

14 December 2007

Speech by the President of the European Parliament, Hans-Gert Pöttering, at the European Council

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

Behind us lie two important days: Wednesday saw the formal proclamation of the Charter of Fundamental Rights in the European Parliament in Strasbourg, and yesterday the formal signing of the Reform Treaty by you, the Heads of State and Government, and the Foreign Ministers in Lisbon.

These two days have drawn a line under two years of crisis and doubt. Such crises are nothing new in the European Union - we have always used them as an opportunity to make a new start, so as to emerge from them stronger than we were before. As representatives of the European Union, we can be proud of what has been achieved this year for our citizens, for our Community. And we can now look ahead to the future with some confidence.

In recent days the word historic has frequently been used - and rightly so. Today's meeting is a working Summit, a Summit marked by a joint commitment to tackling problems: our work has not become any easier, nor the challenges facing us any less pressing.

All the European Union's institutions and bodies share a responsibility to carry out this work conscientiously. A Europe of results, one which brings tangible benefits for ordinary people - that is what European citizens are calling for.

From the point of view of the European Parliament, both the enlargement of the Schengen area and our European satellite navigation system Galileo are projects which send out a clear signal that we are moving forward.

xxx Schengen and justice and home affairs

On 21 December this year we will begin enlarging the Schengen area by doing away with further checks at land borders. In March 2008, checks at airports will likewise be abolished. This will lead to greater freedom and security, not only for the citizens of the nine future Schengen countries, but also for the European Union as a whole.

On behalf of the European Parliament, I should like to applaud the considerable efforts which the nine future Schengen countries have made in order to meet the demanding and stringent requirements of the Schengen Agreement within a relatively short period of time.

This enlargement is also of great symbolic significance: it is a visible sign that the former divisions in Europe, the borders on the ground and in people's minds, are being overcome.

However, this enlargement of the Schengen area must not be a trade-off which brings greater freedom in return for less security.

For that reason, in the interests of European citizens we are looking to the Council to submit an assessment report to the European Parliament after six months. In the area of security in particular, our citizens have great expectations of the European Union. We must live up to those expectations.

In that connection, the Schengen Information System II is fundamental to the effective protection of the Union's external borders. It is absolutely vital that the preparations for the launch of that system should be speeded up. We need this more sophisticated system so that we can establish, by the agreed deadline, the integrated arrangements for information exchange which are so vital.

The fact that Justice and Home Affairs will become a Community policy following the entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon will make closer and more effective European cooperation possible.

Not least when it comes to combating terrorism, the closest possible cooperation is crucial, because terrorism is a crime which merits the very toughest response.

At this point, please allow me to express my deep solidarity with the families of the victims of the letter bomb attack in Paris and of the police officers shot dead by the Spanish terrorist group ETA. The fight against terrorism is part and parcel of the defence of our shared European values.

xxx Galileo

The Galileo project has also faced setbacks and crises in recent months. However, just as with the EU Treaty, in our dealings concerning Galileo we have seen each crisis as an opportunity, as a challenge to step up our efforts and work together.

By virtue of its budgetary powers, the European Parliament has played a very constructive role in achieving the agreement on Galileo. On 20 June 2007 we adopted a resolution clearly supporting the Commission proposal for Community funding for Galileo. The crucial point for us was that other programmes offering European added value should not be undermined by this agreement.

Yesterday, by definitively adopting the EU budget for the coming year, the European Parliament gave its approval to this agreement on the funding of the Galileo project. In that connection, I should like to pay tribute, in particular, to the thoughtful approach adopted by the Portuguese Council

Presidency and to the work of the chairman of the European Parliament's Committee on Budgets, Reimer Böge, whose prudence and determination were instrumental in achieving this compromise.

Galileo has now thrown off its chains and is ready for launch. However, that launch is coming four years late. We must now display even more determination in making up the time lost so that the planned fleet of 30 satellites can in fact be put into orbit by 2014.

The European Union needs its own European satellite navigation system, because at critical moments we should not be forced to rely on other systems. But also because Galileo will enable us to emphasise our own competitiveness on the global market, and because we can develop a wide variety of new applications linked to this technology and so create new jobs.

It is particularly important that a prompt start should be made on implementing the project itself. The European Parliament, under the supervision of my colleague Etelka Barsi-Pataky, is already in the process of drawing up a report which will make it possible for the Galileo regulation to be adopted quickly.

xxx Climate change

Ladies and gentlemen,
Decisive, joint action by the European Union is also vitally important in another key area: the fight against climate change.

The challenges we are facing in this area are more pressing than ever, a fact which has been confirmed by the fourth report issued by the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. We can still ward off the most serious consequences of climate change, but only if we act quickly.

The Spring Summit achieved a first, significant breakthrough in the form of an agreement setting ambitious targets. The challenge is now to enact legislation to implement the decisions we have already taken. In that connection, we are keenly and impatiently awaiting the European Commission's proposals.

On behalf of the European Parliament, I should like to urge the European institutions and all the Member States to show that we are up to the task. If we want effective decision-making, we cannot hide behind the unanimity rule. This means co-decision of the European Parliament.

The European Union can and must prove to its partners throughout the world that it is possible to break the link between economic growth and higher CO₂ emissions and to develop new production methods accordingly.

We now need an international agreement on the worldwide reduction of emissions. The UN conference currently taking place in Bali offers the international community an opportunity to come up with a comprehensive,

binding response to the challenges of climate change.

The details of a negotiating mandate for a post-Kyoto Protocol are being thrashed out in Bali. The constructive discussions held over the first few days offer grounds for hope. The European Parliament explicitly welcomes Australia's decision to reverse its previous policy and sign the Kyoto Protocol, and we would be delighted if the United States of America were finally to follow suit. An agreement without the support of the United States is unthinkable, but then so is a plan without limit values. I hope that any agreement which can be reached is not then blocked by the United States, to the detriment of our entire planet.

Any solution which is negotiated must be based on the principle of shared responsibilities which reflect differing circumstances. Although the developed nations will have to shoulder most of the global burden of reducing pollutant emissions over the next 10 years, the involvement of the industrialising and developing countries, backed by the offer of technology transfers, is essential, since even before 2020 these states' emissions will outstrip those of the industrialised countries.

If we are actually to achieve the 2-degree target throughout the world, it is vital that a global emissions trading system should be established without delay. It is also important that we should curb the continuing destruction of vast areas of forest, a process which today accounts for some 20% of global greenhouse gas emissions worldwide.

We hope that an ambitious emissions reduction target for the period 2020 will be set in Bali, because if a comprehensive and binding agreement can be secured there then the European Union will be required to fulfil the high commitments it agreed to in March.

The European Parliament is convinced of one thing: the fight against climate change is central to our efforts to safeguard our planet.

xxx Intercultural dialogue

It is equally important, however, that we should demonstrate how peace and understanding can be achieved in other parts of the world. By drawing on its own experience of peace, reconciliation and tolerance after centuries of war and violence, the European Union can be a model for its partners and foster dialogue between cultures.

2008 will be the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue. This European Year is the visible expression of our ever stronger political commitment to incorporating intercultural issues into Union policies.

On 8 January 2008 the Presidents of the three institutions will formally open this European Year in Ljubljana.

The European Parliament attaches great significance to this initiative. Peaceful coexistence between cultures and religions, both in the European

Union and on the other side of the Mediterranean, in the Middle East, is possible and of the utmost importance for our future.

We must build an intellectual and cultural bridge over the Mediterranean to the Middle East and beyond – a bridge founded on mutual understanding and shared values.

An institution such as the European Parliament is ideally placed to make a significant contribution to that process, whether through the more systematic incorporation of a stronger parliamentary dimension into all EU summits with third States or regional State groupings, or through the successful further development, alongside conventional diplomacy, of soft power instruments.

Over the coming year, the European Parliament intends to lend fresh impetus to intercultural dialogue by means of a series of events and initiatives.

We will be issuing invitations to senior political and religious leaders from all over the world and organising Arab and African cultural weeks. In May 2008 the European Union will host the annual summit of European religious leaders in Brussels.

After 2008 intercultural dialogue must continue to be a Union priority across all relevant European programmes and policies. Each of the 27 Member States should also develop its own individual action plan. If we succeed in organising parallel dialogues at national, regional and local levels and in involving as many representatives of civil society as possible in those dialogues, we can make a genuine contribution to intercultural understanding.

xxx Middle East initiative

In the Middle East in particular, intercultural dialogue is urgently needed. It was certainly very encouraging that most of the main parties to the conflict should recently have come together for 'negotiations about negotiations' in Annapolis. The fact that Syria and Saudi Arabia sent representatives to the conference was a good sign.

The region's leaders want a European contribution to the peace process. However praiseworthy the American efforts to bring peace in the Middle East closer may be, we should have just as much confidence in our own strengths and use them.

The success of the European unification project, through which former enemies have reached out to one another and learnt to live and work together, can also be an inspiration for a region which, in many respects, represents the cradle of our own civilisation. In the long term, security can only be achieved if we all pull in one direction, not in differing directions.

Here, the European Parliament can offer an alternative perspective. We

want to develop a stronger parliamentary dimension in relations with and between the countries of the Middle East, because we are convinced that the citizens' elected representatives have their own special contribution to make. We want to offer new forums for meetings involving as many of the parties involved in the region as possible. In that respect, the Euromed Parliamentary Assembly has an important role to play.

Europe's experience of establishing economic integration and sharing sovereignty is highly relevant to the Middle East. We must overcome historic divisions by fostering economic development and by helping everyone in the region to take joint responsibility for their own fate.

I would like to particularly thank Javier Solana for his great commitment.

xxx Problem areas

Please allow me to make some remarks about two problem areas which have a bearing on our security and also on human rights:

(1) Kosovo:

The Member States of the European Union should act in concert. The timetable for Kosovo's independence and the provision of security guarantees should take account of the Serbian elections at the beginning of 2008. Firm principles should go hand in hand with flexible procedures.

(2) Sudan/Darfur:

On Tuesday the European Parliament awarded the Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought to the Sudanese lawyer and MP Salih Mahmoud Mohamed Osman. In his acceptance speech, he appealed to us to send European and international troops to Darfur because the soldiers of the African Union are unable to protect the sorely tried local people. It was my wish to pass on Mr Osman's appeal to you.

The European Parliament would welcome it if the European Union Member States were to find the will and the ability to help the long-suffering people in Sudan/Darfur by providing appropriate military and humanitarian resources.

xxx Conclusion

Ladies and gentlemen,

The European Union has emerged stronger from the most recent phase of the reform and integration process. The Treaty of Lisbon provides us with the new basis we need for our work.

What we must now do is put these instruments into practice, quickly and with all the political determination we can muster. Our ambition should be to ensure that the reform Treaty comes into force on 1 January 2009 at the latest.

We must make this new momentum in the European Union clear to our

fellow citizens and debate it with them. Europe can achieve more for its citizens. Together we will be successful.

Thank you for your attention.