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Dinner Discussion with

Prof. Hans-Gert Pöttering
Chairman EPP/ED-Group in the European Parliament

and members of the Presidency of the EPP/ED-Group
in the European Parliament

Tuesday, May 17, 2005

On the evening of May 17th, 2005 a gathering of foreign policy experts, business leaders and government officials attended a dinner discussion with Hans-Gert Pöttering and a delegation from the European Parliament.

Chairman Pöttering centered his remarks around the current issues in the European Union (EU) and the future of the EU. Other members of the delegation also participated in the evening's discussion by contributing their views of the EU to Pöttering's introductory speech.

The focus of much of the dinner discussion was the EU enlargement debate. The addition of Turkey to the EU was thoroughly debated on both sides. The apparent majority of the delegation – and Pöttering - did not favor the inclusion of Turkey. Certain arguments and/or justification for this point of view were expressed by the delegation. A major point mentioned was: Where does Europe end? If Turkey were included in the EU, it could be a springboard for numerous other nations to demand or expect equal treatment, for example: Morocco and Ukraine. The European Union must decide at which point to limit (and thus possibly strengthen) its territory, economy and population. Thus, the definition of the Union must be developed and set in order to give parameters to the future EU.

Naturally, the Turkey debate included the issue of religion in the EU. Both sides of the debate discussed the role of an Islamic nation joining a union of historically Christian nations. Those not in favor of accepting Turkey into the EU were very clear that this is not a discrimination against Muslims. Meanwhile, those in favor of Turkey's inclusion cited that the EU already has a very large Muslim population

– noting Germany, France and Britain. Including Turkey might not be the cultural shock that is predicted.

The discussion did touch upon improving the competitiveness of the European Union economically. Mr. Pöttering made it clear that the intention of the EU is not to be dominant to the U.S. but a “competitor” – thus emphasizing the wish to work with the U.S. In becoming more competitive, the key points were less regulation and reviewing tax levels - specifically for corporate competitiveness.

Naturally, the evening’s dialogue led to the future of the EU and the EU Constitution which has yet to be approved by all member states. Mr. Pöttering would not when asked about the “Plan B” if the referendum failed. He refused to discuss or outline any other options because this would undercut any possible success of the Constitution – it would already be planning for failure. The concern over the vote in France – which was leaning toward a “no” vote – was clear except of course for Euro-skeptic groups. These groups do not feel that a European Constitution would be beneficial to their member state along with non-EU states.

List of Delegation

Hans-Gert Poettering MEP

Chairman of the EPP-ED Group (since 1999). MEP since 1979. Former Chairman, Security and Defence SubCommittee of EP. Member of the Constitutional Affairs Committee of EP. (Party: CDU, Germany).

Jaime Mayor Oreja MEP

Vice-Chairman, EPP-ED Group and Head of Spanish delegation in the Group. MEP since 2004. Former Member of Spanish Cortes; Spanish Minister of the Interior 1996-2001; Former Leader of PP group in Basque Parliament 2001-04. Member, Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs Committee of EP. (Party: Partido Popular, Spain).

József Szájer MEP

Vice-Chairman, EPP-ED Group and Head of the Hungarian delegation in the Group. MEP since 2004. Member of Hungarian Parliament 1990-2004. Member, Internal Market and Consumer Protection Committee of EP. (Party: Fidesz, Hungary, which he co-founded with Viktor Orban).

Marianne Thyssen MEP

Vice-Chairman, EPP-ED Group. MEP since 1991. Former Head of Belgian delegation of EPP-ED Group. Member, Internal Market and Consumer Protection Committee of EP. (Party: CD&V, Belgium, of which she is a former Vice-Chairman).

James Elles MEP

Chairman of the EPP-ED Group's think tank, the European Ideas Network (EIN). MEP since 1984. Co-Founder, Transatlantic Policy Network (TPN). Former Vice-Chairman, EPP-ED Group. Member, Budgets Committee of EP. (Party: Conservative Party, United Kingdom).