

**Speech by President of the European Peoples Party  
Wilfried Martens  
(former Prime Minister of Belgium - 1979 to 1992)**

**Nicosia, 4 May 2010**

**Book presentation:  
"Europe: I Struggle, I Overcome"**

Dear Rector,

Your excellencies,

It is a great honour and privilege to present to you this evening my book *"Europe: I struggle - I overcome"*. I am grateful to you for joining me here in Nicosia, and for the interest you are showing in my personal career and political engagement.

Thank you, President Anastasiades for your kind words and opening comments. Your party, the Democratic Rally, has under your leadership become one of the most active members of the European People's Party (EPP). Thank you for the invitation.

Thank you Professor Zenios for presenting my book in such a thorough and comprehensive way.

I would also like to warmly thank the Glafkos Clerides Institute for Eurodemocracy for taking the initiative to organize this event. I'm happy to say that your Institute is also a very active member of the EPP think-

tank 'Centre for European Studies' (CES). Without your kind help and support, it would not have been possible to hold this event.

Knowledge and learning are essential if we are to make our Continent globally competitive and able to face the challenges ahead. And politicians should never forget that investing in knowledge and skills through better education and research require the will to act not words of inaction.

#### *THE INSPIRATION FOR MY BOOK*

The original idea to write this book came to me six years ago and in 2006 the first edition was published in Dutch and French. Then, I decided to publish an updated international version in English, which covers the period up to the end of December 2008 and looks at the major developments in recent European political history - many of which I have been privileged to take part in.

Publishing this latest version was made possible thanks to the initiative of the Centre for European Studies. This edition has been produced thanks to a dedicated team. For the part concerning my career as a Belgian politician, I am very grateful to two journalists, Hugo de Ridder and Guy Daloze, and to two young academics, Steven Van Hecke and Pieter Ronsyn. For the European section, which is the main focus this book, I warmly thank the Spokesman of the EPP and my close associate Kostas Sasmatzoglou who also has strong bonds with Cyprus and the University of Cyprus. This team made sure my recollections were set in an historic framework and written so as to reach out to the general

public. And they coordinated all the work with 'Springer', the German-based international publishing house, a task requiring long hours combined with attention to detail.

My colleagues, friends and partners in the EPP have stressed to me time and again that individuals who played an important part in politics have a moral responsibility to publish their experiences. The public has the right to know how crucial decisions reached in the past were actually made, particularly since the past produces the present and shapes the future. As politicians, we must remember that we are public servants, elected to office to serve our people and to be accountable for all our actions. We must never forget that we work for the people.

Apart from fulfilling this democratic responsibility, I would also like this book to become a pedagogical tool - a document that helps bring politics to life by using examples gained from personal experience to educate future generations. Too often young people are turned off from political involvement - but we need your idealism, energy and openness if we are to overcome the challenges facing us.

#### *LEARNING FROM THE PAST - LESSONS FOR EVERYONE*

Young people often think outside the box, bringing a much-needed fresh focus to problems. This book is written for the young people whose interest in politics is awakening, and also for those already involved in political life. It covers almost sixty years of European history, from 1950 to 2008, illuminated through my personal experiences. So much has changed during the six decades my book covers, as the European

dream has become a reality based on a shared vision of Europe's role in the world - a Continent united in diversity.

This new world brought many of us opportunities beyond the wildest dreams of our parent's generation, who faced the destruction and upheaval of world war. It makes it much harder than ever before in European history for any one country to become a rogue state. There has been lasting reconciliation between the bitterest of enemies, and two generations of peace.

But whilst taking this peace and prosperity for granted, we should not forget that it is born out of blood and toil, built by those with courage and purpose. For me, as a young child growing up, war was a ruinous reality understood by everybody and feared by all. I am pleased that today, in Europe, this is no longer the case. Sword and shell have been replaced by debate and dialogue, as we seek an ever closer European Union to safeguard Europe's cultural diversity and its languages, nations, regions and minorities. Sadly, the situation here in Cyprus remains as a European anachronism since the north of the island continues to be occupied by Turkish military forces and settled by illegal migrants.

Writing these chapters has been a fascinating journey through my life. Through documents, pictures and sound bites, I continually faced my pronouncements and opinions from years ago. Even though they may have evolved since, I have nevertheless taken care to reproduce my words and deed from those days as accurately and as truthfully as

possible. By putting into words step by step my life's work, I witnessed how my entire career was dominated by politics.

Today, the life of a politician is a continuous race, conditioned by deadlines and objectives that are too often for the shorter term - in the hope that one's action will not go unnoticed and will retain significance for the common good. The career of all politicians also contains at times adversity and difficult passages. Those rekindle motivation and can lead to new successes: hence the choice of *Luctor et Emergo, I struggle – I overcome*, as the title of my book.

#### *GLOBAL CHALLENGES FACING EUROPE*

I have noticed how questions that often occupied me for many years resurface again today and go on dominating the news. This is not illogical. The consolidation of the welfare state, finalisation of the Belgian federal model and further European integration are projects that never really finish: they have to be adapted by each generation. But one should never forget that the ground gained by one generation can too easily be lost by the next.

Europe is adjusting to a new era of globalisation, demographic change and migration. By 2050, the world's population will be over nine billion. And globalisation has propelled a tsunami of change through our lives, with many borders no longer barriers.

We will need to continue down the path of ever closer union as we share sovereignty and gain strength to tackle the cross-border challenges such

as climate change, energy security, nuclear proliferation, global pandemics, demographic change, and global poverty. Our nations face the same threats, ranging from the 'hot war' against global warming to the fight against terrorism. These are issues where people recognise the need for international solutions, ones that require more Europe and not less.

In 2010 the European Union's Comité de Sage will put forward ideas about where Europe is going over the next twenty to thirty years. If we wish to build a Europe based on solidarity, security, shared values and shared prosperity, we need to reflect on how we use the new instruments in the Treaty of Lisbon to achieve such a Europe that is more transparent, more open to people's needs, and more politically accountable. Too often, politicians ignore the long-term implications of policy-making, preferring instead to look at short-term electoral cycles. This is wrong, and means that political tactics prevail over real strength - even though we all know that most problems cannot be solved instantly.

#### *THE CENTRE-RIGHT BUILDING EUROPE*

Leading centre-right politicians laid the foundations for the Treaty of Rome, together creating a Europe based on subsidiarity. As Italy's Alcide De Gasperi stated in 1953 "we must seek union only where it is necessary or, rather, where it is essential. By preserving the independence of all that forms the basis of the spiritual, cultural and political life of each nation, we safeguard the natural bases of our life together". The last fifty years have been our success story, a story

which started with the integration of Western Europe and ended with the final reunification of our continent.

And thirty-four years ago, when I co-founded the European People's Party, we were engaged to build Europe as an ever-closer union with respect for the diversity of every Member State. We were convinced that without economic union Europe would have to relinquish a great deal of its decision-making to third powers and that without a common sovereignty Europe would not be politically independent.

This unification process was not easy. During the early eighties we lived through a period of Eurosclerosis. Then, in 1985, as Commission President Jacques Delors put the integration process back on track and became the driving force for the Maastricht Treaty in 1992. This re-launch was due to the combined commitment of Helmut Kohl and François Mitterand. I look back with nostalgia at this tenacious trio, who transmitted a powerful European message and were ready to defend this to the outside world - when necessary even to their own political parties. These were European statesmen, who focused on the future needs of Europe.

Europe needs such leaders - leaders that put European achievements first instead of using the Union as a scapegoat for unpopular national measures, which perpetuates a continued crisis of confidence. The European model of closer cooperation, as nation states share sovereignty, is the way forward in an ever more globalised world. And as the philosopher Seneca warned two thousand years ago: "If one does not know to which port one is sailing, no wind is favourable". Today's

leaders will quickly become yesterday's men if they fail to act without vision.

Our aim should be to create a political Europe that is more answerable to the voter and offers clearer choices. Politicisation will bring Europe closer to the citizens, demystifying institutional structures through greater transparency and accountability. Political decisions should be made by elected politicians, who are subject to the scrutiny of the voters and the verdict of the ballot box, not by unelected and faceless bureaucrats.

#### *THE LESSONS OF HISTORY*

**Just a few months ago, we celebrated the twentieth anniversary of the tearing down of the Berlin Wall. As twenty-seven nations celebrated our joint success, it is important for us to pause and reflect why one of them, Cyprus, remains divided. Although the European Union stands for freedom, democracy, peace and prosperity, these European values cannot be fully enjoyed in Cyprus as long as it remains partly occupied by the military forces of a country that aspires to become a member of the EU.**

The accession of the Republic of Cyprus to the EU has not in itself solved the Cyprus problem but it has brought to the forefront the importance of European fundamental values and the urgency to apply them in a reunited country, free from occupation forces. Glafkos Clerides understood these values early in his political career and - as a deeply convinced European with a strong sense of history - negotiated with

skill, credibility, determination and vision the accession of Cyprus to the EU.

One has to learn from history - be it in Cyprus, Belgium or Europe. The danger is that if new generations fail to learn from history, they risk repeating the mistakes of the past. I would never have spent so much time and effort on this book if I did not hope that the young generation could learn from it and draw inspiration.

The future of Cyprus in your hands, please use it wisely.

Thank you.

ENDS