

**SPEECH GIVEN BY THE SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE  
HAGUE CONFERENCE ON PRIVATE INTERNATIONAL LAW  
ON THE OCCASION OF THE CEREMONY OF THE ADMISSION OF THE  
EUROPEAN COMMUNITY  
3 APRIL 2007**

Madam President of the Council of the European Union, Madam Minister,  
Madam Representative of the Vice-President of the European Commission,  
Madam Representative of the President of the Parliament of the European Union,  
Mr Minister of Justice of the Netherlands,  
Mr Minister for European Affairs of the Host Country,  
Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the Hague Conference on Private International Law, I have the honour and the pleasure of welcoming the European Community as a new Member of the Conference. "New Member" indeed, but a Member already very familiar with the workings of our Organisation because, in actual fact, the Community since its beginning has been present at the Conference as an Observer, and has actively taken part in negotiations since the entry into force of the Treaty of Amsterdam. The Community is therefore by no means unfamiliar to the Member States of the Conference. Indeed, over the years its representatives, alongside the representatives of the European Union States, have become greatly appreciated members of the large family of experts and delegates forming the strength of our Organisation and supported by the multiple networks of national organs and authorities implementing the Hague Conventions.

The acceptance which has just taken place of the Conference's Statute by the Community is nevertheless no less significant. It is a manifestation of the desire by the European Community to exercise its legislative competence in private international law matters; not in an isolated manner, "*in splendid European isolation*", but by being part of the specialist global organisation with which the international community is endowed.

The acceptance of the Statute reflects the awareness of the European Community of the wealth of work, both fundamental and practical, built up by the Conference in the field of private international law over the last almost 115 years.

It is also an expression of the wish to participate in a systematic manner in the creation of new instruments for co-ordination, communication and co-operation in this field, and which our citizens, in this age of globalisation, have never needed more.

Lastly, it is the expression of the wish of the European Community to determine, along with the other Members of the Conference, a legislative policy and a monitoring strategy with regard to these instruments.

Madam President of the Council,

Each new Member of the Hague Conference is entitled to a full Collection of the *Actes et documents* – the Proceedings of each of the Diplomatic Sessions of the Conference held since 1893. In a moment I will invite you to accept a complete collection by cutting the ribbon that holds these many volumes together. The Member States of the Conference greatly appreciate the Declaration you just submitted, according to which the Community will endeavour to examine which of the existing Hague Conventions it could join – directly, or indirectly through ratification by its Member States.

The Community may join directly the two latest Hague Conventions that came into being following the entry into force of the Treaty of Amsterdam; the Securities Convention and the Choice of Court Convention. The Community will also be able to sign and join the new Convention on the international recovery of maintenance, which we hope to complete before the end of this year. Two Hague Conventions – the Apostille Convention and the Child Abduction Convention – are already in force for all twenty-seven Member States of the Union. Most of the other Conventions have been joined by one or more of its Member States. The citizens of the Community, and those worldwide, would benefit greatly if all of the Members of the Union would collectively join several of these instruments.

This applies pre-eminently to the 1996 Convention on Protection of Children, which the Member States of the European Union already signed “in the interest of the Community”: we very much hope they will be able to ratify together in the near future. The same procedure could easily be followed for other Hague Conventions, such as the Service, Evidence, and Access to Justice Conventions, along with several others.

Indeed, many States have recently acceded to these treaties, and we know that several other States are actively studying them. This tells us that these very practical, flexible and yet precisely worded and closely monitored Hague Conventions are even more relevant today than they were at the time when they were negotiated. They constitute a basic legal infrastructure for an increasingly interdependent world.

The Conference welcomes the European Community as an invaluable ally in its efforts to help ensure justice and legal security for human relations and commercial transactions across borders: through promotion of existing Conventions, through assistance in their implementation, and through development of new instruments. We hope that the Commission will actively and generously support the Conference’s endeavours to provide help in the implementation of Hague Conventions on child protection and legal co-operation, especially to countries with developing economies and economies in transition. The European Community is connected, through many historical, cultural and economic links, with many such countries in Asia, Africa, Eastern Europe and Latin America. It is in the common interest of all of us not to ignore what are often huge disparities in legal development which may jeopardise the correct implementation of Conventions. We need to work towards a level playing field in terms of understanding, expertise and capacity.

Within the Hague Conference the Community is able to join with partners and other regional organisations around the world in creating the indispensable new private international law rules, channels for communication and co-operation that our citizens need to be able to cope with the exponential growth in cross-border activity. This includes novel approaches such as the dialogue we are developing through the "Malta Process" among various cultures across the Mediterranean, and beyond. The future of our emerging complex global society, our global economy and financial market will require the support of private international law. Multilateral treaty-making in this field is clearly at the cutting edge of the development of international law.

Today's acceptance by the Community of the Statute of the Conference, reinforced by your presence, Madam President, sends out an important, highly positive signal to all States and their citizens: the Community puts its full weight behind the work of the Hague Conference to make the world a better place for its increasingly mobile inhabitants. It is a memorable day for Community law and for international law: a day to celebrate!