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**“Europe in the World”
Lecture by President of the European Council
Herman Van Rompuy
at Regent’s University in London**

It’s always a great pleasure to be in London, and a special pleasure to speak here today at Regent’s University. First of all, I should like to congratulate the institution on this new academic status! I also understand that the elegant buildings where we are gathered originally date back to 1913; opened by Queen Mary herself, for Bedford College.

One year before World War I, students and professors working in these buildings certainly lived in another London, another Europe, in another world... 1913, which brought us the parachute, the assembly line and the zip; turmoil in the Balkans and in Mexico... and the first Chelsea flower show.

Ladies and gentlemen, this afternoon, as announced, I would like to speak about where Europe finds itself today in the world. And rather than focus upon the heat of the day, in this academic setting I would prefer to use the opportunity to go beyond the headlines and reflect with you on longer-term trends and developments. In this season, foreign affairs summits and fora come thick and fast, between the St Petersburg G20 and next week’s UN General Assembly in New York... But there's rarely an opportunity to take a step back. A pity, since day-to-day positions and reactions can be outdated quickly, certainly with the current pace of events.

So today here with you at Regent’s, I would prefer to try and describe some forces and fault-lines regarding Europe’s place in the world, and how and where to act (or not) as a Union – drawing on the soon-to-be four years I will have spent in my current office.

P R E S S

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I mentioned Regent's buildings, not just because of their elegance, but also because the year 1913 is not a bad place to start such an exercise. With the hundred-year anniversary of the outbreak of the first World War approaching – and I know it will be well-commemorated in the UK –, one can be tempted to draw analogies with the past. Indeed, earlier this year, one European Prime minister said that in watching rising tensions in Europe, within and between countries, he sometimes felt it was 1913...

Foreign affairs commentators indulge in such parallels. They compare for instance China since 1970 to the former German Empire after 1870: allegedly two rising economic powerhouses keen to challenge the global hegemon of the seas, today the United States, just as back then it was Britain. Their point being that a century ago, the resulting tensions brought down the international order. However, I think such parallels miss the point. We live in a different world. It would make more sense to contrast the belligerence of the Great Powers of the past with the relative restraint of those of today.

After all, nowadays none of the big players (and you can all make your own catalogue) would dare to risk all-out conflict with a country in the same league. Very generally speaking, we have probably more to fear from failed and collapsing smaller states, as hotbeds of terrorism and anarchy, than from direct confrontation between strong, big states. In that sense, 2013 is quite unlike 1913. Bigger players are much more wary to play the war card, more conscious than back then, of their economic interdependence and of the risks of destructive escalation, more appreciative of the international order, however fragile it sometimes seems. And globally, that makes the world a safer place.

It is commonplace to compare the situation today with Europe's clout at the start of the last century: close to 20 percent of world population, producing close to 40 percent of the world's wealth, and ruling over 80 percent of the world's land mass. If humanity as a whole were a sports team of fourteen people, today only one player would be from Europe... Yet the fact that the half billion people living in EU countries (or 7 percent of global population) still produce 20 percent of global wealth is not negligible – it's more than the US or China. If relative decline there is, it is certainly from a high starting point.

And still today, despite the self-inflicted destruction of 1914 to 1945, and despite communism's grip on half of Europe for four decades after that, our continent remains by all means unique and privileged for its combination of relative prosperity, freedom, peace and security, as well as equality. It's always important to keep a sense of proportion! This of course does not mean that I underestimate our other problems, not least high unemployment in some European member countries.

In any case, we have all reasons to rejoice for the fact that in the past twenty, thirty years, hundreds of millions men and women across the world have made their way out of poverty. It's unprecedented in human history. The benefits of globalisation are real.

And in a way, it is also the modern way of life we value, that is spreading to other parts of the world. Others are making these aspirations their own, in their own way. We do not hold a copyright on how we organise our societies. In some respects, just as, two generations ago, decolonisation was also the result of the spread of 19th-century democratic nationalism to the rest of the world, so globalisation today is shaped by the spreading of a 20th-century vision of open economies and societies. Deep down it's the same movement.

We still tend to think in terms of emerging *economies*. But of course it also means emerging powers. Stronger economic weight quite naturally crystallizes into global political influence; in my view, more so than military might can achieve. We've seen how this has only accelerated with the global financial crisis.

As long as globalisation was seen mainly as an economic process, it appeared as if we could all win. In the new, political phase of globalisation, this changes. Politics is also about balances of power. And power is relative. Whereas prosperity is spreading, power is shifting... It further increases the uneasiness in our societies with these developments. Even if I sometimes think that, from bipolar, the world has not become multi-polar, but rather a-polar.

The West is losing certain monopolies we've held for two centuries, economically, politically, militarily. It would be counterproductive to deny it. But, nuance again, the loss of monopoly does not mean the loss of all power. Europe and America still have major assets. Even as happily dethroned copyright-holders, in today's "open-source" world we continue to perform well.

We have our challenges but – as the past few weeks and months have again made clear – the emerging countries, too, face huge internal challenges, political and economic. Most also have to readjust their social and economic models. Just as we in the eurozone and the European Union are currently doing.

For the countries of Europe, the question is how to deal with these long-term trends and sudden accelerations. How can we continue to defend our interests and values, our societies, in today's world?

Clearly each single European country will come up with its own answers – depending on geography and history, size and strength, and political culture too. All kinds of examples spring to mind! Yet the 28 countries within the European Union provide some of these answers together. As a Union. And we should not underestimate what we can – and what we do – achieve that way. Without Europe, there would be no WTO, no International Court of Justice, no global fight against climate change, no G20. Together we provide more than half of the world's development and humanitarian aid, making a huge difference from Haiti, to Afghanistan, to Syria.

I know the EU (or Europe) is sometimes derided as somewhat of a "Florence Nightingale". But soft power is not a dirty word. And we don't just send nurses and nutritionists, we also send judges and policemen, we send soldiers and marines. We help build statehood, security, the rule of law. As the European Union, we work in places like the Sahel or eastern Congo to combat lawlessness, to restore a sense of justice. The troops of our countries are present in Iraq, Afghanistan and Mali, under the aegis of NATO or the UN, and sometimes that of the EU (as in Somalia).

We know the value of acting together. More often than not, what we do together, we do better. What might sometimes slow us down but what ultimately makes our strength is that we always strive to set out on a common course when dealing with crisis situations. Take the Middle East Peace Process, or sanctions against Iran's nuclear endeavours, or our involvement in Libya and Mali: we are as united as can be.

Of course, part of our diplomatic coordination takes place in the open, especially when the stakes are high, which may sometimes look confusing. (By the way, this can also be the case in other major democracies.)

European countries know it's worthwhile to talk things through, because the added value of pulling our weight together is huge. Governments recognise that an important part of the work for their citizens' security and prosperity is best done with their neighbours, their partners. They see that being part of the Union is not about giving up one's own role, but rather about leveraging strength by aligning positions, pooling resources, acting in the world as a team.

In that sense, a country like the United Kingdom has always been a driving force. As I said in February this year in the City of London's Guildhall: *"The United Kingdom's commercial outreach, its military and diplomatic clout are matched only by few other countries. It is uniquely placed to leverage its own initiatives, and therefore by working jointly has the most to win. For a country like the UK, to make its voice heard in the world, 'Europe' does not work as a damper, but as a megaphone."*

I was pleased to see, this summer, that the benefits of European cooperation in Foreign Policy and Development are fully recognised in the Government-led "Balance of Competences Review". As Europeans, our joint influence is particularly strong in two areas: trade and our neighbourhood.

First, on trade. We've built the world's largest and most prosperous market, and we're the most open economy in the world. And let's call a spade a spade: even in the current economic climate, that still makes Europe a commercial superpower. And we can say this with more confidence, having overcome the existential threats to the eurozone. The huge pull-power we can get from trade works precisely because we wield it together. Pulling apart would weaken our hand, and we know it.

Europe has invested a huge deal in multilateral trade. But it's not a secret that nowadays the multilateral trade agenda is not in good shape. The situation could be worse: 1930s-style protectionism has been avoided, and this is no modest achievement. The most powerful economies in the world, at the St Petersburg G20 two weeks ago, agreed to extend to 2016 their commitment to not introduce any further protectionist measures.

But let's be honest: even if the WTO's court-like capacity to resolve trade disputes remains an irreplaceable asset, the policy-driving function of the World Trade Organisation is stagnating. Given the economic pressures back home, our countries simply can't wait until all parties involved get their act together. We can't afford to forgo the additional growth we can get from better international trade.

We remain committed to multilateral trade; in the meantime we are pushing ahead via bilateral and regional deals. Some ambitious ones have already been concluded (like between the EU and Korea) and others are on the way. With Japan, with India, with Canada, with Vietnam... But above all, I am thinking of the Transatlantic trade talks which the United States and the European Union decided to launch, at the G8 in Northern Ireland earlier this spring. This, I think, can be a game-changer, not just on both sides of the Atlantic, but worldwide.

I am not saying that making it really work will be an easy task – it's about pushing boundaries further than we ever have before. Both sides will need to make compromises. But pulling this off could change the face of world trade, for the better.

Secondly, enlargement. With trade, this is the second area where our joint pulling power can really be felt. For our direct neighbours on the continent, the Union works as a magnet. Enlargement – dear also to successive British governments – is our most successful foreign policy, still today.

After 1989, we've helped the countries who in the Cold War found themselves on the eastern side of the Iron Curtain to transform themselves politically and economically. For sure, they did the work themselves, but our pulling power helped to mobilise the necessary social energy, and to give a shared perspective in a period of turmoil and uncertainty.

Today, in Europe, the focus is on the Western Balkans. Giving these countries a firm European perspective has been one of my foreign affairs priorities since the start of my mandate. And the progress is real. Earlier this year, Croatia became the Union's 28th member. The agreement our High Representative Catherine Ashton brokered between Belgrade and Pristina helped unlock the accession process for Serbia, brought Kosovo closer to the EU and placed Kosovo/Serbia relations on a path towards normalisation. A page has been turned, and hopefully it will trigger a positive dynamic: it is a game-changer for the region.

Further to our East, with the countries that lie between Europe's and Russia's borders (Ukraine, Moldova and Belarus) and in the southern Caucasus (Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia), we also share special relationships. At our upcoming Eastern Partnership summit with all six, this November in Vilnius, the stakes will be high. These partners are, as it were, in between two 'magnets' and have two relationships that they have to make work. Take for instance Ukraine's interest in signing an Association Agreement with the EU, confirmed again today, in our view there's no reason this would damage the country's long-standing ties with Russia: it's not necessarily a matter of 'either/or'.

A word about Turkey. I visited Ankara last May – in fact right before the Taksim square events. The Turkish call for a solid relation with the European Union was very clear. Prime Minister Erdogan summarised his requests with the following words: "*Chapters, chapters, chapters*" – more negotiation chapters with the EU, as a key motor for reform. Our already complex relations have obviously been affected by the government's reaction to popular protests last June. But post-Taksim, we need to see where things stand and be ready for re-engagement. We have to recognise that when it comes to the southern shores of the Mediterranean, we do not have comparable pulling power – to say the least.

Early in 2011, when the popular uprisings in the Arab world broke out, we were almost surprised that young people in Cairo, Tunis or Benghazi were taking huge personal risks to fight for their rights, for democracy, social justice, equality before the law. They were fighting for universal values which we in Europe hold dear, but sometimes almost seem to have lost faith in... A strong wake-up call!

Two and a half years later, the situation is clearly very different. But I continue to believe it is in Europe's interest, short-term and long-term, to support democracy in the Arab world, as we strive to do. The whole region is undergoing a tectonic shift. It will take time to find a stable equilibrium. But the people will not accept a return to dictatorship.

This brings me to a brief word on the issue of the day, after all: Syria. After the atrocious chemical attacks of last month, all EU countries agreed that a clear and strong response was crucial and that we must avoid a dreadful precedent being set. Our 28 foreign ministers also underscored, on 7 September, the need to move forward with addressing the Syrian crisis through the UN process.

The European Union welcomes the diplomatic opening which has been created in the Syrian conflict by America and Russia. Now, after the UN report, it's urgent for the UN Security Council, together with the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, to take all necessary measures to ensure the swift and secure destruction of Syria's chemical weapons and programme. At the same time, the international community must concentrate on advancing a diplomatic process that will lead to a political solution. The "Geneva-II" initiative must move ahead swiftly. Europe remains ready to provide all support needed to achieve a political settlement.

Ladies and gentlemen, there is something else – speaking about “*Europe in the world*” –, which we tend to underestimate. Our good intentions and noble motives to act are not always perceived as such (this is an understatement).

A few months after the 2011 intervention in Libya, which helped to avoid a bloodbath in Benghazi, I remember speaking to a President from an emerging country, who blamed the intervention solely on oil and commercial interests. I told him about the scars of Srebrenica... it seemed to him a real eye-opener.

In some Arab countries anti-Western sentiment is not uncommon. The most absurd conspiracy theories are widely believed to be true. We cannot just discard such stories as ridiculous. Because politics is shaped as much by perceptions as by reality. In Europe, we sometimes overlook the weight of recent history; how people in some parts of the world look at us. Fortunately, also, many in the world greet today's post-colonial Europe as an ally in the fight for democracy and prosperity. I often see this, for instance last Monday at the conference for Somalia in Brussels, where a New Deal for the Somali was agreed.

These are some of the dilemmas and forces shaping the fast-changing, a-polar and at times dangerous world in which we, Europeans, must find our way, and do find it. I still believe Europe, European countries, have a story to tell to the world. With humility. When we talk about tolerance, when we talk about reconciliation, about democracy, we know these are hard-fought.

Before we became a continent at peace with itself (and with the world) we paid the heftiest of prices – a price the young students who studied in this building in 1913 were still (if only just) blissfully unaware of.

We have left behind us the battles of history between religions, nations, dynasties, ideologies. A hundred years on, we can look at our future with confidence, and self-confidence, even in these difficult economic times. The world is more open, more connected, it is safer, if still unpredictable. Our role in it is changing, and bound to change further in the decades that lie ahead of us. But we cannot disengage.

You will not be surprised if I say that it is my conviction, that the Union which 28 countries have at their disposal, with its flaws and its qualities, always a work in progress, that this Union is an essential means for Europeans to advance in the world, together.

Born in 1947, I am a post-war child. If some of you here, like myself, have grand-children, these children are the third generation who've only known peace in Europe. Each generation is responsible for peace in its time, and beyond. We may hold a different place in the world today, but we live in a better Europe and in a better world. That's why I'm ready to say: yes, humankind can make moral and political progress. That's why in these difficult years, I remain a man of hope.
