

**EuroPCom Conference**  
**“Communication Challenges and Opportunities**  
**for the European Union”**

Opening Session Keynote speech

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I am pleased to be here today because I believe the topic of this conference is important: Communication challenges and opportunities for the European Union. During my three years as US Ambassador to the EU, I was struck at how poorly governments communicate in general: we failed to explain the transatlantic trade and investment partnership agreement, for example. I witnessed how European governments, including the EU institutions, often fail to communicate the benefits of European integration.

When I told my then 13 year old son that President Obama had appointed me ambassador, his eyes widened with disbelief and said with disbelief: “You??” It was a morale-boosting moment. I thought about his question a lot over the weeks and months that followed: Why me? And the answer I articulated for myself was simple: because I believe in Europe; I believe in the positive impact of European integration; and I believe in the power of the US-EU relationship to address a series of shared challenges on a regional and even a global scale.

I believe in Europe partly because I am also a product of Europe. I am a dual US-Italian national and have spent half my life in Europe. I am the grandson of refugees from Italy and a man, Benito Mussolini, who wanted to Make Italy Great Again (#MIGA), but who wound up destroying his country. My maternal grandparents returned to Italy after the war so that my grandfather Bruno Luzzatto could participate in Italy's postwar reconstruction.

When my father was named by President Carter as US Ambassador to Italy, my Italian mother helped my American father understand the importance of personal relationships in that great country. I recall one dinner conversation in which my mother announced that the government would fall the following day. My father retorted that the issue had been discussed at a senior staff meeting of the Embassy that morning; the unanimous view was that the government was stable. Well, the following day the government indeed did fall.

At the dinner table that evening my father asked my mother how on earth she had known. She responded: "Well, dear, I was at the hairdressers yesterday and the woman next to me, the mistress of Minister X (I've changed the name to protect the innocent), told me that the Minister would introduce a vote of no confidence for which

he had the necessary votes.” And here my mother paused for dramatic effect, for she had trained as an actress off off off Broadway: “You know, dear, you really should spend more time at the hairdressers, and less time with your ‘senior staff’.” When I told this story to my Embassy senior staff, they were not amused.

My attachments to Europe created a few problems for me when I had to go through a very intrusive FBI vetting of my nomination. The FBI form, that ended up being 280 pages when completed, asked me to list all the “foreign nationals” with whom I have had ties of “affection or obligation.” Rather than ask what on earth that meant, my wife and I decided to list her 30 Spanish cousins and all of my Italian family, together with their contact details and professional histories. The second part of the question asked: “for each contact with the foreign national listed in part (a), please detail for each contact the nature of the contact, the duration of the contact and the intensity of the contact.” And that was before I was asked whether I had ever plotted the violent overthrow of the US Government.

I believe in the enormously positive impact of European integration. As Ambassador, I had the opportunity to work on several speeches by President Obama and Secretary of State John Kerry on this issue. On April 25 last year President Obama delivered an Address to the

People of Europe in Hannover.<sup>1</sup> In that speech, he quoted former German Chancellor Konrad Adenauer:

“European unity was a dream of a few. It became a hope for [the] many. Today it is a necessity for all of us.”

He added that it’s also a necessity for the United States:

“because Europe’s security and prosperity is inherently indivisible from our own... A strong, united Europe is a necessity for the world because an integrated Europe remains vital to our international order. Europe helps to uphold the norms and rules that can maintain peace and promote prosperity around the world.”

He also asserted that:

“your accomplishment -- more than 500 million people speaking 24 languages in 28 countries, 19 with a common currency, in one European Union -- remains one of the greatest political and economic achievements of modern times.”

It was a terrific speech, but there was only one problem: it should have been delivered by a European politician, not by the President of the United States. No European politician is giving speeches like that. Unfortunately, we no longer have a president in the United States giving speeches like that either.

In October last year Secretary of State John Kerry visited Brussels to deliver another speech on the transatlantic relationship<sup>2</sup> to which I also contributed. He noted Belgium’s motto: “*L’Union Fait la Force*” –

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<sup>1</sup> Remarks by President Barack Obama to the People of Europe, Hannover Messe, April 25, 2016.

<sup>2</sup> Remarks by Secretary of State John F. Kerry, “On the Transatlantic Relationship,” Concert Noble, Brussels, October 4, 2016.

unity makes strength. The United States has its own version: *E Pluribus Unum*, out of many, one. And he emphasized that:

“unity within Europe and partnership between the United States and Europe, remain absolutely indispensable to global security and prosperity.” He ended the speech by asking Europeans to “believe in yourselves as much as we believe in you.”

It was a great speech, but there was a problem: it should have been given by a European politician, not by the U.S. Secretary of State.

I have been struck at the defensiveness of many speeches given by national and EU officials. These speeches are full of defensive words that emphasize protection from threats and change. I can understand that officials need to demonstrate to their citizens that they are attuned to their fears – about terrorism, uncontrolled migration and a fast-changing environment that includes technological shifts and global competition.

But Europe cannot inspire a sense of solidarity with a defensive narrative; it needs to offer a vision, it needs a narrative that can inspire. Europeans tend to mock the State of the Union speeches delivered by U.S. presidents because they seem naïve, overly optimistic and perhaps jingoistic. Regardless of whether one finds the State of the Union speeches to be overdone, it can hardly be

denied that the personal stories used to be make broader policy points can be very powerful.

Images are a powerful tool. I recently saw an interesting ad campaign for the EU which compared the EU to a window: invisible in most circumstances but unfortunately only noticeable when it is dirty or broken. The challenge is to make the EU less invisible by reminding people how it – like a window -- lets light in and keeps the cold air out. The EU needs to convince more people that it cares about what they care about; that the EU empowers and protects.

Images and stories are so powerful. Facts are not enough. During the TTIP negotiations, the US Government and the Commission were showing up to debates with facts, long and detailed studies; the critics were showing up with stories and passion about how the trade agreements would undermine Europe's standards and way of life. I had the pleasure of seeing grown men dressed up as giant chlorinated chickens and Trojan Horses.

And guess what? When passion meets facts, passion nearly always wins. That's why we need passion to support an argument. And that's why we need visions that can inspire. Former German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt once said that "Whoever has visions

should go to the doctor.” I disagree: visions are essential to inspire and justify sacrifice for the greater good.

The Commission is right to focus on Erasmus+ and the Solidarity Corps as areas that inspire pride –across all of the 28 member states -- in the EU’s mission. I would include the EU’s leading global role in development assistance, humanitarian aid, climate change, good governance (including anti-corruption and democracy building), and the protection of the rules-based multilateral order (including institutions such as the World Trade Organization). These are all areas in which the United States is retreating; it should be a point of great pride that the European Union is now the world’s most important actor in these areas.

In many areas, the EU acts as a “force multiplier” – enhancing the ability of individual Member States to achieve important goals. There is much truth in the adage that in Europe there are two categories of EU states: those that are small and those that haven’t realized it yet. The EU ensures that its leverage is greater when acting together than when its individual members act separately, for example:

- In global trade, where the EU has the expertise and negotiating power to achieve balanced free trade agreements, as well as

the ability to defend European industry against international trade distortions;

- In development assistance and humanitarian aid, where the EU can ensure consistency and effectiveness of long-term programs;
- In energy security, where the EU has promoted the integration of electricity and gas markets, thereby reducing the ability of suppliers to exploit their dominance; and
- In the protection of external borders.

Positive messages don't sell themselves. They have to be sold. When I mention this to European governments and the European Commission, I sometimes get a horrified reaction: "marketing" is a dirty word, but it is needed. There is little point in doing good work, if few people are aware that it is being done. The era of elite approaches to governance are over; pedagogy must be central.

Positive messages can only be marketed by the right messenger. I am often reminded of the Zulu saying: "I cannot hear what you say for the thunder of what you are." When I travelled around Europe marketing our trade agreement, I knew that many would simply be unable to hear what I said because of strong feelings about the

United States. Governments therefore need to make more use of third party validators who inspire trust.

Governments need to start thinking more like a company in the private sector and it needs to think of communication as a campaign that needs to be professionally run. It should use the normal tools: focus groups, market segmentation, rigorous message testing etc. As one of the leading pollsters in the U.S. repeats, **what's important is not what you say, it's what people hear.**

I also believe that the European Commission is too timid. While the EU should certainly support a varied and robust civil society, I see no reason why it should continue to support (sometimes very generously) organisations that undermine the EU's message. This is a simple question of value for money. Organisations are free to peddle their myths, but why do it with EU money?

Too often the European Commission follows a policy of non-rebuttal: not responding to inaccuracies in the media. This is counterproductive: when there are no rebuttals, the falsehoods become accepted as fact. The Commission could learn a lot from Stratcom, that responds quickly to the barrage of Russian disinformation with a very small budget and a handful of people at the EEAS.

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Member States complicate efforts to communicate effectively about Europe and the EU institutions. Soon after I took up my post in March 2014 I was invited to a dinner at which Margaritis Schinas, the European Commission spokesman, identified as one of the major challenges the fact that “Member States don’t consider themselves shareholders in a common project.” That phrase stuck in my mind. How true: many Member States consider the EU, and talk about the EU, as if it were some external alien force that does things (usually negative) to the Member States. That has significant practical consequences because a Member State that does not consider itself a shareholder won’t invest in the common enterprise with the hope of eventually extracting dividends.

The simple fact undermines the ability of Europe to communicate to its citizens the importance of the European project. I am repeatedly struck at how often European politicians resort to the game of blaming Brussels for everything that is hard or wrong, while appropriating all the credit for things that go well.

One of the most insidious narratives that many Member States have long propagated is that the EU has promoted an “ultra – liberal” economic agenda. According to this argument, the people of Europe have suffered the cold winds of globalization and free trade by the

choice of unelected bureaucrats, rather than by economic necessity. One of the core challenges of the EU is to explain that globalisation is a reality, whether we like it or not, and that the EU provides Member States and its citizens with the tools to MANAGE globalisation better.

At a time of unprecedented threats to the Union, it is high time that the Member States talk up the contributions of the European project. I am frequently reminded of a wonderful scene from Monty Python's The Life of Brian in which the members of the Judean People's Front are meeting secretly. Rather like many Member State leaders in the EU today, the leader asks: "What have the Romans ever done for us? They've bled us white, the bastards."

One activist tentatively suggests that the Romans did, after all, give them the aqueduct. A second adds: sanitation. A third adds: roads. Others chime in: irrigation, medicine, education, health, wine and public baths. The EU can't take credit for roads, sanitation and so on of course. But it can certainly take credit for a great number of things. The European project and European institutions have contributed significantly to the creation of a zone of democracy and stability and prosperity that is the envy of the world. The ultimate proof of this is that millions of people from all over the world risk their lives every year on hazardous land and sea journeys to reach these shores – not just for economic reasons, but because Europe is

an attractive model of freedom and tolerance that offers people enormous opportunities to fulfill their dreams.

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Europe usually seeks to communicate its purpose with ritual invocations of the 70 years of peace following World War II. For the first time in generations, war between EU Member States is now unthinkable. It is, of course, an important point, and one that resonates personally with me. The EU can claim significant credit for anchoring Europe in a zone of democracy, tolerance, stability and prosperity. Just ask the Balts or the Central Europeans.

Two years ago I went to Riga to participate in the US-EU Transatlantic Legislators Dialogue. I sat with the parliamentarians of the EU, Latvia and the United States in the Saeima, Latvia's national assembly. And I recalled how in January 1991 Latvians from all walks of life manned the barricades around that building, braving freezing temperatures and potential death at the hands of the Soviet Army to prevent a Communist coup. And I took my wife and children to visit the Museum of the Occupation to show them how Latvia was traded like a piece of real estate between totalitarian regimes.

In 1983 I met members of the Solidarity Movement when I studied at the Jagiellonian University of Krakow. I was able to interview Lech Walesa, then under house arrest. Soon after taking up my post in

Brussels in March 2014 I had the pleasure of meeting his son, Jaroslaw Walesa, a member of the European Parliament, and to send him that interview. Poland has changed from a satellite state of the Soviet Union to become once again a proud member of Europe, thanks in large part to the EU.

It is not just the most recent EU members that have benefited from the EU as an anchor of democracy, stability and prosperity. Greece, Portugal and Spain can also thank the EU for facilitating their transitions from authoritarian to democratic rule based on market economy principles.

Many of Europe's youth may have forgotten this history; or perhaps it is too distant for them to care. But perhaps they should consider just how seriously youth in neighbouring countries take the European ideal. A few years ago, when I was still in my government post, the US Mission to the EU screened an award winning documentary called [Winter on Fire](#). It tells the story of ordinary, and yet extraordinary, Ukrainians — heroes of the Maidan — who braved the cold and the risk of death to fight for a future in Europe. They were waving EU flags.

As important as this point is, I am convinced that Europe can make a stronger case to Europe's youth that may take peace for granted.

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Given the need for narratives, for passion and for communicating directly to youth, what needs to change?

First, the tools of communication clearly need to change. Do the EU institutions really know the impact of the euros they spend on communication — by theme and by channel? Such an audit would help redirect the euros to the areas where they have the greatest impact.

According to the Marten's Centre, the European Commission spends 400 million euro on its communication budget, but only a small amount on social media. But that makes no sense. Trends in the US indicate what is about to happen in Europe: 50% of those aged 18-29 use online platforms as their PRIMARY source of information; of the same age group, only 27% get news from local, cable or network television AND A MERE 5% OPT FOR PRINTED NEWSPAPERS. It is estimated that in just five years time consumer video will move from 64% of all internet traffic to making up more than 82%! Another important reality is that sustained success in market on social media now requires paid advertising.

With a 400 million budget, the Commission could and should shift significant sums to social media, including short video clips in tweets, and cut back on expensive print campaigns. What is more effective — a glossy printed publication about the EU's humanitarian aid intervention or a short clip SHOWING what the EU is doing to save lives? Think of the huge impact the Brexit LEAVE campaign had with just 7 million pound budget: they sent out more than 1 billion targeted advertisements, mostly through Facebook.

What do businesses do to avoid being hacked by cyber-criminals? They hire the hackers. Similarly, the EU institutions should consider hiring from among those who have run successful social media campaigns, especially against EU projects (ACTA, TTIP, CETA etc). [Naturally, rigorous confidentiality and security standards need to apply to these individuals to ensure they don't use EU tools against it once again!]

Second, EU affairs need to be part of the national debate. More resources should be aimed at training national journalists in EU affairs to help ensure that more of national news includes EU affairs. EU articles should not only be written by journalists posted to Brussels to focus on EU affairs. It should be a topic for all journalists.

Third, the messages need to change. In today's environment, there are two critical themes that need to be repeated and are of general application across everything the EU does: security (both physical and economic) and choice. These are the two issues that preoccupy the vast majority of Europeans; choice is probably the key concern of the young.

Appealing to the young has to be the key objective. The millennials want everything; they want it now; and they want it cheap. The EU is their natural partner to promoting that goal, whether it is in ensuring that they can download digital content from anywhere in Europe; or whether they can transport that content across borders. Free competition enables more choice at lower cost. The EU has provided the young with opportunities to study and travel abroad cheaply and easily.

The EU needs to be less timid in selling its message to the young. It is already the case that the EU's assistance to Member States through the Structural Funds is regularly mentioned by law in billboards and commemorative plaques near bridges, roads, ports, airports and so on. A Commission Regulation from 2000<sup>3</sup> is extremely detailed about how the EU contribution must be recognized: the percentage of the

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<sup>3</sup> Commission Regulation (EC) No 1159/2000 on information and publicity measures to be carried out by the Member States concerning assistance from the Structural Funds. Official Journal of the European Communities L130/30 of May 31, 2000.

billboard reserved for the EU contribution is specified, as is the typeface and the wording. So why not acknowledge the EU's role in other areas as well?

— The EU could have required companies to recognise (in their advertisements) that the ban on mobile phone roaming charges is due to EU legislation. I recall being in London and seeing advertisements of Vodaphone stating that it was getting rid of these charges as a service to its customers; the EU was not mentioned.

— When the data portability and unjustified geo-blocking legislations are passed, the EU should consider requiring online content sites (such as Apple iTunes, Amazon, Netflix) to specifically recognise the role of the EU in enabling consumers to access content.

Why not oblige EU banks to publicize that depositors enjoy a 100,000 euro deposit guarantee thanks to EU legislation?

Why not oblige search engines to publicize on their web sites that those using their services benefit from privacy guarantees under EU legislation. Google's search engine states that "some results may have been removed under data protection law in Europe." Perhaps the notice could be phrased in a more positive way, noting the right

to be forgotten, and the limits on how customers' information can be used.

Why not encourage EU companies that benefit from trade defense mechanisms, such as safeguard measures and anti-dumping duties, to communicate to their thousands of employees that it is due to EU protection that their jobs are safe?

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In summary, there has never been a more urgent time for the EU institutions to reinforce positive messages about the EU's contributions. The EU institutions should not expect the Member States to be active partners in this objective. Therefore, they should continue to refine the messages that the public will find most relevant to their lives, and to identify new ways of delivering those messages. In summary, there has never been a more urgent time for the EU institutions and Member States to reinforce positive messages about the EU's contributions to peace, stability, democracy, security, prosperity and choice. Some Member States will not be active partners in this objective. Therefore, the EU institutions should continue to refine the messages that will find the greatest resonance to people in their daily lives, and to identify new ways of delivering those messages.

Thank you for your attention.