

Brussels, 18 June 2004

Address by Pat COX to the European Council

EUROPEAN ELECTIONS

This is the first meeting of the European Council after the European elections of 10-13 June, the largest exercise in trans-national and continent-wide democracy ever undertaken in Europe. As President of the Parliament, I am bound to tell you that I believe the elections, whatever the specifics of individual results, were disappointing on two counts.

The relatively low turnout - at exactly the same level as in 1999 in the Europe of 15 (49%), but with chronic abstentionism in most of the new Member States (26%)- underlines what many of us have feared : a difficulty for many people to relate to the EU and to appreciate the real benefits which it brings to their daily lives.

Secondly, the growth in support for Eurosceptic - and in some cases Europhobic - forces indicates a negative spiral from indifference to hostility by a small but significant minority towards the whole European project.

The elections were a missed opportunity. Too many political parties concentrated on national or personality issues. Europe was, to a large extent, the missing ingredient in the European elections.

Political leadership now requires an active engagement in the battle for the hearts and minds of European citizens. If not, the negative trends risk to grow, and we risk not make progress with the European project. The results were disappointing for the European Parliament, but they must be a warning to all the Institutions. Those governments who, hopefully, after this weekend will lead campaign for ratification where they have a referendum, have been given a clear wake-up call.

The responsibility of European statesmen is now to take a stand for Europe. We must defend our European vision in a language people can understand. The Europe that we defend must be one which is relevant. Europe is not just the most successful exercise in reconciliation the world has ever known, it is also about jobs, security, improved infrastructures and high environmental standards. It is about delivering economic growth, prosperity and security for our peoples. If we relate our political ambitions for Europe with delivery for our citizens, if we accenuate the Europe dimension of the issues we know they are concerned about - unemployment, terrorism, crime, the future of pension funds, economic growth and, in the new Member States especially, agriculture reform - we can reverse the tide and we may rekindle the enthusiasm for Europe which was so absent last weekend. It requires focusing on essentials and delivery.

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AREA OF FREEDOM, SECURITY AND JUSTICE; THE FIGHT AGAINST TERRORISM

In terms of delivery of outcomes that people want, and where Europe has clear added-value, preventing terrorism and building a common area of freedom, security and justice rank highly. I therefore today reiterate the call Parliament already made on 11 March, for a "Tampere II" European Council to carry out a policy review of the experience of the last five years - shortcomings as well as achievements - and build on the impetus from today's meeting to draw up a new agenda and a medium-term programme, with a sense of political urgency and strategy. My specific request to you in this regard is for the sectoral Council to make legislation in this citizen-sensitive area, not behind the backs of parliaments, national and European, but, openly, with real consultation and dialogue with parliamentarians.]

ENLARGEMENT

In the draft conclusions, the Presidency rightly stresses that Bulgaria and Romania are part of the

irreversible process of the fifth enlargement of the European Union. On behalf of the European Parliament, I welcome the very substantial progress that both States have made in the accession negotiations - particularly the closing, this week, of all the chapters for negotiation with Bulgaria. Parliament has expressed very specific concerns about the reform process in Romania. If Romania does not complete the reforms, there is a risk that it will differentiate itself in the enlargement process.

Parliament very much welcomes the idea of opening the negotiations with Croatia early in 2005. As you point out, Mr President, in your conclusions, the moving to the next stage for Croatia's accession should act as a spur for the new European perspective for the Western Balkans region.

On Turkey, it will be for the European Council in December to determine whether a date should be set for an opening of the negotiations. The European Council will rightly be guided by the Commission's report, expected this autumn. I hope, however, you will find it appropriate to place on record our recognition of the continued efforts for reform in Turkey and on the very positive role played by Turkey in the negotiations and aftermath of the Annan Peace Plan. We in Parliament are particularly pleased about the release of Leyla Zana, our Sakharov Prize-winner, and colleagues.

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Today, I speak to you for the thirteenth and last time since the beginning of my mandate as President of the European Parliament. In that time, the European Parliament has, in my view, shown itself to be a mature and reliable legislative partner for Council and Commission, and has emphasised at all times the primacy of politics.

Over the past five years the European Parliament has fulfilled its institutional duty, in the efficient and responsible exercise of its legislative powers. In the last five years, 403 codecision procedures and 86 sets of conciliation negotiations have been successfully concluded - 250% more than in the preceding five-year period. Only two proposals were not adopted - the Takeover directive in 2001 and the Port services directive in 2003.

Parliament has manifestly not sought to push its parliamentary prerogatives to the limit. Almost one third of the procedures were fast-tracked and adopted in first reading, while half of the total were agreed and concluded at second reading, in 'pre-conciliation' processes, leaving only one fifth for conciliation proper. In plainer language, Parliament and Council used the legislative instrument politically, with strong common sense and with a strategic view.

When I addressed you for the first time, in Barcelona, I spoke about closing the delivery gap for citizens. Nowhere is this need more apparent than on the Lisbon agenda, where a gap in delivery is leading us towards a gap in credibility for the whole exercise. I am happy to report that, throughout the mandate, the Parliament delivered 100% and proved its readiness to deliver on legislative responsibility and to work quickly. Thanks to your cooperation and that of the Irish Presidency, the Parliament was able to conclude its work in an unparalleled 'exit velocity'. We must not let this slip.

You will recall that, also in Barcelona, I proposed, and we have since reached, an Inter-Institutional Agreement on Better Law-making - agreeing a set of guidelines to achieve more efficiency and transparency in the way we make European laws together. The quality of our legislation is fundamental. We should now apply the Agreement that we made.

Firstly, I believe that we should take the consolidation and simplification of legislation from the sidings where they have been parked for too long, and provide the will and the resources to overhaul the unwieldy corpus of legislation. We should draw up be a joint and prioritised programme of all three Institutions, with a precise timetable. Our stated aims of simplicity, clarity and certainty of legislation need to be reflected in our output.

Secondly, we should take a serious look at the alternatives to regulation provided for in the agreement. Of course we have to regulate at the European level, but we should do it better and we should do it less. It is a subsidiarity issue on which our institutions can agree, but it also affects competitiveness. We certainly do not want to slow growth through unnecessary rules and regulations when feasible and flexible alternatives are available.

Thirdly, we need to agree as soon as possible on common criteria and a common methodology for

impact assessment in the legislative procedure, to better measure the budgetary and economic effects of what we do on employment, competitiveness and the environment. Again, if we do not commit will and resources to the task, the quality of legislative output will suffer and ultimately, too, it will disadvantage the European citizen .

We need, in more areas of public policy, to move from laudable statements of best intention to practical results. All too often there are gaps between our policy aspirations and our capacity and political willingness to act. Concentrating on essentials and focussing on delivery are core tasks for the next European Commission and European Parliament. These will be greatly facilitated by a renewed emphasis on communicating Europe's public purpose in plain language.

Above all, in communicating to the wider public and in our campaigning we need to talk about a Europe that has real meaning. We need to talk about the Europe of values and not to confine ourselves solely to the sterility of a Europe of markets or the intricacies of the Common Agricultural Policy, indispensable as these may be. We must talk to people about our belief in pluralist democracy and its centrality to the European project.

We have created a new European way. We must not be shy about its fullest expression on a multilateral global stage.

This values based agenda obliges us to emphasise the discovery and building of new European harmonies together. This is the new horizon. This is the step beyond the Europe of harmonisation. Fortified by strong values, focussed on clear interests, enabled by greater capacity to act, enhanced by common political will and vision, I am confident that the new Europe can meet the global challenges of the new century.

This European Council has one headline task: to agree a good constitution which will at last put an end to our prolonged period of institutional introspection, but which must be accompanied by a commitment to garner the public support necessary for ratification, and the renewal of the EU Institutions, particularly the Commission after the elections. It is our earnest hope that you will achieve this goal in this meeting. This will be the strongest signal to the Eurosceptics and to those who doubt our firmness of purpose: a Europe back in bu