

Welcome Remarks by the Ambassador of Belgium, H.E. Mr Jeroen Vergeylen

Conference

**“CRISES AND DEVELOPMENT – THE IMPACT OF MULTIPLE CRISES ON THE EVOLUTION OF EU
LAW.”**

Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest, 11 April 2024

Dear Minister János Bóka,

Monsieur le Recteur, Professeur László Borhy,

Dear Professor Pál Sonnevend, Dean of the ELTE Law School,

Dear Colleagues Ambassadors,

Dear Director General of the European Commission Legal Service,

Dear Professors, Dear Students, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good afternoon to you all. It is my distinct pleasure and honour to welcome you all here today on behalf of the Belgian Embassy in Budapest as co-organiser of the conference

CRISES AND DEVELOPMENT –

THE IMPACT OF MULTIPLE CRISES ON THE EVOLUTION OF EU LAW.

I would like to thank Rector Borhy and Minister Bóka for their presence and their kind and inspiring welcome remarks. I greatly appreciate Minister Bóka's presence. We know that his time is scarce with a Hungarian Presidency approaching rapidly, and preparations in full swing. Belgium wishes you all the best and will support the Hungarian Presidency and ensure a smooth hand-over at the end of June in whatever way we can.

I express my gratitude to the ELTE Law School and in particular to Dean Pál Sonnevend and his team for the efficient and pleasant cooperation and for assembling the “crème de la crème” of academic scholarship on EU law. The list of speakers is truly impressive. I particularly welcome the President of the Court of Justice of the European Union, Prof. Koen Lenaerts, as keynote speaker.

The Belgian Embassy is proud to be a co-organiser of today's conference and to be able to partner with one of Hungary's most distinguished academic institutions, the Eötvös Loránd University of Budapest. ELTE is more than an acronym and a name. It is a reference and a quality label, not only in Hungary, certainly in Belgium, but also in the whole of Europe and beyond. The calm and independent academic excellence based on a long tradition of sound scientific reflection and research are a great asset for Hungary and for Hungary's youth and future. We congratulate the university for its important

work and its long-standing essential and stimulating contributions to Europe's intellectual legacy and further development.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Everyone feels that the European Union is, once more, at a cross-roads. The EU has reached a point where one could almost feel overwhelmed. Today's crises are manifold, simultaneous, complex, interlinked and long-term. The first permanent president of the European Council, Herman Van Rompuy, called it "the permanent crisis", the "permacrisis". The current Belgian Presidency has been acutely aware of this concerning environment. The motto of the Belgian Presidency was chosen for that reason: "Protect, strengthen, prepare". Three action verbs. Firstly, protect our citizens, our companies, our borders, our values, and above all: protect the rule of law and democracy, that the European continent has fought for so painfully for most of the 19th and 20th centuries, at great cost, not least in terms of human suffering and loss. Let's protect our rule of law and democracy because they are being challenged. Secondly, strengthen our competitiveness, our internal market, our industrial transformation to deliver the twin green and digital transition in a just way and without undermining our industry's competitiveness. Strengthen our social welfare and health systems. But also, strengthen our global action and credibility, our open strategic autonomy, and our European defense. Thirdly, prepare the Future, by looking at our governance, how the EU is run, reviewing and possibly revising our internal working methods, to make our action more efficient and more effective. Not only because we will accept new Members States to join and to ensure that that happens without disrupting our own functioning, but also because the EU needs to adapt to the external global challenges and pressures.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The 1st of May 2024 will mark the 20th anniversary of the EU's biggest single enlargement with 10 new Members States, which included Hungary. Indeed, this conference takes place to commemorate – I would not be shy to say "celebrate" – the 20th anniversary of Hungary's accession to the EU.

The Belgian Presidency will organize a fitting anniversary celebration in Brussels at the end of this month, on the 29th of April, at the eve of an informal General Affairs Council meeting that will be entirely devoted to enlargement. I believe that Minister Bóka will represent Hungary there. The 2004 EU enlargement remains one of the most successful achievements in the history of post World War II Europe. This milestone underscores the remarkable progress of integration, demonstrating the successful journey of the EU in bringing nations together for a more united and prosperous future. So let me congratulate Hungary for this anniversary, as well as the 9 other Members States, and indeed all Member States of the EU. The 2004 enlargement, as well as the 2007 enlargement after that, made us all stronger, safer, and more prosperous.

For the coming years too, enlargement is a geo-strategic investment in peace, security, stability and prosperity. It is a driver for improving the economic and social conditions of European citizens and

reducing disparities between countries. To succeed, it must foster the values on which the Union is founded.

The Belgian presidency will support the ongoing enlargement processes with all candidate countries, in line with the existing methodology, the merits-based approach, and the progress of each candidate in fulfilling the accession criteria.

In parallel, the Presidency will advance the reflection on the internal reforms required for a successful future enlargement. The EU will have to review and, where necessary, reform its policies, institutional mechanisms and budgetary procedures to ensure its ability to serve and protect its citizens.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Jean Monnet, one of the EU's founding fathers, famously wrote in his memoirs the following:

« J'ai toujours pensé que l'Europe se ferait dans les crises, et qu'elle serait la somme des solutions apportées à ces crises. Encore fallait-il proposer ces solutions et les faire appliquer».

"I have always believed that Europe would be built through crises, and that it would be the sum of their solutions."

That is an ambiguous formulation. It does not say that Europe becomes better or stronger after dealing with every crisis – although we like to believe that. It merely says that the solutions that are found, be they good or bad, will define the Europe of the future. It can go both ways, and this entails a challenge, and a mission, for politicians, for diplomats and other civil servants, and certainly for legal scholars, and for students. The analysis of how EU law has adapted to the way in which crises have been managed by the EU in the past is undoubtedly a useful and necessary step to making sure that the future solutions to crises will be good rather than bad.

I would like to reiterate my profound thanks to the Eötvös Loránd University of Budapest and to all the organisers, contributors and participants, and I wish all of us very fruitful discussions. Thank you for your attention.