

Strasbourg, 5 May 2004

End of mandate address by Pat COX at the Plenary part-session

Today, Colleagues, is the last occasion for me to use the privilege of addressing this House as its President.

I think it is a moment to reflect and to look back on this mandate.

Thanks to the determined leadership of the Committees and their Chairmen, I believe you, the member of this House, can be proud of a solid record of legislative achievement. You have managed, I believe, an important gearshift, and have been an extremely hard-working Parliament throughout this mandate.

Your work has demonstrated that a European Parliament given responsibility, acts with responsibility.

The extent of our legislative engagement and our engagement across the European institutions - which has contributed to a climate of trust and provided legitimacy, efficiency and confidence; the sheer scale of our extraordinary 'exit velocity' in recent months - involving the adoption of over eighty reports in our last several sessions -; all these bear testament to the general up-scaling of Parliament's work in the course of its fifth mandate.

The lesson is, and I hope this will be understood by the electorate in June, that this Parliament does make a political difference.

Parliament as legislator

The key message of this mandate, in my view, is that the European Parliament has shown itself to be a mature and reliable legislative partner for Council and Commission. We have emphasised at all times the primacy of politics.

During the last five years, 403 codecision procedures and 86 sets of conciliation negotiations have been successfully concluded. This is 250% more than in the preceding five years. Only two proposals were not adopted, and that by democratic choice - the Takeover directive of 2001 and the Port services directive of 2003.

The legislative legacy of this Parliament, from 1999 to 2004, is one which will improve the quality of life of our peoples, and lay down the conditions for improved prosperity. The list of legislation illustrates the range and depth of our activity in fields including environment, transport, cultural exchange, financial services and consumer protection .

We have also used our legislative powers with flexibility and skill. 28 % of our codecision procedures were adopted in first reading, half of the total were concluded at second reading, through 'pre-conciliation'. In plain language we have not always pushed our parliamentary prerogative to its limits, we have used our prerogatives strategically and with a strong political sense.

Throughout the mandate, we in the Parliament, alone of the law-making institutions of this Union, can boast at the end of our mandate delivered a 100% legislative record, of which I believe, in terms of delivery we can be truly proud.

We proposed, as you know, and reached, an important Inter-Institutional Agreement for the future on Better Law-making.

Parliament as one arm of the Budgetary authority

Legislation has been important, but of course not the only role we have played. Our actions have ranged much wider. For example, in Budget terms, the figures show clearly - and let this message be understood by the Council regarding the Constitutional Treaty - that this Parliament has been prudent in terms of discretionary expenditure of the Community Budget, more prudent indeed than the other arm of the Budget authority, the Council. We have shown yet again that the endowment of

responsibility in the budget field begets parliamentary responsibility in return.

Parliament as authorising environment for executive action

Parliament has learned, from the experience of 1999, the lessons of executive accountability. The maturing role of this House and its Committee on Budgetary Control shows how we have absorbed the lessons of the previous crisis, in particular that parliamentary accountability is an indispensable requirement of executive action, and not simply an add-on extra.

Power of assent

The power of assent has been exercised responsibly, as for example the assent given by this House to the Accession treaty, while at the same time, as the discussions and votes on the Passenger Name Register have amply demonstrated, this parliament is nobody's 'rubber-stamp'.

Tribune and Forum of the People

Increasingly we as parliamentarians have fulfilled a role as a focal point for the expression of concerns held by people on the ground. The debates on the Erika and Prestige disasters led to real remedial legislation.

In summary, our Parliament has been an efficient lawmaker, a prudent budget-maker, the EU's platform for executive accountability, and an effective tribune for the peoples of Europe.

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Colleagues,

You may remember the headline goals I set myself when I spoke to you after my election: - our contribution to Enlargement; enhancing communication with European citizens and the promotion of internal reform in our House, particularly the Statute for members.

I invested myself in all three objectives and I would like now to report back to you today.

I have completed a full and busy schedule as President:

Inside the Parliament I have had -

- 90 meetings of the Conference of Presidents, covering 669 agenda items;
- 54 meetings of the Bureau of the House, treating 934 agenda items;
- 450 other meetings in this European Parliament;
- 334 meetings with visiting personalities and politicians
- 16 visits of Heads of State

I represented you in this House at 12 meetings of the European Council.

Outside Parliament, outside Brussels and Strasbourg, I have made

- 203 visits to
- 33 states, including the European Union states and candidate states of tomorrow
- in 24 states, I addressed the plenary sessions of national parliaments.

I have given over 1,000 TV and media interviews in Brussels and Strasbourg (236 TV interviews and 710 press conferences and press points), and an equal number on my 203 abroad on your behalf.

I have addressed this plenary, over and above the normal duties of the Chair, on 24 occasions, and made 113 major speeches outside this House on your behalf.

Our correspondence total runs to nearly 10,000 and another 10,000 dossiers. I thank my Cabinet for their patience and for their work.

Enlargement

My first priority - and the overriding public purpose of my presidency - was the enlargement that this

week has reached its culmination. The work of the Vice-Presidents on the Bureau, the Group leaders of the Conference of Presidents, the advance budgeting for pre-integration - all this meant that our work this week with our new parliament of a Europe of 25 has proceeded without a hitch. I am proud of that fact. This did not happen by accident, it was part of a strategic political and administrative plan and I thank Julian Priestley and his team for the work that they have put into this on such professional terms.

What did we as parliamentarians bring to enlargement? We did this of course through the actions of our Foreign Affairs Committee and our rapporteurs, through our Political Groups, and through my own visits. We brought the animation of politics, we brought the Europe of values, we brought a sense of trying to communicate the historical and exciting nature of the moment and to project that to Europe's publics.

We moved the debate on, from the sterility of the *acquis* to the vitality of the moment - encouraging necessary compromises, reaching necessary agreement on the financial perspective. At the same time the prospect of membership induced an extraordinary transformation in the new states themselves.

In Parliament, we emphasised the parliamentary dimension. In November 2002, a special staging post, when we invited all the parliamentarians to be with us before the Copenhagen summit of that year. 2003, the 'year of parliaments and parliamentarianism'. You took the unprecedented - fifth enlargement, but first time ever - to invite observer MPs from every state. That is greatly to your credit.

Let me express the hope that, in this reconciling Europe, reconciliation can be found on the island of Cyprus, and that our last divided capital can, in time, be reunited.

Enlargement brought with it a recognition of the need for a new rulebook for the Union, and the convening of a Convention on the Future of Europe to prepare it. Against expectations, the Convention formula proposed by this Parliament and our Committee on Constitutional Affairs was adopted, and, against many expectations, it proved an unqualified success.

There is still work to be done on the Constitutional Treaty. Let me reassure this House here today that, in this interim period, I will focus with determination, together with our representatives, Klaus Hänsch and Elmar Brok, and the Group leaders, to ensure that the European Parliament plays the fullest role possible in the weeks that remain. Let me express the resolve that we will work for the successful completion of the Constitutional Treaty during the mandate of the Irish Presidency.

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On economic reform, the Parliament has done what was asked of us. There is no European parliamentary delivery gap, but there is for Lisbon unfortunately a considerable gap which risks to become a credibility gap.

Communication

Communications are an indispensable and growing requirement of parliamentary democracy, particularly for a continental-scale Parliament such as ours. We have intensified our communications with other European Institutions and with national parliaments, and in doing so, we have demonstrated that the European Parliament is a determined and reliable partner for European progress. The next Parliament would do well to invest yet more resources to communications, to selling our story, a story of which we should be proud.

However, and this is my strongest belief, there is no public relations or information-campaign substitute for real politics based on conviction, passion and reason.

We parliamentarians are in direct contact with our constituents. We know their anxieties and aspirations. We must bring vision and give leadership. We are the indispensable link in the unbroken chain of democratic accountability between our constituents, our regions, our states and the European ideal.

External relations

The difficult days and weeks of 2003, when we lived through the European Union's 'Iraqi crisis', amounted to a setback for effective multilateralism through the United Nations, a setback for the European Union and a setback for Transatlantic relations. We have much to reflect on and lessons have been learned for the future. The crisis marked a departure from our European way of doing business. It showed that institutional or constitutional provisions risk becoming merely empty vessels, if they are not animated by political will and by common public purpose.

This mandate has been marked by our standing for real decency in international affairs, for European values. I have great pride that we have stood for the due process of the International Criminal Court compared to its absence in Guantanamo Bay. I have great pride in our reaffirmation of multilateralism. The visit of the United Nations Secretary General, Kofi Annan, on 29 January of this year, to accept the Sakharov Prize on behalf of the UN and the colleagues who died in Baghdad, marked a high-water point. It signalled, in a powerful and emotional way, our Parliament's commitment to the multilateral way of doing politics.

We have sought in other relations, with Russia and the US, to develop relations, with limited success, but more needs to be done. With great pride I can report to you the achievement of establishing a Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly, agreed in Naples and constituted last March in Athens. From the outset, this parliament played a central role in ensuring that that Assembly will be an effective instrument of democratic dialogue, where pluralism is visible and real.

Reform

Internally, the Bureau has accomplished important work under the title of 'raising the game' in terms of new internal structures - putting a new focus for the next mandate on assisting members, providing legal and procedural advice on a scale and with a quality not available before. These reforms have been tangible and beneficial and will add value and quality to our parliamentary work.

A major disappointment of my mandate has been the failure, finally, of the Council to find a qualified majority for the adoption of a common Statute for Members of the European Parliament. We made the compromises asked of us, even those suggested by the Council, and yet at the last moment a minority blocked our way.

An arrangement whereby Members of the same parliament have 25 different legal and financial regimes in my view is neither desirable nor tenable in the long term. Although our efforts did not come to fruition this time, it is my hope that the Statute can finally be adopted early in the next legislature. The Parliament, as you know and as you have voted, clearly needs reform.

On the issue of expenses, important progress has been made by Parliament in reforming our rules and regulations to ensure greater transparency and accountability. Specific reforms on travel allowances, on the secretarial allowance and other allowances have been decided by the Bureau and the Quaestors in the course of recent years and have continued under my presidency.

At the outset I sought a global reform based on two main elements: the fair treatment of Members of this House on the basis of equality, and transparency on allowances to be based on costs incurred. The failure by the Council is not our failure. It is regrettable, however, that currently there is a campaign, using questionable and deplorable methods, the main purpose of which appears to have been to seek to discredit this institution, and which seeks to call into question the honour of Members of this House. This has been done to wreak maximum damage on zero evidence against individuals, their careers and their families. It is a disgrace.

European elections

We now have an experience, more or less, of fifty years of European policy-making. In that time, policy in very many aspects of day-to-day life in our Members States through the Union has been Europeanised. European public policy and regulation is deeply embedded in the national political decision-making environment. For all that we have Europeanised policy, we are still searching for a way to 'Europeanise' politics.

I have therefore tried, particularly in this last year, to deliver this message: - there is such a wealth of European issues on which we have, in our many parties, represented here, that we do not lack a

European platform to fight a genuinely proper European election. That is my invitation to you as you leave here for that election: stick with Europe and try to make sure that it is not only about mid-term tests and national or local beauty contests. Try to make sure it is about real, genuine shaping of the future of Europe.

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As regards the conduct of my Presidency, what success I have had in my short time, I owe to all of you.

I wish to thank you all, but perhaps, most especially, my colleagues the Group leaders, who have slogged in the political 'trenches' with me on so many occasions.

I realise, more fully than I did at the outset, that you cannot please all the people all the time. I have always sought to serve this House without fear or favour, without malice or prejudice, to serve in the interest of the whole House and not any of its component parts.

I very much believe that I have worked according to the principles of a fellow Irishman, Edmund Burke, who said to his constituents and correspondents in 1774: "Your representative owes you, not his industry only, but his judgement; and he betrays, instead of serving you, if he sacrifices [his judgement] to your opinion".

I stand by the judgements I made from this chair and I am prepared to be judged on them.

I thank my Cabinet. I thank the European Parliament and again I do not have enough words of thanks or praise for Julian Priestley, Harold Römer and wonderful leadership, professional leadership, of a quality, transnational, world-class public service.

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Allow me to finish on a much more personal note. Serving as a Member of the European Parliament for fifteen years, as a Vice-President and President of the ELDR for more than seven years, as President of this House for almost two and a half years, has been the great experience of my working life.

With what I can assure you were very mixed emotions, I have informed my supporters in my Munster constituency, this morning, that I do not intend to stand in the forthcoming election. I want to thank the people of Munster for their consistent support over the years and I thank my own supporters and my family, some of whom are here today.

Although no business in politics is ever finished, I have made a contribution and I know others are there to take up the challenge.

Europe has been the cause of my political life. I will continue serving the cause in any way that I can.

I leave this House, but my friendships, insights and abiding respect for what this Parliament does, never will leave me.

Above all, my thanks for your support and friendship.