

Speech by the President of the European Parliament at the meeting of the European Council

18/06/2009 - Brussels

Mr President of the European Council, dear Jan Fischer,
Ladies and Gentlemen, Heads of State and Government,
Mr President of the Commission, dear José Manuel Durão Barroso,
High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy, dear Javier Solana,
Ladies and Gentlemen Ministers,

I. Result of the European elections

The citizens of Europe have elected their European Parliament on 4 - 7 June. As President of the European Parliament I welcome that this election has produced a clear pro-European majority. Around eighty percent of the 736 elected Members are from parties that favour the work of European unification and the Treaty of Lisbon.

Many Members have been elected for the first time. The European Parliament in which the newly-elected representatives will take their seats now has little in common with the European Parliament directly elected in 1979 for the first time.

Today this European Parliament stands at the centre of a European parliamentary democracy of which we could only dream in 1979. Parliament has become a legislature that is conscious of its responsibilities and in most areas of European legislation an equal partner in decision-making.

It is also welcome to see that the number of women Members has over the period more than doubled and today about 35 percent of MEPs are women – the Finnish Members hold first place with a 62 percent female share. That too is a sign of a living democracy that embraces all the areas of society.

Of course we would have liked to see a stronger turnout. But 162 million citizens did take part in the election. It was nevertheless an achievement, that at the same time so many people from 27 countries on our continent took part in a democratic election. Participation in elections to the United States House of Representatives in 2006 lay at around 36 percent, without its legitimacy or authority being called into question.

Opinion polls have shown that those who support their country's membership of the European Union are more numerous than the turnout figure for the European elections suggests. Particularly in some of the new Member States, where the participation was lowest, the vast majority of the population supports European unity. This is a sign that the European Union is now an accepted reality in many of these countries, but it also reflects a lack of information on and understanding of the way in which the European Union works.

It should be our aim to achieve that there is a greater election turnout in 2014. I therefore appeal to the integration-friendly parties in all the Member States to view the aim of European unification and European issues as an ongoing matter of importance. The major challenges of national politics are at the same time European challenges. We need to communicate this better to our citizens than heretofore.

But the media too must do their bit by reporting on the European Parliament and its activities throughout the legislative term – and not just in the run-up to the European elections. Over the next five years the European Parliament will be taking a number of decisions that directly affect the lives of all European citizens. To make this clear to people the European Parliament will need the media's support.

In view of the major challenges facing us, it is ultimately up to us newly-elected Members to demonstrate European citizens the added value of Europe - for example by our decisions in fighting the economic and financial crisis, combating climate change or through our ensuring of more security.

It will be crucial for the families of parties that have decisively helped to shape European unification to continue to work together closely with all pro-European forces, so as to strengthen the European Union in this period of globalisation and further defend our common European values.

xxx Oversight and regulation of finance markets xxx

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This election has also clearly shown that Europe's citizens support the social market economy, securing a balance between market liberalism and social responsibility. They want to continue our European agenda to improve the oversight and regulation of the finance markets.

The European Parliament has taken swift and responsible action on the proposals that have been put forward. Before the legislative term ended Parliament completed its work on deposit guarantee schemes, credit rating agencies, the capital requirements of the banking industry and Solvency II.

The European Parliament has since 2002 repeatedly drawn attention to the need for further action to improve the regulation of the finance markets, and so it welcomes the fact that the Commission has put forward its first proposals for the regulation of hedge funds, which we shall be considering as soon as possible.

It is now crucial to create the proper framework for oversight of the finance markets in a single European internal market. We have to free ourselves from the idea of purely national oversight structures – we need to have European solutions.

In this connection the European Parliament notes with agreement the recent proposal to create a European Systemic Risk Committee, in which the European Central Bank would also have a role to play.

We look forward to early progress in reshaping the architecture of European regulation and oversight, to which we shall be making our own substantial contribution.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Particularly in view of the current economic and financial challenges, the European Union must maintain its course on the path of reform. In the next few months we in the European Union must work especially hard to ensure that a comprehensive agreement is reached at the climate conference in Copenhagen in December.

xxx The new Commission xxx

In this connection it is essential that the European Commission's work should continue smoothly and with the proper commitment.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Today's European Council has the great responsibility of nominating the new Commission President. In the spirit of the Treaty of Lisbon, the political family that was confirmed as the strongest in the elections to the European Parliament is entitled to call for the new President of the European Commission to come from its own ranks.

There is a clear mandate from the vote. We must honour that democratic mandate. For nomination of the incumbent President of the European Commission at this summit the necessary conditions are fulfilled.

In contrast to before the elections, there are differing views in the European Parliament as to the timing of choice of the European Commission's President. Parliament's Conference of Presidents, that is the Chairs of the political groups, will take a decision on this on 9 July when determining the agenda for the European Parliament's new electoral period beginning on 14 July.

Yesterday, on 17 June, the President of the European Council consulted the President of the European Parliament on this question.

Today's nomination of the future President of the European Commission is important for ensuring continuity. Following the constituting of the Political Groups, which should be concluded by the end of June, further consultations with the European Parliament must ensue, in the spirit of the Treaty of

Lisbon. After this the European Council can draw further conclusions.

For the composition of the complete College of Commissioners it is entirely feasible and preferable to await the outcome of the referendum in Ireland, so as to know if the number of Commissioners remains unchanged.

But whatever procedure is chosen in the end, the European Parliament must insist that the date on which the European Commission takes office is determined in such a way as to ensure that the necessary time for the proper completion of the hearings by Parliament, is guaranteed.

In any case, the new Commission must take up office this year. Considering the economic and financial challenges, we cannot diminish our capacity to act.

II. New legislative term and the Swedish Presidency

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The citizens of Europe wish to have a European Union that is capable of action and transparent.

xxx Code of conduct for lobbyists in Brussels xxx

So it will be important to pursue the Commission's transparency initiative in the next legislative term.

The Conference of Presidents of the European Parliament decided to begin negotiations with the Commission on setting up a regulatory framework for the activities of interest representatives.

We made good progress. We succeeded in drawing up a draft code of conduct and in agreeing on guidelines for a future joint register of interest representatives. This lays down a solid foundation for continuing the work in the new legislative term. This work should be swiftly and satisfactorily completed.

But the European Parliament regrets that the Council as co-legislator has not so far seen fit to enter the negotiations on a joint legally binding register. With a view to reaching agreement between all three institutions I should like today to call upon the Council once again to give consideration to participating in that proposition.

xxx Review of legislation xxx

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As a point of principle, the European Parliament takes the view that more intensive planning and agreement between the three institutions of work related to legislation is of the utmost importance.

This is also of significance when it comes to formulating policy priorities for the next legislative period. In the interest of good legislative planning and effective interinstitutional cooperation, the European Parliament would welcome it if the new Commission could again set out its five-year strategic policy guidelines.

III. Lisbon Treaty

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Over the past year the European Union has faced challenges it has seldom seen before. Every day we feel the effects of the fact that the Lisbon Treaty has not yet entered into force.

The Lisbon Treaty is of supreme importance for the future of the European Union and the success of our cooperation. The new treaty strengthens the European Union's democracy and its capacity for action.

We must do our utmost to ensure that the Lisbon Treaty becomes a reality as soon as possible. The

European Parliament welcomes the ratification in May by the Senate of the Czech Republic of the Lisbon Treaty. We appreciate the Czech Presidency's resolve to contribute to the success of the new treaty.

I appeal to the political leadership of those countries which have not yet completed their ratification process, following parliamentary ratification, to do so as soon as possible.

Ireland has given an undertaking to hold a second referendum, on the basis of a satisfactory outcome to the present European Council in the formulation of clarifications on a series of issues that have raised concerns with people in Ireland about the Lisbon Treaty.

Ireland's voice has been heard. The last European Council has already taken the relevant steps and agreed that all countries can continue in future to be represented by their own Commissioner.

The European Parliament expressly supports the formulation of further clarifications and legal guarantees for Ireland.

On this basis the citizens of Ireland will be able to take their sovereign decision in the autumn. It must be in all our interests to create the necessary conditions for rapid ratification of the Lisbon Treaty in all the Member States.

IV. Review of my term of office as the European Parliament's President

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Today's European summit is the last in my term of office as President of the European Parliament, an institution of which I have been Member since its first direct elections in 1979 and continue to be today.

Over the last thirty years we have come a long way. We have achieved a tremendous amount. We have experienced the transformation of the European Parliament from a consultative body into a legislative partner.

The division of our continent was overcome, something which in 1979 seemed to be merely a vision, a dream, a hope. It became a reality. As stated in the Berlin Declaration of 25 March 2007: 'We have united for the better'.

The European Parliament, along with the European Commission and the Governments, have done much to help overcome the division of Europe and worked hard in the last legislative term to ensure that the Members from the Member States that joined in 2004 and 2007 have been integrated in our activity.

Following enlargement, the European Union and the European Parliament have become larger and more diverse. For that reason too the reform of the European Parliament's working methods and procedures has been a major concern of my term of office. Those efforts have been successfully concluded – and that is a sound basis for work in the new legislative term.

During my time in office I have endeavoured to facilitate the work of our Members and to modernise our ways of communicating with Europe's citizens. Cooperation with national parliaments was decidedly improved.

With the new electoral period the Statute for Members enters into force, on which we have worked for many years. It is an important contribution to the regulation of the finances concerning us as Members, to transparency and openness. The adoption of a clear and transparent legal statute for assistants is likewise an important step forward.

Finally, the European Parliament has placed the need for the unconditional protection of human rights and the essential dialogue between cultures at the centre of its work.

For this reason the European Parliament has made quite particular efforts to contribute to a just solution in the Middle East. We want that Israel can live within safe borders. But we also want a sovereign, democratic and viable Palestinian State, which exists in peace with Israel.

As the European Union, we must make it clear that the Government of Israel is expected to make an unequivocal commitment to that objective. This will involve an end to settlement activities, including those in the Jerusalem area, restoration of the free movement of persons and frontier traffic in the Palestinian territories and an agreement on the status of the city of Jerusalem.

The Quartet - the EU, USA, Russia and the United Nations - should work together with determination on this matter.

The European Parliament views with concern the increasing violence in Iran after the announcement of the election results last Saturday. This is further proof of the inadequate rule of law, particularly the restrictions on freedom of expression and freedom of demonstration in Iran.

The European Union can not ignore the impressive mobilisation of civil society which has taken to the streets of Teheran and other Iranian cities in recent days. The refuting of the official election results is not limited to a small elite. This movement is being directed by reformers and has broad popular support. We have a moral obligation not to shut our eyes to what is happening and to have an open ear to the call for freedom.

On the occasion of her birthday, I should like on behalf of the European Parliament to express our full support for Aung San Suu Kyi the winner of the 1990 Sakharov Prize.

We are in complete solidarity with her. This brave woman embodies all the hopes of the people in Burma/Myanmar for a free and better future.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In the new legislative term I shall continue to work for the aims that I have pursued in my term of office, and I should like in particular to lend my support to the dialogue between cultures.

I should also like to do my bit to strengthen the European identity. For in all the diversity of issues in our day-to-day work we should never forget our roots, and never lose sight of the values that bind us together.

It has taken a long time for the present free, peaceful and socially committed European Union to come into being. We now need to put some life in the principles on which the European Union is founded.

In 2014 we shall be marking the centenary of the outbreak of the First World War. A hundred years later we are living today in a renewed Europe of peace, freedom and unity.

So I shall be devoting my best efforts to the task of setting up a House of European History by the end of the next legislative term in 2014.

This House should serve as a place in which, by means of both a permanent exhibition and specific displays referring to the history of our Member States, we can remember and renew our European sense of identity. Parliament's Bureau took important further decisions in this regard yesterday.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In conclusion I should like to thank you all for our good cooperation - in many cases for genuine friendship - during my term of office as President of the European Parliament.

It has been a great joy for me to work with you on projects that will remain part of the history of European integration and our common future in the 21st Century, such as the Lisbon Treaty, combating climate change or tackling the economic crisis on the basis of a social market economy.

I would ask all of you to remain faithful to European unity and the defence of our shared values.

My best wishes for you all personally, for the countries you represent, and above all for our shared European continent.

Thank you very much for your attention!