

Benita Ferrero-Waldner

European Commissioner for External Relations and European Neighbourhood Policy

Acceptance speech by Benita Ferrero-Waldner on the occasion of this year's European Voice award on being elected "Diplomat of the Year"

Check Against Delivery
Seul le texte prononcé fait foi
Es gilt das gesprochene Wort

The European Voice award "Europeans of the Year"

Brussels, Belgium, 28 November 2007

"Thank you very much. I am delighted and honoured in receiving this prize from European Voice.

The European voice continues to provide a very useful reference point for an insight into the Brussels political scene.

Firstly, let me whole heartedly apologise for not being there tonight with you. The life of a diplomat demands that I am always on the move, from one place to another, depending on where the agendas and issues of foreign policy dictate.

Today, I am in Annapolis, at the International Meeting on the Middle East, discussing the first steps of negotiations between the Palestinians and Israelis, an issue that has taken many years of diplomacy and lots of energy.

I regret that I am not in Brussels with you, but I am certain that today - at this historic meeting in Annapolis - we will usher in a new period of Israeli - Palestinian negotiations, and the opportunity to move forward in the process that will make the sacrifice worthwhile.

I am particularly touched that I have been given this award on the grounds of my contribution to securing the freedom of the Bulgarian nurses and the Palestinian doctor.

I know the Libyan affair may be just a distant memory of the summer months, but for me this issue has been a marathon, requiring my attention and energy for the best part of the last two and half years. In fact, I was already aware of this issue before joining the Commission.

They have been two long years, with lengthy negotiations, but one of the worthiest investments of my time. Indeed, it has been a real challenge both professionally and personally.

However today it warms my heart and I can proudly say that Valya, Snezhana, Nasya, Valentina, Kristiyana and Ashraf are back with their loved ones, where they belong.

I am also pleased that a solution has been found to the drama of the Benghazi children and their families – innocent victims of this tragedy.

This happy end would not have been possible without first and foremost the combined European efforts to reach a solution.

Let me use this opportunity to express my gratitude not only to my fellow colleagues but also to my British, Spanish, Italian German and French colleagues who have played an essential role in this long process of securing the release of the nurses and doctor and supporting children of Benghazi and their families.

Please allow me to say a few words about my colleague Frank Walter with whom I have the honour of sharing this award. Truly, it has been a real pleasure to work with him on this case and on many others. He is a brilliant and thoroughly professional diplomat.

Finally, I would like to say that this has been a truly European success and this award recognizes the hard work of all of us!!

Many thanks for this wonderful award."