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HERMAN VAN ROMPUY

President of the European Council

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, it is a pleasure to say a few words at the opening of this fifth World Policy Conference. You have an intensive program ahead of you and let me briefly share with you some reflections on one specific challenge for the European Union overcoming the economic and financial crisis. Until not very long ago, it was the focus of global attention, not always positively, but that pace is behind us now. That is my main message. We are slowly leaving the existential crisis mode. And people are realizing this more and more. There is an increasing confidence in the Eurozone future, a growing sense that we will get there. The latest decision on Greece, 10 days ago, shows how we are moving into common waters. And I am glad to say as President of the European Council, without emergency summits, but we are not at the end of the road, and all countries and institutions are continuing to work, reforming our economies, making sure we can withstand shocks, defining a longer-term plan for a stronger Eurozone, and that is why I was submit to December European Council roadmap for a genuine economic and monetary Union. Without going into details, let me just stress one point, and you may think that is all very well, I am sure they can come up with technical solutions, but in the end will European citizens follow, a key question indeed, and I am obviously aware of some of the doubts, but I am confident about the public support for our Union in the end. We must put things into perspective. With the crisis, for the very first time, European citizens are confronted with the hard fact that some costs come alongside the benefits of our Union, for instance to defend a common currency during a financial crisis. Citizens are also realizing for the very first time that they are in this together, and that what happens in another country with banks, bubbles or budgets affects them too. Realizing this is one thing, drawing all the consequences is quite another. And being jointly responsible for a common European good can be a painful discovery for people who are struggling in their own country to find a job or make ends meet. But I strongly disagree with those who conclude hastily that the crisis has killed solidarity between European countries. The crisis has revealed what it takes to be in the Union, in fact this is the very first real test of solidarity in the history of the Union. Before the crisis our Union was considered a win-win process, it requested no real efforts. Of course, there are tensions and constraints, there is opposition and critic, and yet, a huge collective effort is on the way to ensure we come out of this crisis together. It is de facto solidarity of an unprecedented magnitude. We need results in terms of stability, grows and jobs to convince our citizens that European Union and the Euro is not part of the problem but part of the solution. As a Noble Peace Prize reminds all Europeans: "In the end what hold us together is stronger that what pulls us apart". Thank you.