

Speech by Joan Debardeleben, given on December 10, 2012 at the reception held in celebration of the EU winning the Nobel Peace Prize.

Thank you to Ambassador Brinkman and the other Member States ambassadors for giving me the privilege of making some remarks at this event.

While I will not recount the achievements of the European Union that have warranted this award, we should not, however underestimate the significance of what has been accomplished. As the final speaker today, I ask you to cast your eyes to the future, not to the past. Many challenges to peace (both in Europe and globally) lie ahead; and it falls to us, collectively, as we celebrate past successes, to consider what needs to be done to preserve these gains. First is the challenge of the EU's neighbourhood, both to the East and the South. Continued efforts are required to ensure that the EU's larger neighbourhood develops durable foundations for peaceful relations. To the southeast, in the West Balkans, parts of which suffered violent conflict in the post-communist period, there, continued preparation for EU accession offers the best guarantee. To the south of the EU, in the wake of the Arab Spring, dramatic transformations are still underway, which have not yet reached a stable outcome; to the East of the EU, democratic transformations have stalled, or in some cases slid back. The enlargement of the EU that took place in 2004 and 2007 secured a broader zone of peace and security in post-communist Europe, but it is now essential to prevent the construction of new boundaries and divisions on the outer perimeter of the enlarged EU, which could in the future again endanger peace.

A second great continuing challenge is climate change and environmental degradation. The EU's strategy for sustainable development affirms its commitment to this agenda; indeed the EU and its Member States have already shown remarkable progress in setting standards and establishing an internal regime of burden sharing to address climate change. But these commitments have not yet found resonance in the international community at large. If not addressed quickly and aggressively, environmental damage may well represent the greatest threat to human well-being and to peace in the present century. At this moment, as the EU struggles in finding a way to preserve European solidarity in the face of economic crisis and hardship, a danger exists that an inward turn may distract attention and energy from these and other regional and global issues at a time when global leadership is more necessary than ever. These are not, however, issues for the EU alone. Let us reflect on how we may use this celebration to consider together innovative, path-breaking, and yet pragmatic approaches to respond collectively to these cardinal challenges that face not just the EU but also Canada and the entire global community.