The European Union is the largest market in the world – for the time being at least, until we are overtaken by China and India – but is not yet a real political heavyweight.

One of Europe's founders, Jean Monnet – or was it Robert Schuman? – is supposed to have said: *“Puisqu'on ne peut faire l'Europe de la culture, faisons l'Europe de l'agriculture”* – since we cannot create a Europe of culture, let us create a Europe of agriculture. This is wrong. Schuman and Monnet knew all too well that a cultural project was not the right goal.

Coal and steel were the interests that had divided Europe, the industries that were the basis for the power of nations and hence the trump cards for waging war! Not really cultural products. The European Coal and Steel Community was the first step towards integration, a binding agent between six countries to avoid any possibility of war.

Chancellor Angela Merkel alluded to this in her maiden speech to the European Parliament:

“Harmony among nations, that was and also remains the greatest goal of European unity. That was also the starting point for the initial steps taken in Europe after 1945. The treaty establishing the European Coal and Steel Community, as well as the Treaties of Rome, dealt with our culture very little or not at all”.



The European culture Angela Merkel is talking about and which characterises us is based on respect for diversity, freedom and tolerance. In addition, this project must be buttressed by a European vision.

How far have we come with Europe today?

We must acknowledge that the European project is in a very critical state and that it is urgent to find a political solution to this crisis.

The European members of BUSINESSEUROPE have resolutely and unanimously opted for rapid and far-reaching European integration. It could also have been different. I know a range of companies or business people who are not real believers, or who think that things can go on as they are, who consider that European integration cannot slip backwards. Nothing could be further from the truth! European integration needs constant work, solutions need to be identified to reach political compromises.

For BUSINESSEUROPE, this means:

- carry through the necessary reforms at national level, in order to allow European integration to move forward coherently;
- stimulate and organise the European internal market in an efficient manner;
- to that end, put up firm resistance to all forms of protectionism both within Europe and with respect to the outside world;
- that is also why we are proponents of expansion of the European Union, in the first instance for political reasons and also for economic and social purposes;
- lastly, there is an urgent need to rethink social systems on the basis of the unique features of the European model, in particular that economic growth must go hand in hand with greater solidarity.

To realise these five objectives, a decision on institutional reforms is urgently needed. This is not a mere adventure. We regard institutional reform as an essential element for economic and social development, as well as the cultural progress of our continent.

Europe – and each of its Member States – must today offer a response to three challenges: globalisation, demography and technology.

Only Europe can provide these responses. Hence, our vision is a stronger Europe in the world.

This also requires a much deeper dialogue with European citizens who no longer believe, who have the impression that they are losing their “national” identity, who have difficulties with diversity.

The European project “A Soul for Europe” that President Barroso recently presented, following in the footsteps of Jacques Delors, may offer an answer: *“because Europe needs culture since culture, without any doubt, contributes to its well-being, its greater welfare and its social cohesion... Culture is the place where creativity most fully expresses itself and is a force for innovation and initiative”.*



And if you will forgive me, culture also has a growing economic and even technological interest. There is indeed a bond between business – the economy – and the cultural sphere. This interest is not small. It was calculated recently by the Commission: 2.6% of European GNP or around six million jobs. That is more than the food industry.

The indirect consequences are also spectacular. In the world of music, for instance, the reason we are all here this evening, developments in the last few decades have been incredibly large. It is absolutely certain that globalisation has had the greatest influence. Music is a central pillar of every culture.

Music comes from anywhere and everywhere: compare today's programme for Festival van Vlaanderen with one from twenty or even just ten years ago. Music has become an enormous business – sometimes to the detriment of quality. We must congratulate Festival of Flanders and Klara Festival which attach paramount importance to both quality and diversity.

Musical activities also form the basis for an industrial and technological development: CDs and DVDs but also CD players, mobile equipment and Internet technology. A highly creative and innovative industry because of technological progress. This also has far-reaching consequences for the remuneration of creation and artists, as well as for maintenance of intellectual property rights.

What applies for music also applies – *mutatis mutandis* – for literature and publishing, design, cinema, plastic arts.

That brings me to my conclusions.

On the one hand, I am struck by how many similarities there are between successful entrepreneurship and the creative art world: the drive, the openness, the stimulating character, the push for innovation.

When Angela Merkel asks herself: "*What makes Europe's difference possible?*" her answer is "*freedom in all its manifestations*" and she links directly to "*freedom of enterprise and the freedom of artists to create their work as they see fit*".

Successful companies and dynamic cultural activities are also the characteristics of a successful and dynamic country or region.

The public authorities have their role to play not by steering the projects but by creating the right conditions for success. Bilbao has been transformed by its Guggenheim museum!

With my second conclusion, I would like to urge the many business people here this evening to engage creatively with culture in their capacity as business leaders and businesses. Obviously, this can be done in a wide variety of ways, adapted to fit in with the individual characteristics of the company in question.



Nevertheless, a cultural project that is more than just a marketing instrument.

A cultural project that holds together the people within the business, that reflects an innovative way of thinking, that becomes a stimulating factor for development of the business!

Because companies form part of *"The Soul of Europe"*.