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Der Präsident

REETING FOR THE OPENING OF THE 30TH EUROPE-SEMINAR OF THE INTERNATIONAL KOLPING SOCIETY

by Hans-Gert Pöttering, President of the European Parliament

Dear participants of the 30th Europe-seminar,
dear friends of the International Kolping Society,

Both as the President of the European Parliament and in particular as a Kolpingbrother it is my great pleasure to address you on the opening of the 30th Europe-seminar of the International Kolping Society. Today is a special day, since we do not only celebrate the 30th anniversary of the Europe-seminar but also the 35th year of the creation of INGO-Status and the 20th anniversary of the declaration of the International Kolping Society with reference to the work of the Council of Europe. On this occasion, I would like to congratulate all members of this organization for the excellent job they have done for the past 30 years.

With great pleasure I remember the Europe manifestation that I attended two years ago. Certainly the Europe-seminar starting today will be an equally great success. I am looking forward to the results that will be produced in the course of this meeting.

2008 is also an exceptional year for the European Union as its main focus is the intercultural dialogue. During the enlargement of the European Union to 27 member states we had to face various new challenges, which we mastered successfully. However, it should not be forgotten that we are still on our way to a united Europe and, therefore, have yet many steps to take. One of the most significant steps among those is the Lisbon Treaty. I dare say that the signing of the treaty can be regarded as a historic success, not only because it protects Christian values by adding a Charter of Fundamental rights but also because it improves the cooperation between the European institutions and grants bigger authority to the European Parliament by which Europe becomes more citizen-friendly.


However, despite of new treaties and contracts being concluded and developed, we still tend to concentrate on the political and economic aspects of the European Union. We forget that we share a common set of values that originated from our joint history. In order to achieve our goals, we need to strengthen the European values of freedom and democracy as well as the sense of community because Europe can only be successful if every member of the society makes a contribution.

The future of Europe is in our hands. Even though the institutions of the European Union expand and gain efficiency we still need to use them better. A sculptor can be provided with all the best tools but that does not make him an artist. The most important tool is his capability to shape the stone. Therefore, I hope that everyone will continue to use his/her capabilities in the best possible way in order to contribute to the joint mission of Europe. We need to remind ourselves, however, that there will always be a big difference between the sculptor and us. Our work will never be completed. There will always be need for improvement. Hence, we can never stop the progress. We need to be patient instead because it takes many small steps to change Europe and the world.

The example of the sculptor points out the importance of non-governmental organisations and associations as they have a great share in the Europe of People. They are the root of the European project, a network of worldwide friendship. Regular reunions encourage mutual understanding and cooperation. For that reason I am particularly pleased to see that so many people from different countries join the 30th Europe-seminar, showing interest and willingness for discussions and thereby express their sincerity for the European idea.

I thank the International Kolping Society for the exceptional dedication to European Integration and the Dialogue of Cultures. By supporting the development of democracy and freedom and the respect for human rights and dignity, it has contributed to the border crossing cooperation that was once begun by Adolph Kolping. This engagement created a bond between nations since it was supported by 500.000 members from 60 different states. Therefore, it is as important as the intensive cooperation between the International Kolping Society, the Council of Europe and the European Parliament, which exists since 1974. Therefore, annual Europe-seminars are very important due to their function of drawing the participant's attention to the European idea.

I hope the International Kolpingwerk will continue this tradition, many further reunions will take place and every participant will take home a common experience of Europe.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Hans-Gert Pöttering". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, stylized 'P' and a long, sweeping underline.

Hans-Gert Pöttering
President of the European Parliament