Ladies and Gentlemen,

Dear Friends,

Colleagues,

Let me thank Professors Strugnall and Murray for their kind words and for organising this event.

Thanks also to all of you for attending this important opening.

It is almost exactly one year during my visit to Melbourne we discussed with the project to open an EU centre at Melbourne University: I'm glad that the idea has transformed into reality so quickly.

I’m honoured to be here to open the University of Melbourne's EU Centre on Shared Complex Challenges.

The focus of attention of the Centre is particularly important. In today's world we face many shared complex challenges – security, climate change, energy, development, health – and it’s only by working together that we can hope to find solutions.

Today I will focus briefly on three points:

1) The EU Australia relations;

2) The role of this centre, also in the wider context of our public diplomacy in Australia;

3) The introduction of our guest.

EU/AUS relations have come a long way since the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1962 (and Philomena Murray has looked in detail at the history of that).

The EU and Australia are likeminded partners - with a common cultural heritage, converging interests, and shared values.
For over 50 years our relations have grown broader and deeper. Trade remains an essential part of our relations. The EU is the second largest trade and services partner for Australia, and the leading investor. And – as you have probably heard from the many meetings during the G20 – discussions on whether an FTA between the EU and Australia is possible have started.

Today our bilateral relations cover a wider range of policies from Security/Defence to global economy, from Research/Education to environment and climate change, and development aid.

Only last week we signed an agreement to exchange diplomats in DFAT and EEAS.

The upcoming conclusion of the Framework Agreement will bring all the elements of cooperation under one umbrella for the first time in the form of a legal, binding agreement.

The complexity and strength of this bilateral relation – and more generally the EU and its policies - need to promoted and understood. This centre is integral part of our public diplomacy efforts in Australia and worldwide.

Foreign policy is not just about summits and meetings between governments; it is also about perception and understanding. While Governments ultimately take the policy decisions it is also important for other stakeholders to contribute with research, writing and teaching to bring different perspectives and ideas to the concepts to policy debate. This "think tank" role of the EU centres provides an invaluable contribution to our work.

The 2014 has been an extraordinary year for our public diplomacy with the launch of five centres. This one, one at RMIT, two in Adelaide - at University of South Australia and University of Adelaide and one in Canberra at the Australian National University.

The EU has invested over 4.6million euro (over the next 3 years) to establish these five Centres in Australia, plus a networked centre in New Zealand.
Between them they represent one of the largest public diplomacy projects in Australia & New Zealand and probably the largest EU single network below the equator!

It was only in August that the Hon. Bronwyn Bishop, Speaker of the House of Representatives and I formally launched in Canberra the 6 centers in a joint event. To give you an idea on how the centres contribute to the deepening the understanding and the relations between the EU and Australia let me give you a quick overview of some of the initiatives carried out in the recent months:

- During the G20 in Brisbane several of our EU centres joined in to host President of the European Council, Van Rompuy, and the Vice President of the European Commission, Dombrovskis at a very well attended outreach and networking event;
- In October, your 'sister’ centre here in Melbourne at the RMIT organised a Policy Forum on Counter-Terrorism and Security that provided valuable input into the first ever EU/AUS Counter Terrorism Dialogue;
- In Adelaide last August I launched with the former Prime Minister Bob Hawke the Hawke EU centre for Mobilities, Migrations and Cultural Transformations;
- The EU Centre for Global Affairs at the University of Adelaide ran a very useful round table discussion of high level academics and practitioners on how to improve EU/AUS trade relations, ahead of G20 summit in Brisbane;
- As part of the well-established Schuman lecture series – the ANU provided the platform for the Secretary of DFAT to share his ideas on: *Indo-Pacific Lessons from a European Experiment*. A very interesting topic you don’t usually hear Australian officials at that level talk about publicly. As a Schuman lecturer the DFAT Secretary is in good company – as believe Helga gave a Schuman lecture in 2009.

This new Centre at Melbourne University has a key role in helping the EU and Australia to address some of the key issues of bilateral, regional and global relevance: climate change, regional governance, and business innovation – three truly complex challenges. And the Centre has already been active over the past months.
1) **Climate change** is one of the most important and global challenges to our standard of living and the sustainability of the planet. In the words of the UNSG, Ban, "humanity has never faced a greater challenge". While the science of climate change is hardly contested anymore, intensive international efforts are trying to define a common response for the international community and this is not without difficulties. As we speak 190 Countries – including Australia and the EU - are gathered in Lima to help shaping the collective response to climate change for the decades to come. This Centre has already organised last month a high level conference on this subject.

2) The study of **Regional governance** remains of key importance simply because the world is evermore interdependent. Regions in Europe, in South East Asia, in the Pacific or elsewhere adopting each own paths for addressing common challenges. It is therefore very important that we understand how those regions address the same challenges we face. As probably the most integrated region in the world the EU does not necessarily need to serve as a model for other regions that operate in different context – however, it certainly should serve as a reference point.

3) This centre will also help to promote **business innovation**. At the core of EU efforts to promote innovation and R&D is the EU's Horizon2020 programme, the EU's new €80bn ($A110bn) research and innovation programme which runs from 2014–2020, with an increase in funding on the previous budget period. The EU is convinced that R&D will be crucial to promote growth and employment. Last week, at this Centre, a senior official from Brussels gave an important presentation to promote Horizon 2020.

Finally it is my very great pleasure to introduce to you our very special guest today from Brussels - Helga Schmid, Deputy Secretary General of the European External Action Service.

I dare say that she represents a new breed of European Diplomats that move effortlessly between their national 'home service' - in Helga's case the German Auswaertiges Amt - and the European institutions.
Helga has held this position since 2011. Previously she was Director of the Policy Planning and Early Warning Unit (Policy Unit) at the Council of the EU where she worked closely with the first EU High Representative for Foreign and Security Policy, Javier Solana. Before that she had a distinguished career in the German Foreign Service.

Helga’s role is a complex one, and let me quote:

"The role of the Deputy Secretary General for Political Affairs is to give policy guidance on issues such as the Middle East, Iran, Russia, Western Balkans, Transatlantic Relations and relations with other partners of strategic importance (including in the Asia/Pacific region). She assists the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs & Security Policy during the meetings of EU Foreign Ministers, advises her on pertinent Foreign policy issues and represents her in key international negotiations - for example in the so called EU 3 plus 3 group that leads the Iran nuclear talks, or during the past year as EU envoy in the so called Middle East Quartet."

As Political Director, she also holds more than 20 regular dialogues at Deputy Foreign Minister/Political Directors’ level with third countries including the US, China, Russia, India, Turkey, South Korea and Australia, and represents the EU in international fora such as the UN.

Helga has been several times in Australia. She is now here to lead - for the second time - the EU delegation to the annual EU-Australia Security Dialogue which is held tomorrow in Canberra.

I am delighted that her busy schedule allows her to be here today to support this launch.

Ladies and gentlemen, please welcome Helga Schmid.