

**Bijdrage voor de welkomsttoespraak van Marja van Bijsterveldt  
YEPP Congress “ New Challenges for Europe”, 27 maart 2003**

**Dear friends and members of the Youth of the European  
People’s Party,**

**We are very honoured and proud that the 4th YEPP  
Congress is taking place in our country. As a former and  
active member of the Youth Party of the CDA, I realise  
that a meeting of so many youth member parties is of vital  
importance. Any party that values debate and wants to be  
a true representative of its constituency, needs a youth  
party. Not only due to the fact that ideas can differ and are  
of value for a vivid party, but foremost because you  
represent the next generation. And by participating in the  
political process at an early age you are able to not only**

**express your views, but also take responsibility for the continuation of our democracy.**

**There is a lot at stake at this moment. Most European countries feel the consequences of the demographic developments that started after the Second World War. Less youngsters and more elderly people. Consequences that will form part and parcel of future societies. A decreasing amount of economically active people, will have to bear the financial burden of a growing number of economically inactive citizens. Societies therefore will change and are changing already. Changes that put a burden of responsibility on your shoulders.**

**But not only an economic burden. Also in the political scene Europe is changing at a tremendous speed. We are on the eve of a new Europe. A Europe that was once**

**created through the dreams of especially Christian Democrats: Schuman, Adenauer, Werner and De Gasperi. It took courage to take distance from the national sovereignty, just after the Second World War. It took vision and belief in a common future for Europe. There is no political movement that dedicated so much effort and perseverance to the ideals of peace and prosperity in Europe.**

**In this long and precious tradition you all stand. You are the heirs of those beliefs, of those dreams. But you are also the heir to the new Europe. A Europe that must dedicate itself to the consolidation and stabilisation of freedom and democracy, human rights, peace and prosperity in Europe and beyond. And based on our christian democratic values we must ensure a society which is based on solidarity, which places the individual at the heart of its activities.**

**But Europe is expanding and we face new challenges. Our movement is very much in favour of the enlargement and prepared to face those challenges. In my view the need for an interreligious and intercultural dialogue is the most pressing of all. If we are able to create one enlarged Europe where the integration of cultures and values is truly and really felt and exercised, we are able to overcome all other hurdles.**

**The CDA recently published a report called “ Investing in integration; Reflection on diversity and common values.”**

**In this report it is concluded that citizens are the bearers of the basic values and institutions that belong to the heart of the democratic constitutional state. These rules of the game within a society cannot be abandoned. The cohesion and identity of a society is not decisively and certainly not only created by governments or politics. Citizens in a vital**

**society created them through upbringing, through identification with the common interest, through shared language, shared values, through public debate and through media. And citizens must make sure that government is facilitating the integration of different cultures within a society, in a way that core values are broadly internalised and accepted. In order to ensure a successful integration a demanding policy is needed. On the one hand this means a policy in which the common and shared values are transparent. And on the other hand, a policy that is demanding in the sense that it appeals to the willingness to make commitments on either side.**

**The same holds true for Europe. We must be able and willing to take our responsibility as citizens. Not only in our own country, but also –and perhaps especially- in Europe. Governments and politics alone cannot create a**

**Europe that stands for common shared values of solidarity, respect for democracy , for human rights and freedom.**

**In order to do so we have to understand and respect eachother. People from different cultures and religions all take part in the European integration and adhere to the core values of democracy and freedomrights. Only if we are willing to engage in an dialogue concerning our beliefs, we are able to fully stand in a long christian democratic tradition. It will again take courage and will again take vision and creativity. But that is the real challenge we face, especially the younger generation.**

**Although our movement played and is still playing an important role in the European integration process, we were not able to involve citizens as much as we should have liked. There you face another challenge. Perhaps we**

**were so engaged in the building of the European Union that we forgot the basic principles mentioned before.**

**Meaning that governments nor politics can create commonly shared values, only facilitate matters with a demanding policy. That a vivid society, a vivid European society can only be build bottom-up. Through citizens who believe in an European society and take responsibility for it.**

**You took responsibility by becoming an active member of your party. I have read your political programme with much interest. The title is promising “ We stand for Europe” and re-echos the beliefs of our founding fathers. But also the content is promising as is the role YEPP sees for itself: As an independent motivator and provocateur of the EPP. Your political programme expresses this role and sees beyond the enlargement and debates on the**

**technical structure of the European Union. It expresses vision on a new Europe, it expresses courage and willingness to create and continue the integration process.**

**As you rightfully stated the European project is approaching a crossroads. When we look at the foreign policy of the European Union, we realise that our goals and visions are not yet realised. Europe is still divided, even on vital matters as the war in Iraq. Our efforts to really create a common European foreign policy must be continued, as must our efforts to focus upon common grounds and not on differences.**

**Perhaps that is the greatest challenge of all. In order to create a united Europe that truly is A Union of Values, we must overcome our differences and stress the common grounds and values. It gives me great hope and pleasure to**



**feel and see that our movement is alive and kicking. In an increasing number of European countries voters give their support to the EPP parties. In an increasing number of governments the christian democrats are again taking responsibility. And in Holland we are very proud that Jan Peter Balkenende is our political leader. Once active in the youth movement of our party, now one of the youngest Prime Ministers. Let he and others be your example. An example that proves the vitality of our political movement and the need for active youth movements like YEPP.**

**May I wish you a fruitful and challenging Congress in which debate and creativity will stimulate you to take up the challenges ahead.**