

Henk Sierksma: One Europe!

Living in the Netherlands, a country known for its export economy and the global outlook of its culture, I am very much aware of how much we depend on creating a strong and united Europe. Here are some of my thoughts after having taken part in the Amsterdam seminar:



What do we need to improve in Europe?

- The differences between EU countries in terms of culture, economic development and language skills are, I believe, one of our main weaknesses. They contribute to our competitive disadvantages vis-à-vis the United States and the BRICs.
- The European Union doesn't have good branding. For example, I was not aware of the elections in May. When we do hear about Europe in the media, the reports are generally negative instead of explaining why we need a United Europe (the seminar of course was very positive and explained a lot about the why of Europe...). So what could the branding strategy be? How can Europe influence the media and create a connection to all EU citizens?

Being one Europe, how do we create a winning EU?

Our objective should be to improve Europe's competitive position, from a financial perspective, but also on the level of education. For example we should have the same kind of universities everywhere in Europe but also one tax system and one set of regulation for EU companies. It would be useful, too, to have governments organize financial and administrative support for mobility within Europe (for NGO's, doctors, business, etc).

We should discuss what a united Europe means for culture: what are the shared values in the EU? And should English and EU history be taught to every European child from an early age as in the Netherlands?

One Europe! I am proud to be an EU citizen. But how can we make the rest of Europe feel this pride, too? What is the EU, why do we have the EU, what is in it for me?