

PRESIDENT COX's ADDRESS TO THE EUROPEAN COUNCIL

FRIDAY. 18 JUNE 2004

BRUSSELS

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 a sombre reality check on two counts.

The relatively high abstention rate -stability, but at a low level in the Europe of 15, combined with chronic abstentionism in most of the new Member States -underlines what many of us have feared: a disconnection from Europe and its Institutions on the part of many people.

Secondly, the growth in support for Eurosceptic -and in some cases Europhobic -forces indicates a negative spiral from indifference to hostility 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, Banquo's ghost at 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 will grow, and we will 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 and to those governments who, we hope, will be in a position after this weekend where they will have to win public support for the constitutional treaty.

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, we will reverse the tide and we may rekindle the enthusiasm for Europe which was so absent last weekend.

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.

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 10 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.

