

International Energy Charter, Kurhaus, 20 May 2015

The current Dutch Minister of Economic Affairs, responsible for Energy policy, was so kind to invite me for this dinner at the occasion of the adoption of the International Energy Charter, which has its roots in December 1991, when it started as the European Energy Charter.

It was in the Spring of 1973 that I entered Dutch politics as Minister Kamp's predecessor. Those were the days that the Dutch had become rich because of the enormous gas findings in Slochteren, and had decided to go for an Energy Research Center in Petten and for the enrichment of uranium, as we all thought the future would be at least partially nuclear energy. This was also the time of the oil boycott by OPEC that failed but made clear the key role of the Port of Rotterdam in Europe.

In 1982, nine years later, I became Prime Minister. These were the years that East and West were still building nuclear missiles and started to deploy them in Europe. The UK, Western Germany, and even France and Italy agreed to host US missiles on their territory, but for me as Dutch Prime Minister it was more difficult. As a government we wanted to be loyal to NATO, but at the same time there was massive opposition by Dutch pressure groups. We were confronted with the largest demonstrations in Dutch history, to this very day.

When I paid a visit to the White House in Washington as a young Prime Minister, President Reagan confided to me that he understood the Dutch hesitations, but that he needed the Dutch "to let the Commies sweat". When I asked him what he meant, he responded: "Ruud, at the end of the day, I do not want to deploy. I want a zero-zero solution."

A couple of years later his strategy proved to be successful. You all remember Reykjavik (October 1986), the Fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of the Cold War (November 1989), and the Reunification of Germany (October 1990).

Those years, knowing of Reagan's ambition, I became close with Gorbachev. I was then into my second term as Prime Minister, the end of the eighties. Those were the years that Margaret Thatcher suddenly addressed Gorbachev with "Brother Mikhail".

For me this was a reason to develop ideas about a "European Energy Community", which I presented first in June 1990 to the European Council in Dublin. That was the time that Jacques Delors was President of the European Commission.

Delors and I thought time had come to go for this “European Energy Community”. I described the main goal of this initiative as follows: “To achieve economic integration beyond the frontiers of the European Community within a specific area which, despite its enormous sphere of influence, is clearly demarcated. The area targeted will mainly comprise Central and Eastern Europe and, more especially, the Soviet Union, but will also include the EFTA countries.”

I quote these sentences from 25 years ago in Dublin. It was the first effort for close cooperation in wider Europe, where the geopolitical map was changed drastically.

In June 1990 in Dublin the European Council decided to start the so-called Energy Charter process. This process moved with considerable speed, because already eighteen months later, on 17 December 1991, here in The Hague, the Energy Charter declaration was signed by 51 countries. And already three years later, in Lisbon, the Energy Charter Treaty could be signed, providing a legal basis for cross-border trade and transit in the energy sector, and security about investments.

But in the very same period, that is on Christmas Day 1991, Gorbachev had to resign and the Soviet Union came to an end. Boris Jeltsin became the new President of Russia, and the Soviet Union was succeeded by CIS: the Commonwealth of Independent States.

The attention of politics moved on to other territories of integration. Many countries in Eastern Europe became member or candidate member of the European Union. Economic growth in these countries brought them a level of welfare they never experienced before. The Energy Charter and its Treaty continued to exist, and served the society at large well, without much political maintenance.

We are now twenty-five years down the road. Pressing energy issues have emerged, like the need to decarbonize the energy sector to prevent climate change, and the embarrassing notion that still billions of people lack access to modern energy services, hampering their social and economic development. Therefore I’m very pleased to note, that today, the initial idea of fostering cooperation on energy between countries has reached a global scale. Energy Charter 2.0, as youngsters would call it.

I was pleased to have witnessed the birth of the Charter in 1991, but even more pleased to witness today that the Charter reaches a new level. I would like to urge all of you not to stop

here. Not all countries are represented here today. So that is a next step. And the important new intentions in the Charter, about access to energy and greening the energy supply, have to be effectuated, across borders. For the sake of our planet and its people, I wish you all the best with these challenging tasks.

I myself, after the start of the Energy Charter and after the end of my political career, became involved in the Earth Charter. In the year 2015 we celebrate not only the start of the International Energy Charter, but also the Earth Charter+15.

Therefore, I allow myself to wish you according to the last words of that Earth Charter “a joyful celebration of life”.

I thank you for your attention.