



Speech

by the President of the European Parliament

Prof. Hans-Gert Pöttering

at the

Meeting of the European Council

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Mr President of the European Council, Janez Janša,
Heads of State and Government,
Mr President of the Commission, José Manuel Durão Barroso,
Mr High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy, Javier Solana,
Ministers,

Since the Summit held roughly one year ago, on 8 and 9 March 2007, the European Union has taken significant steps forward.

Not only has the European Union established a new and effective basis for its future work, in the form of the Treaty of Lisbon, but the reforms initiated as part of the Lisbon process are gradually taking shape as well. The groundwork has been laid for the practical implementation of the comprehensive strategy on combating climate change and establishing energy security. Great hopes are being placed in the European Union's efforts to secure peace and democracy throughout the world.

Lisbon Strategy

Mr President of the European Council,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The goals of the Lisbon Strategy are the right ones. No one can argue that the structural reforms carried out in recent years have not borne fruit: growth in the European Union has increased, new jobs are being created.

However, we still have a long way to go to meet all the goals we have set for ourselves.

The reforms which have been agreed on have not been implemented with the same degree of resolve throughout the European Union.

We must make further efforts to complete the internal market, to strengthen competition in important sectors of the economy, such as energy and telecommunications, and to establish a suitable framework for these sectors.

Globalisation offers the European Union great opportunities. The key to European competitiveness lies in promoting knowledge and innovation. For that reason, we should establish a 'fifth freedom' in the internal market and eliminate existing obstacles to the mobility of knowledge and cross-border research.

World-class education, training and lifelong learning are vital if we are to succeed in combining flexibility and security on the labour market.

Heads of State and Government,

Small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in particular form the backbone of the European economy. For that reason, the European Parliament strongly supports the Small Business Act put forward by the Commission as a means of creating new opportunities for

SMEs and an integrated policy approach designed to release the full growth potential of SMEs in every phase of their existence.

Better lawmaking

Mr President of the European Council,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Better lawmaking is fundamental to the success of the Lisbon Strategy.

What is needed above all is improved legislative planning between the Commission, Parliament and the Council. Although provision was made for just such improvements when our Interinstitutional Agreement on Better Lawmaking was concluded more than five years ago, in practice nothing has been done.

The European Parliament also strongly supports all efforts to simplify existing legal provisions. New legislation in a given area must, as a rule, consolidate existing laws in that area, so that ordinary members of the public, undertakings and professional groups in particular can understand European law.

The Council and the European Parliament have a shared responsibility to move forward quickly the process of adopting the 225 existing legal provisions which have still to be brought into line with the new comitology procedure. The European Parliament intends to meet its responsibility by means of a collective procedure in its Committee on Legal Affairs. We are looking to the Council to make similar efforts.

Climate change and energy

Mr President of the European Council,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Combating climate change is becoming a race against the clock.

Following the submission by the Commission on 23 January 2008 of the so-called 'energy package', we now have a sound basis for achieving the goals set by you, the Heads of State and Government of the European Union, one year ago, and a credible policy framework which will strengthen our position in negotiations with our partners throughout the world.

In the European Parliament's view, it is essential that we should identify an approach which guarantees us energy security, strengthens the competitiveness of our economy, and, at the same time, helps us to achieve our climate goals.

The decisive factor is a balanced energy mix: we will improve our chances of dealing with climate change if we spread our investment appropriately across all sectors and, for example, promote technologies such as carbon capture and storage.

The European Parliament is now beginning its consideration of the Commission proposal on the revision of the emissions trading system (ETS). It is fundamental to the effectiveness of a revised ETS that it should be based in part on the auctioning of certificates.

A report on the inclusion of air transport in the ETS has already been adopted in Parliament. Now the focus must switch to road transport, another area we must tackle if we are to achieve our climate objectives.

The European Parliament is well aware of the sensitivity of this whole question. At the same time, we are convinced that action is needed, a belief reflected in the fact that we are currently considering the report on the issue of CO₂ emissions from cars.

In our work on this matter we will endeavour to achieve a compromise which is both fair and sustainable in global terms. We are hoping for your support so that a result can be achieved at the latest before the end of the French Council Presidency.

At my instigation, the political group chairmen have decided that consideration of the energy package in committee should be completed before the end of this year, so as to leave sufficient time for the vital discussions within the groups, between the groups and with the Council. In that way we can achieve a result before the European elections in June 2009 and, therefore, before the United Nations conference to be held in Copenhagen in December 2009.

Mr President of the European Council,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Research and innovation in the areas of environmentally-friendly technologies and renewable energies will also offer the European Union the chance to develop its global competitiveness.

Our Committee on Industry is working on a report which will examine ways in which we can achieve our objective of increasing the proportion of energy needs met from renewable sources to 20% by 2020.

Each Member State must now take a look at the progress it has made towards achieving the Kyoto objectives and what further efforts will be needed in the coming months and years. In order for the European Union to be on track to meet its Kyoto commitments, every Member State must take its obligations seriously and follow-up on them, or else some countries will fail to reach their targets.

Many countries are looking to the European Union to take a global leading role in the run-up to the Copenhagen conference.

Without a binding international agreement concluded under the auspices of the United Nations we will not achieve our objective of halving greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. However, achieving that objective is essential if we are to have a realistic chance of warding off the most serious consequences of climate change!

At all events, such an agreement must be based on the principle of shared, but differing, responsibilities. Although over the next 10 years the developed nations will have to bear the brunt of the global efforts to reduce pollutant emissions, the involvement of the industrialising and developing countries is essential, since even before 2020 these countries' emissions will exceed those of the industrialised nations.

However, any comprehensive global strategy to combat climate change must also encompass efforts to curb deforestation throughout the world, since today the felling of vast areas of forest accounts for some 20% of global greenhouse gas emissions.

Let me also say a word about the report on climate change and international security submitted today by the High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy, Javier Solana:

This report makes clear that the desertification caused by climate change would, for example, severely undermine political stability in North Africa in particular, which would in turn have a direct impact on the number of immigrants from North African countries seeking to enter the European Union.

The European Union should support forward-looking projects such as DESERTEC, which was presented to the European Parliament by Prince Hassan bin Talal of Jordan: the aim of this project is to promote the use, on the basis of the latest technology, of solar energy in parts of the world, such as the Middle East, which enjoy long periods of sunshine. Countries including Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Libya, Morocco and Tunisia have already stated their interest in cooperating in such a project.

Middle East initiative

Mr President of the European Council,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The success of the European unification process, in the course of which former enemies have reached out to one another and learnt to live and work together, is also of great significance for the Middle East. The work of overcoming historical differences by creating closer economic ties and fostering joint development can be an inspiration for this region as well.

The only answer is the continuation at all costs and a drastic speeding-up of the peace talks between the Israelis and the Palestinians. The peace process initiated at the meeting in Annapolis must not be allowed to subside into violence and terror.

Only last Monday, at its plenary sitting, the European Parliament condemned in the strongest possible terms the appalling murderous attack on a school in Jerusalem and the latest acts of violence perpetrated by Hamas and other Palestinian extremists. The bombardment of Israel from the Gaza Strip must stop! This kind of resistance is terrorism and cannot, therefore, be the subject of negotiations!

At the same time, ignoring the population of Gaza and supplying them with only the barest humanitarian necessities cannot be part of a workable, long-term solution. As long ago as in February 2007, the European Parliament adopted a resolution on the disastrous situation in the Gaza Strip which had become, in every respect, the poorhouse of the Middle East.

The European Union must of course help to alleviate the hardship which the people of Gaza are suffering. Above all, however, it must make a stronger, long-term political commitment to the region in order to give its financial generosity meaning and purpose.

As one arm of the budgetary authority, the European Parliament will take steps to ensure that the money we have committed to the region does not simply go to waste. All the parties must understand that the European Union will not stand idly by and watch the results of its financial solidarity destroyed by military action.

The European Parliament has committed itself to a role as an honest broker in the search for a solution to the Middle East conflict. Our new Working Party on the Middle East intends to contribute to that process. In two weeks' time we will discuss, with the Follow-up Group set up at the Paris International Donors' Conference, the French Foreign Minister, Bernard Kouchner, the Norwegian Foreign Minister, Jonas Gahr Støre, EU Commissioner Benita Ferrero-Waldner and the Special Representative of the Quartet, Tony Blair, just how effectively our aid is getting through to the people in need on the spot.

The Annapolis process must not simply provide cover for a continuation of the settlement policy, one which leaves the Palestinian territories parcelled up into countless sealed security areas which seriously restrict the local inhabitants' freedom of movement.

The guiding principles should be respect for human life, the achievement of security through reconciliation, and compliance with international law.

The Mediterranean

Mr President of the European Council,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Please let me also make a few remarks about the proposal to establish a Mediterranean Union.

A stronger commitment to the countries on our southern border chimes in with our efforts to foster dialogue between cultures and can help to strengthen political, democratic, economic and social development in a vitally important region.

At all events, however, it is important that a Mediterranean Union, whatever form it takes, should strengthen and further the Barcelona Process. There can be no question of establishing a Union which is in competition with the Barcelona Process or which even has its own institutional structure.

The European Parliament was amazed that up to now the parliamentary component of the Barcelona Process, the Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly, has been completely ignored in the proposals. Efficiency, the rule of law and sustainable development cannot be achieved without democracy, without parliamentarians.

In contrast to all the other parliaments involved, the European Parliament is a standing member of the Bureau of the Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly.

Discussing the fundamental aspects of this vital issue today without involving the European Parliament would be to disregard the importance of democracy and parliamentarianism for the development of the region.

The European Parliament is equally astonished that an decision appears to have been taken to convene a summit in Paris on 13 July, without Parliament being mentioned as a participant. I hope that this was a mere technical oversight!

All the Member States and all the institutions of the European Union must be involved in this process, naturally this includes the European Parliament.

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Mr President of the European Council,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The new Reform Treaty, signed by all 27 Heads of State and Government on 13 December 2007 in Lisbon, will enable the European Union to meet the expectations of its citizens, to take practical measures to help them and to offer them a better future, on the basis of our shared values.

Thus far, five Member States, Hungary, Slovenia, Malta, France and Romania, have already ratified the Reform Treaty. The European Parliament gave its approval on 20 February 2008.

So that the necessary reforms can be implemented quickly, the new Reform Treaty should be ratified by all the Member States by 1 January 2009.

I urge you all not to relax your efforts to achieve this vital objective.

Thank you for your attention.