

CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES FOR THE EUROPEAN UNION*

I must say that this conference comes at a challenging moment in the history of the EU and deals with challenging issues such as the Lisbon Treaty implementation, the EU-Turkey-CY relations and Energy security.

Allow me to say a few words about the Lisbon Treaty and about the EU-Turkey-Cy relations.

1. First the Lisbon Treaty:

It was a long and difficult process to come to this so called "Reform Treaty" because it takes time to think and to agree with 27 states and 27 populations on how to carry forward this EU to a better, more efficient and democratic future.

I will not here analyze every aspect of the Lisbon Treaty in details but I just want to mention two points:

a) EEAS (EU diplomatic Service)

The target date is 01/12/2010 for the effective implementation of this service, which will be an essential instrument in the foreign policy of the EU.

The EP still has to adopt a few technical instruments (budget, status of the EU-diplomats) in the coming weeks.

The creation of this service is one of the most important innovations of the Lisbon Treaty and will in the future play a major role in building a true EU foreign policy.

b) The EU Citizens Initiative

The Lisbon Treaty states: 1 million citizens of the EU, from a significant number of member states can take the initiative to put a specific subject on the EU-Commission's agenda.

* Welcoming/opening address by H.E. Mr Guy Sevrin, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary, Royal Belgian Embassy in Cyprus at the conference "CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES FOR THE EUROPEAN UNION", organized by the Cyprus Center for European and International Affairs in cooperation with the Centre for European Policy Studies (CEPS) within the framework of European Policy Institutes Network (EPIN), on October 15, 2010.

A number of technical details need to be sorted out (electronic signatures, receivability of the demand, after 100.000 signatures) but we are hopeful that this initiative will be implemented by the end of the year.

It is an instrument that will bring the citizens closer to the Union and the Union closer to the citizens. It makes the EU more democratic.

2) Now EU-Turkey-CY relations

What the Belgian EU presidency has been aiming at is to keep the EU-enlargement process going. The more states that join the EU (of course after they adopted our values and principals) the better for the strength & credibility of the EU, at least that's what we strive for.

So we started negotiations with Iceland and we hope to reach a final stage in the negotiations with Croatia.

We are also talking with other Balkan states. Soon we will start a dialogue with Serbia.

But I suppose Turkey is more interesting for you.

As my minister of Foreign Affairs said when he was here end of August: we would like to keep the Turkey-EU train going. The end station of this train should be EU-membership.

We are fully in line with the position that Turkey has to fulfill all its obligations to the EU, including the implementation of the Ankara Protocol and we use every opportunity to explain this to Ankara.

At the same time we want to move on by opening at least 1 chapter (specifically Chapter 8 Competition), a chapter that is not blocked and is solely dependant on the Turkish will to reach the benchmarks.

Taking up the image of the train again: I would say that it depends on the speed of the train of reforms in Turkey when it will reach the final destination. it also depends on who is driving the train, the quality of the rails, what the passengers want, the train may have to go over narrow bridges and through dark and long tunnels, there may be a risk that the train derails or changes directions ...there may be obstacles on the rails...

But what we hope for above all is that this Turkey-EU train will not clash with the Cypriot train which final destination is a just and viable solution for the reunification of the island.