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Speech, General Affairs and External Relations, Justice and Home Affairs, Transport, Telecommunications and Energy

### **Prime Minister Matti Vanhanen at the Joint Parliamentary Meeting on the Future of Europe in Brussels**

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A Europe of Results

(Subject to changes)

Mr Speaker, Mr President, Honourable Members,

It is a great honour for me to address this Joint Parliamentary Meeting. It is important for parliaments to discuss the future of Europe with each other. I am looking forward to the debate and the exchange of ideas.

A couple of weeks ago, I had the pleasure of attending the COSAC meeting in Helsinki. For me, it was an extremely valuable meeting, in terms of the discussion and the outcome.

To begin with, I would like to take this opportunity to tell how the Finnish Presidency has used the period of reflection to move forward with the Constitutional Treaty.

The Finnish Parliament is due to vote on the Constitutional Treaty this very afternoon. I believe it will give the Treaty its unequivocal support. The Estonian Parliament endorsed the Treaty last spring when you held your last meeting in May. Perhaps you should meet more often.

This autumn, Finland has been conducting bilateral discussions with the Member States on the future of the Constitutional Treaty. These discussions have focused on how to proceed and on the content of the Treaty. No one has any ready-made solutions but at least national debates have started in many countries.

I shan't go into detail about Finland's discussions with the Member States because they are confidential, but I do intend to give an oral presentation of the main points at the December European Council.

Finland undertook these consultations in order to provide material for the report on the future of the Constitutional Treaty due next spring. The European Council held in June of this year gave the German Presidency the task of producing the report, which provides a basis for making decisions on how best to proceed with the reform process.

My own view is that the Constitutional Treaty is a well-balanced package. Europe needs reform. That is why the Finnish Government wanted to push ahead with it, at both national and EU level. I am not here today to suggest ways out of the current deadlock, but I would say that I do not personally believe that cherry picking from the agreement is a viable option: the powers and competencies of the Union and its Member States need to be properly defined, and the various parts of the Constitutional Treaty form a unified whole that cannot easily be split apart.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The June European Council agreed that the Union should take a "two-track approach". That means working to achieve concrete results using the possibilities offered by the existing Treaties and, at the same time, deciding on the best way to move forwards with reform of the Treaties. The reforms set out the Treaty have yet to be realised but we cannot wait: we have to improve the way the Union functions now.

A Europe of results also happens to be the best way of promoting the Constitutional Treaty. If we can demonstrate that the EU is effectively serving its citizens' interests, we will help to bring about the kind of

constructive climate in which a solution can be reached with regard to the Constitutional Treaty.

There plenty of areas where good results have been achieved. And one of the things they all have in common is a genuine desire and ability on the part of the various players in the EU - the Commission, the European Parliament and the Member States - to get things done. The Services Directive and the Seventh Framework Programme for research are good examples. I hope that, by Christmas, we will have added another success to the list, in the shape of the REACH package of chemicals legislation - important for consumers and business alike.

The existing Treaties do provide scope both for making decisions and for improving the way in which they are made. During its Presidency, Finland has focused on three areas in which much-needed progress has been made. Those areas are: greater transparency, more effective influence in EU external action and more effective decision-making on justice and home affairs. Allow me say a few words about each of them.

There is no shortage of success stories in the Union. Great progress has been made on foreign and security policy. A good example during our Presidency was the rapid reaction to the Lebanese crisis. The EU showed its ability to act. In a short space of time, we sent a considerable number of troops to reinforce the UN operation. I could mention the informal summit in Lahti as another example. Russia is often cited as one of the areas of foreign policy in which the Union has most difficulty in presenting a united front. Speaking with one voice in our dealings with Russia is certainly of crucial importance. And that is what we managed to do at Lahti, in spite of some doubts ahead of the meeting.

Although things have started to take a turn for the better, there are still challenges ahead, not to mention some real pitfalls to watch out for. The question is how to make the Union's external action more coherent, both between different pillars and between the various players at EU and national level. It is quite clear that the pillar system does reduce the EU's effectiveness; the division of EU policy into Community external relations on the one hand and second-pillar external relations on the other is not good from the point of view of our influence. In the field of external relations, there is not one set of regulations, procedures and actors, but several. The most coherent response would be to apply the Community method to all aspects of external relations. Enlargement only strengthens the case for this approach. The Constitution would have improved matters in this respect, but we have to push ahead, with or without the Constitution. We must move forward with practical measures. On this, there is widespread agreement between the various actors in the EU. And the June European Council gave the Finnish Presidency a mandate. Our job was to enhance the EU's effectiveness in its external relations. We have made progress on that front, sometimes by making fairly basic changes. The focus was on practical measures, which tend not to make the headlines, except perhaps indirectly, in the shape of greater effectiveness and better results. This autumn, some changes were made to the way we prepare for summits between the EU and third countries: preparatory work was started earlier; efforts were made to plan more strategically and to get away from the same old formula. At ministerial level, the Foreign Minister from the Presidency country, the High Representative and the external-relations Commissioners met once a month to examine common foreign policy challenges for the month ahead and there was a greater level of coordination between EU countries within international organisations. The Heads of State or Government held their first general coordination meeting at which they examined external relations challenges during the Presidency as a whole. That was just the start. These practical measures must continue and new ones must be launched. I hope that Germany, Portugal and all the Presidencies after that will continue with this work.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The EU's citizens expect effective action from the Union to combat international crime, human trafficking and terrorism. To my mind, the Union is at present too often unable to meet its citizens' expectations.

Time and again, the way forwards is obstructed when a small minority of Member States use their veto to block a decision. It is disturbingly easy to come up with examples: negotiations on the European arrest warrant dragged on for more than three years; there has been no progress at all over the past two years in discussions on a framework decision on combating racism; and talks on cross-border police investigations have collapsed.

That was why the Finnish Presidency made improving decision-making one of its objectives, especially when the decision is about improving our citizens' security. We were also given a mandate by the June European Council.

Police and judicial cooperation in criminal matters is a difficult area. However, I am convinced that some Member States are unwilling to compromise precisely because any Member State can, if it wants, scupper any solution that is discussed. Any decision that is finally reached delivers only meagre results and scant progress.

The Member States and the EU institutions have urged the Union to develop concrete forms of cooperation rather than merely drafting more regulations. I fully agree with them. But there have to be ground rules for concrete cooperation too, and it is precisely with regard to those ground rules that agreement is so hard to achieve. In other words, concrete cooperation can only work effectively if people are willing to be reasonable.

Finland proposed switching to majority voting for decisions on police and judicial cooperation in criminal matters - a change which is already possible under the existing Treaties but which requires unanimity. However, at the justice and home affairs meeting in Tampere, the Member States were unwilling to take such a decision. And so Finland will not be able propose using the "passarelle", as it is known, to the European Council.

At Tampere, the Member States noted that the Constitutional Treaty was the best way of moving forward. Once again, I quite agree but, unfortunately, we do not know what will happen with the Constitution, or when. We could have sorted this matter out this autumn. It is my intention to discuss more effective decision-making on justice and home affairs with my colleagues at the December European Council meeting. I want us to make a commitment to finding a solution to this problem.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

With regard to transparency, the Finnish Presidency had three objectives: to bring greater openness to meetings of the Council, to improve access to documents and to make communication more effective.

The rules regarding the openness of Council sessions changed at the start of Finland's Presidency. So far we have held almost 90 ministerial-level meetings in public (compared with 17 for the corresponding period last year). In the last four months, 86% of all legislative work has been conducted in public. Sessions have been webcast over the internet, and have been viewable by anyone wanting to see how EU laws are made - from town councillors in France, to reporters in China and fishermen in Greenland.

The priority with regard to access to documents was to ensure the openness of documents connected to legislative procedures. Documents dealt with in open sessions were automatically made public and available on the internet. And the Regulation governing access to documents is to be reviewed next year.

In relation to communications, particular attention has been paid to the timing and the scope of information on the website. Public documents are translated into a number of languages. The website is in English and French, while press releases are available in Finnish, Swedish, English, French and German. We have made life easier for the media too by giving officials' mobile-phone numbers.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I want to conclude with a few words on what has been a key theme for the Finnish Presidency: enlargement. The objective at the European Council is to launch an in-depth debate among Heads of State or Government on the future challenges for enlargement. For me, it is clear that we have to continue with enlargement using the same, open and objective approach as before, without imposing any new restrictions or conditions.

Enlargement is crucial to the future of Europe. The Union's open enlargement policy has been a success story and I am glad that we will be welcoming Bulgaria and Romania as members from the beginning of next year.

The Turkish accession negotiations have reached a critical stage. As the Presidency country, Finland sought solutions which, amongst other things, would have opened up Turkish harbours and airports to Cypriot ships and planes, and made direct trade with North Cyprus possible. However, agreement on the package proved to be beyond reach.

The Commission has put forward its own proposal on measures regarding Turkey's accession negotiations. In my view, the Commission's recommendation is a sound basis for a Council decision. I am working on the assumption that the General Affairs and External Relations Council will take the necessary decisions concerning Turkey's accession negotiations, so we will not be raising this matter at the European Council.

However, I would like to point out that we never stop trying where Turkey's EU accession process is concerned. The train may slow down from time to time but the final destination is unchanged.

Mr Speaker, Mr President, Honourable Members,

Thank you for your attention. I will be here, at your disposal, during the debate.