

## Tribute to Bronisław Geremek

*Bronisław GEREMEK (1932–2008), European Deputy (ALDE) as well as an historian and brave defender of freedom, graced us with his presence at the European Estates General on 21 June 2008. We were deeply saddened to hear the terrible news of the passing of this great European on 13 July 2008. Below is the entire speech he delivered at the opening plenary session of the 2008 European Estates General.*

“Ladies and Gentlemen,

I will begin with a word about my home country, a country famous for its plumbers. Poland and its people are very European. Public opinion surveys prove it. The accession referendum in Poland prior to its entry in 2003 had a 56% participation rate and over 75% voted yes on the European Union. And this population also sometimes elects elites who are less European than they are; that happens, too.

The expansion was not just a move towards populations who have fought for freedom; it was also a move based on reason, in the European interest. Europe is stronger, so why is it now feeling morose, weak?

I share this feeling of urgency expressed by President Giorgio NAPOLITANO and would like to speak to a specific problem, the citizenship problem. Not citizenship in the obvious sense of the word, but the *citizenship problem*. Is there European citizenship if the only definition in the treaty is that a European citizen is a citizen of a member country? The term “Roman citizen” implied new rights and new duties. Until now, we have not managed to define citizenship in those terms. For me, it offers an obvious advantage, but for the majority of those here today having a European passport not only means the *ease* of crossing borders, but the *option* to cross borders. For us, the people in the East, this passport was a dream beyond our reach, almost impossible to achieve. The privilege of the European citizen, of being able to cross borders without problems, even without a passport, is an enormous privilege.

Yet for the others, how do we explain citizenship in terms of rights and the duties that accompany them? We would have to look to Erasmus, which has trained one and a half million European Union ambassadors, for a different description. How do we make the labour sector also see the immediate and direct advantages coming out of the European Union? We have to think about this; for example, we should consider having a European fund to train people for new jobs and revitalize education, because the demands of globalisation are going to be changing the context of our lives. The European Union should be working towards this end.

Secondly, I would like to address the content of citizenship. When we say *I am a citizen*, there is the problem of where we come from. Where are we? Where are we going? This is a problem of history and collective memory. We have no collective memory; we have individual memories. We are in the process of creating a collective memory and we are beginning with education. That is why I think European education is currently the weak point in the

construction of Europe. If we aspire to a political community, a *community of citizens*, we have to have a common awareness of a common destiny and a goal for the future.

It is easy for me to say I love Europe because for me it was an impossible dream. Never in my life did I think I would see my country free, a member of the European Union, and me in the European Parliament. This part of the dream must be the very focus of training the citizen mind.”