

Speaking points of Amb L Briët - Europe Day function

(Freedom Park - May 5, 2008)

Good evening friends and colleagues...

A warm welcome first to our South African friends;

Deputy Minister Botha,

And a warm welcome to you, Director General Rodriguez,

Excellencies, Distinguished guests, all protocol observed.

- Allow me to start on a serious note by extending condolences to the family of Italy's former Ambassador to South Africa, Alessandro Cevese, who, as many of you will know, tragically died in a vehicle accident in Limpopo on 19 April. Our thoughts are with his wife and children.
- This magnificent location – Freedom Park – provides an occasion to repeat what President Barroso said at last year's Europe or Schuman Day: "... on this day I want, above all, to focus on the values that, more than anything else, define the European Union and its history: freedom and solidarity."
- These values are particularly relevant here tonight as we celebrate the 51st anniversary of the European Union at South Africa's great and new monument to humanity and freedom.
- The Freedom Park, with its mission to contribute to the building of a united South Africa, and through this, to a better human understanding among nations and peoples, reflects the very values on which the EU is also founded. We see the European Union as a force for freedom and so are honoured to have been granted use of this "people's shrine", as former President Mandela envisioned the Freedom Park.
- Let us just reflect on the past and remember the many who gave up their lives for the freedom and democracy we so easily take for granted today.
- The names of the South Africans who died for freedom in Europe at the time of World War 2 will be engraved on the walls of the Freedom Park monument. Today, 5 May, is celebrated as Liberation Day in some EU Member States, including my country of origin – the Netherlands, to commemorate the end of WW II.
- But sadly, freedom remains as uncertain as ever. I urge you to take just a moment to reflect on the many struggles for freedom being fought today – in fact, right *here* on our doorstep we fight for freedom from poverty ...
- Bridging the divide between a first and second economy in a country where abject poverty rubs shoulders with untold wealth must remain central to all that we do in South Africa, from Science & Technology ... to economic development ... to Arts & Culture.
- And we witness, all too passively, just north of the Limpopo the struggle for freedom from what has sadly turned to kleptocracy and tyranny. It is a sad day indeed when the military and police, the very forces which are supposed to protect us, are used to intimidate, repress and torture fellow brothers and sisters.
- At last December's Africa-EU summit in Lisbon President Barroso said " I cannot understand that those who once fought for the freedom of their country now deny that freedom to their citizens."
- Tonight we are privileged to celebrate, as part of Europe Day, our close relationship with the South African people and its government, including that with the Department of Science and Technology.

- Little reporting space is given within the mainstream media to S&T, one of the most important endeavours in pursuit of improving peoples' lives. Science and Technology is news, and more often than not, it is good news! (I urge all of you to visit the websites of DG Research and of the Department of Science and Technology!)
- Our cooperation in S&T is first one of cooperation between people ... knowledge sharing and collaboration. But it is also one of financial cooperation: R&D in South Africa benefited to the tune of some €341 million (close to R4 billion in today's terms) under the European Union's 6th Framework Programme.
- I sincerely hope that under the current 7th Programme South Africa will be able to carve out an even larger slice for itself.
- May we continue to work closely at deepening our cooperation in science and technology, in pursuit of harnessing knowledge and innovation for sustainable development and poverty alleviation in Africa.
- On a lighter note, and before I end, let me invite you, despite the chill in the air, to take a stroll to the top of the amphitheatre. Apart from the spectacular 360 degree view, Glühwein is served to warm you up and make this short journey well worth while.
- Thank you for making the time available this Monday night to commemorate and celebrate with us this year's Europe Day.