

Strasbourg, 6 February 2002

Policy Statement Speech by Pat COX

We come to the next item of business - and here I would like to thank the Conference of Presidents and colleagues in the House for taking a short policy statement from myself, followed by a debate, to talk a little bit about the next two and a half years of the presidency.

When I spoke after my election on 15 January I said I would like to claim the privilege which is a common privilege of the newly elected President to address the House on our strategic purpose for the coming period. In deciding to speak today it was in deference to the fact that on the Wednesday of that part-session the Spanish Prime Minister was here to launch the Spanish presidency. One thing I want to bring to this House - and I hope we will all work on this together - is an ability to communicate who we are and what we do. So when you wish to communicate something you need to pick your moment and you cannot pick a moment which on that day belongs to someone else. Thus I am availing myself of the opportunity this morning.

The great sense that I carry from the campaign which preceded my election as President is that there is an enormous appetite for change in our House. Despite that, it is a frustrated appetite in terms of the delivery of change. We need, through the different mechanisms - the Bureau, our committees, the Conference of Presidents - to convert that appetite for change into actual change on the floor of this House. My invitation to colleagues today is to seize this opportunity to create the change for which there is self-evidently such an appetite in this House.

I hope in the next period before the election that we can be a reforming parliament in a visible way and that we can be a communicating parliament and a parliament that is prepared to take risk for change. This will require creativity and imagination on the part of everyone and together we can face that challenge. In effect what I should like to invite you to address in our debate today is a willingness to engage in creating a culture of transformation. It is now more than two decades since direct elections were introduced and we need to review how we do our business. We need to create a more vital and dynamic sense of parliamentarianism on the floor of this House.

The greatest transformation in hand of course is enlargement. The time has come for us, the political class, to repossess enlargement. It is inevitably the case that the *acquis communautaire* requires an enormous amount of work on the part of the European Commission and on the part of the public service in the candidate states to deal with all of the detail. But surrounding that detail is the wider political challenge - and that is our challenge. This House is uniquely well-placed to lead the politics of the transformation towards an enlarged Europe.

We are now entering the end game on the enlargement debate and we have the complex budgetary proposals which no doubt the House in due course will express itself on. It is important that the era for change which is enlargement should not be reduced to a budgetary debate about small change or large change, however one may perceive that to be. We have to take initiatives in this House to drive that agenda.

I want this Parliament to be the place where the vitality of the enlargement debate plays itself out. Although the calendar is not yet firmly set, it seems to me that on two occasions this year we are likely to discuss enlargement, probably before the Seville summit at the end of the Spanish presidency and probably again in November.

I would like to ask you, especially in the political groups, to consider a formula where we can invite MPs from our political families from the candidate states to participate in to our enlargement debates with us this year, to create a sense of vitality, to create a moment which is a very European moment, and to do it in terms which allow us to hear the different voices. They may be voices of accord or discord on some of the issues, but it is a really vital time and I hope the House will find within its mechanisms, and through the groups, a willingness to explore and create this platform, to express in a parliamentary sense this new Europe.

(Applause)

Eventually, following from the example of German reunification more than a decade ago, I would hope that the House will agree that, when the candidate states sign the accession treaties that have yet to be ratified, we might consider budgeting and planning for full observer status so that we create the *avant-garde* for the new Europe and that we do it in this House because it is our public purpose to give real political leadership. Subject to these details and to getting agreement - because we need to work through it as regards budgets, we need to work through it in our Bureau, we need the agreement of the Conference of Presidents on our calendar - I should like in the coming months and before the Seville summit if I can, to visit every candidate state on behalf of this Parliament and to issue to them, to our parliamentary colleagues, the formal invitation to be the *avant-garde* for the new Europe and, if you allow it, it will be your invitation to them and my privilege to deliver it on your behalf.

(Applause)

In the context of foreign policy and on a wider basis I hope in a number of ways that we can up our game. Europe needs a

new foreign policy and I am certain in this House there is a majority and a will to create that foreign policy. In forming and developing strategic partnerships with the United States, with Russia, with a Euro-Mediterranean dialogue, with a dialogue of civilisations, we are engaging in politics that are vital not just to the parliamentary process which is the image of the European Union itself. In this House we have great credibility in terms of our appetite to fight global poverty, disease and famine. In this House we have a wonderful and proud record in the promotion and defence of human rights. We must be determined to continue to play a leading role in this but we must find new platforms to express our leadership. It is not simply that we need to follow events but we ourselves, as a Parliament, have the capacity to create new platforms to offer a lead.

In the last few days and weeks, thanks to the work of so many colleagues in the House, we have begun to move towards a new and more mature form of political relations with other institutions and in particular with the European Commission. I congratulate Mrs Malmström in the Committee on Constitutional Affairs and the Vice-President of the Commission, who is here today, for the work which they have done in securing a landmark high-quality agreement on how we will go about the legislative process from now on. We need it and the work is excellent.

(Applause)

I congratulate the House for the overwhelming vote of support yesterday for the report by Mr von Wogau which will allow us to adopt an effective interim solution - and it is only an interim solution - on the financial services reform pending, through the Convention, and through the Intergovernmental Conference, a new basis in the Treaty on which to conduct our institutional relations, on which to promote the role of a democratic Europe and on which to promote this Parliament's role in representing citizens in a vital way.

I would like in particular also to pay tribute, because these two reports have come through the Committee on Constitutional Affairs, to the leadership role and qualities of Mr Napolitano whose work in this House has contributed so handsomely to these achievements.

(Applause)

The thread of consistency in all of these measures is the primacy of politics itself. That is our business. We also have to give a signal to the Commission, to the Council, to the wider world, that we in the European Parliament are mature and reliable partners in the project that we share in terms of European integration.

The counterpart is that I want to work now in the lead-up to the Barcelona European Council, with the Commission and with the Council, to get a meaningful interinstitutional working group. The primacy of politics comes to zero if the platforms to develop politics are not there. I say this to the Council: the time has now come for it, with the Commission and Parliament, to deliver that platform and to give us the ability to restore and to develop the primacy of politics, to prepare ourselves for common work on the Convention and for successful and common outcomes of substance in the Intergovernmental Conference.

We must not forget also that we here in this House are a tribune of the peoples of Europe. Our essential public purpose is to serve our citizens. We can create and we can communicate a new pride in this Parliament. Our determination must be to accentuate the democratic over the technocratic, to insist on openness and to connect our message in every way we can with a wider European public.

I am very proud of the fact that it was on the floor of this Parliament that we, the parliamentarians, created, developed, explained and won the argument in favour of a Convention, in favour of a new way of creating the new Europe, in favour of an open and democratic and transparent way, in favour of trying to get in touch with a rising generation of Europeans who are untouched by business behind closed doors. The old permissive consent to allow the elite to proceed is no longer there in the old way and so we must earn the consent and respect of a rising generation. We can only do it through open methods and the Convention must be an open method and can be a very significant start.

Parliament can claim an ownership of the idea. But we also have a key role as a stakeholder in this Convention. Our determination as Parliament is to promote the democratic Europe over the technocratic Europe and to insist on openness. In that regard, it is my view - and later today we have the possibility in the Conference of Presidents to meet the President of the Convention - that we must ensure as a Parliament that the Convention itself in its open work is the primary platform, is the main way, is the open discussion that leads to the way forward.

It is important - and we have distinguished colleagues on the presidium to help to lead this debate - that this is a well-managed Convention. But its management must assist the Convention itself to be a real platform for open debate. I have asked the services here, in terms of connecting this debate to the wider public, to ensure that it is broadcast on a continuous basis on video-streaming, so that those who wish to follow - whether they are journalists, people working in research institutes, students in universities, different groups in the socio-economic sphere in Europe - but who are not in Brussels for its work, can do so on a regular basis.

Colleagues, we still have a long way to go on the question of internal reform. I read the book *Mes combats* produced by my predecessor Nicole Fontaine. She spoke in it about the Members' Statute and about the virtual impossibility of making

progress on that issue.

I do not know what progress we can make but I express this hope today. I would like to bring closure to the Members' Statute. I want to work with the rapporteur, Mr Rothley; I want to work with key colleagues in the Bureau and the College of Quaestors. But firstly I want to talk to Members in this House to try to develop, mobilise and motivate a majority for change. Over the coming weeks, we will engage in an intensive round of consultation with Members. There will be no statute over the head of Members - I give you that guarantee. But there can be no statute without mobilising the majority - first in here. Then, of course, even if we do that, we still have to rely on the Council to deliver its part of the contract. But I want to start the first phase right here: to know the ground we stand on, to create a clear will for this change and then to try to bring closure to it. It is politically important to do so before the next European elections. I hope you agree and I hope you will help to create that climate for a majority for change.

(Applause)

I mentioned at the outset that there is a great appetite for change. Very many colleagues feel that the House lacks vitality in many of its debates and we need to work on this. I look forward to the Corbett report and whatever change that may bring. I do not prejudice its outcome - it is still a matter of debate and controversy.

I have no monopoly on wisdom, but we know - even as far as it goes or may go - that the Corbett report itself is just a start. The House will decide on the Corbett report - the President will not.

But a point I want to make: whatever powers that gives to the presidency to try to regulate how we do our business on the floor - to have fewer votes, more work done in committees and then to create space here for real political debate - I will use it to the maximum extent. So I want people to know in advance: whatever that platform is, I want to use it in a way that opens up space to have creative political debate on the floor of this House.

We had a wonderful debate yesterday on the Middle East but we need a lot more of that class of activity because we are a political institution.

In that regard - I claim no monopoly of wisdom in this - I cannot displace the work of the Committee on Constitutional Affairs - but I pose, Laeken-like, a number of questions. Why is it when we have a debate that the groups have not so far been able to agree that somewhere - maybe for the last third - we actually ask colleagues to respond to each other? Why do we not create a dynamic which demands that we debate and not simply read statements? Some way or another we need to respond to each other. Should we consider on committees, that where there is a report where there is broad agreement but where there are key amendments on which there is clear disagreement, that we could through the Conference of Presidents debate only the key amendments? It is sometimes done on the floor of the Congress in the US - not the whole debate but the debate on the key amendments, because that is the part that has the political voltage running through it.

We need to look at some of these things and I invite you to look creatively at them, because we need more vitality and we ourselves can gift this to ourselves if we are creative enough.

The *acquis communautaire* to which I referred earlier on enlargement, covers 2,500 legislative acts over 50 years and 85,000 pages of legislation. On the Eur-Lex website you will find half of those acts in a consolidated form - not yet the law, because we have never made a law to consolidate all those acts - but you will nonetheless find that half the *acquis* is now on Eur-Lex in its shortened form. I am told that through consolidated text we could reduce the 85,000 pages to 25,000. That is already very big but it would be some achievement. I believe that we should work with the other institutions to do this as a matter of priority. It is a failure in strategic planning that it has not been done already. It should have been done in advance of enlargement, for which these 85,000 pages of text are now being translated. However, we should do it primarily for citizens who want to connect to European law, to find in one place one consolidated text that explains their rights and the limits to them. I hope that we can engage in an exercise with the other institutions on this.

We as Parliament have a public purpose to bring real value to debate, to be a continental-scale legislator. I want over the next period to try to sell our story better than we have done in the past.

I want to propose to the Bureau a comprehensive stocktaking exercise in order to provide Parliament with modern and streamlined information policies. I want with you to develop a communication strategy before the next European election in 2004. We will have to invest in intellectual honesty and political realism to recognise past defects; to look at the underlying reasons for those defects; to look at any confusion about images of our institution in the eyes of the public.

We have many strengths to build on, not least our unique status as the largest elected representative assembly on our continent. The pivotal role that we play in the Convention itself also requires a special exercise in communication. As I said earlier - and I close on this - we must earn the consent of today's generation of Europeans. This is the tribune of the people where that process must play itself out: creating a cultural transformation, recognising our responsibilities towards enlargement, towards building new strategic partnerships, stressing the primacy of politics, reforming the House, communicating our public purpose. These are the aims of my presidency. They can be summarised in one phrase: working together to create a Europe fit for its future.

(Applause)