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Five years on: what our objectives were and what we have achieved

*Check Against Delivery
Seul le texte prononcé fait foi
Es gilt das gesprochene Wort*

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Honourable Members,

We will shortly be reaching the end of the road we have travelled together during the last five years. Five years of far-reaching political and institutional changes and momentous events across Europe and around the world.

Let me begin by reminding you where the European Union stood in 1999.

On the institutional front, many wanted reform to be confined to the "leftovers" from Amsterdam. They were for an institutional agenda of limited scope that could clearly not address the Union's new challenges.

In an economic climate that was far from bright, the prospect of actually putting the euro into circulation aroused very real misgivings, concern and scepticism.

Equally real were the misgivings about enlargement and the number of countries to bring in. Many wanted to limit enlargement to no more than six. No clear timetable or definite rules had been laid down, and the press and public opinion were full of apprehension.

More alarming still were the risks the situation in the Balkans held for the whole continent, given the lack of a clear, convincing EU strategy in that region.

Lastly, shaken by the events of 1998 and 1999, the Commission was in crisis.

Its credibility and authority were at rock bottom, which was why its image needed restoring by the first serious, root-and-branch overhaul of its administration.

Honourable Members,

Faced with the challenge, we took up the gauntlet.

Together with you, we put forward an ambitious agenda for Europe.

And the driving force behind that agenda, what gave our work thrust and direction was enlargement.

Enlargement

Europe's unification -- involving enlargement to embrace ten new members, a clear timetable for the other candidate countries and real prospects of full membership for all countries in the Balkans -- is the greatest contribution the Union could make to stabilising and developing the whole continent -- politically, economically and culturally.

To meet the challenge of enlargement, we had to strike the right balance. Neither too slow, because we risked losing momentum in the drive to unification that was so strong in the candidate countries. Nor too fast, because we needed to keep the people with us across the Union.

So we gave our backing and support to the reform processes in central and eastern Europe. And we took on board the concerns Europeans were voicing about the costs of enlargement, population flows, the risks to the environment, nuclear safety and corruption.

Public support in the new Member States was stronger than any had forecast, as the referendum results showed.

We have demonstrated that negotiations and dialogue -- however arduous, complex and laborious -- are the only democratic way of exporting democracy and stability.

At the same time, setting our sights for enlargement high to meet half the continent's aspirations for freedom, security and democracy meant we had to show equal boldness in tackling the overhaul of our institutional workings.

Reforming the institutions

And so -- first alone but bolstered by ever-growing support -- we set our sights on a reform that could deliver in terms of making a Union of 25 plus Member States work.

Over these five years, we have lived through constant negotiations on institutional issues: the application of the Amsterdam Treaty, the Nice Conference, the Irish people's initial rejection of the new Treaty, the European Convention and the Constitutional Treaty.

Thanks to the combined efforts of Parliament and the Commission, the Convention approach finally won through, bringing more democracy and more transparency to the Union.

Yet there was deep scepticism on this proposal, which I defended as early as that night in Nice.

Never before have two visions of Europe clashed so forcefully. The vision of a stronger, political Europe that can cope with the global challenges before us. And another of a weak Europe, a mere area of prosperity, stability and regulation -- not a genuine political actor.

There have also been big changes in attitudes and policies on Europe among Member State governments since the 1980s and 1990s.

Over these years, alliances between governments have very often been pragmatic, one-off alignments on particular issues, linked to specific proposals or the domestic or international political situation at the time, rather than groupings of countries working consistently for closer integration.

For our part, we have always striven to make our Union stronger, more democratic, more effective and more efficient.

We have presented highly innovative proposals -- for an EU Foreign Minister, for instance -- at the European Convention and the Intergovernmental Conference that followed.

Our task is now at an end.

In a few days the Constitutional Treaty will be signed in Rome. There is no doubt this is a huge event for Europe, bringing more democracy, simplification and transparency -- even if it falls short in some aspects. Such as the areas where unanimity remains the rule.

Your contribution, Honourable Members, and ours have been crucial.

Honourable Members,

I have spoken about enlargement, about institutional reforms, about our policy for growth and peace. But none of that could have been achieved if we had not at the same time put our house in order too, if we had not restored the European Commission's strength and prestige and given this institution of ours every reason to feel proud of itself again.

Reforming the Commission

Political change has to go hand in hand with in-depth reform of the administrative structures and workings.

In various sectors, such as decentralised financial control and external aid programmes, the positive effects are already starting to be felt.

But above all the reform sent strong political messages and sought to ensure the Commission regained its legitimacy, independence and effectiveness.

Think of the arrangements for the rotation of directors-general, after long years when time-honoured practice assigned certain departments to officials of a particular nationality. Or the rules on the nationality of Commissioners and members of their offices. Or the decision to locate Commissioners close to their departments and staff.

But there is one feature of my Commission I am especially proud of: its collegiate spirit.

I was lucky I had a highly professional team to rely on, a team that has pulled together and worked in harmony.

Today, some members of this Commission already hold top posts in national governments and parliaments.

These are clear, tangible signs that the institution I have had the honour to lead for over five years is back in shape and doing well.

And I am sure the Commission will grow even stronger under my successor President Barroso, and I wish him every success.

Europe in the world

Honourable Members,

The unification of our continent is a great opportunity to extend the Union's stability and prosperity to the whole region.

Our aim was not to shift the divide -- the Wall -- a few hundred kilometres further east or south.

For years there has been talk of where Europe stops, but no clear, practical proposal was ever tabled.

Now we have put forward a new vision of the Union's borders -- through the European Neighbourhood Policy, which seeks to establish a genuine special relationship with the whole ring of countries stretching from Russia to Morocco. The need we have stressed so strongly for a new relationship between the Union and its neighbours is recognised in the European Constitution.

At a time when so many speak of a "clash of civilisations" -- though I for one am convinced it is more of a "clash of ignorance" -- we have given strong impetus to fostering intercultural dialogue and mutual knowledge, in particular in the Euro-Mediterranean area.

On the subject of the Mediterranean, remember how fiercely I was criticised when I mooted opening up to Colonel Gaddafi's Libya. Just two days have passed since the sanctions against Libya were lifted, but that period seems so remote. Yet thanks to these four years of discreet, persevering, intense work, we have managed to bring about major changes in that country and this has paved the way for Libya's return to the international fold.

We have also come out clearly on the side of multilateralism.

We kept our sights on stepping up world and regional governance, building a closer partnership with the United Nations and narrowing the gap between North and South.

We have not just talked about multilateralism, we have put it into practice in our efforts to achieve our goals and realise our political choices.

Just a few examples:

- We have allied the objective of liberalising trade with the need to pay greater heed to the legitimate demands of civil society and the developing countries.
- We have played a key role in opening up the World Trade Organisation to new members with a view to more effective world governance.
- We have geared our development cooperation and humanitarian assistance programmes above all to reducing poverty.
- We have strengthened links with other regions of the world -- such as Latin America and Asia -- and we have assisted in new regional integration processes -- such as the establishment of the African Union;
- We have made a substantial contribution to strengthening the transatlantic relationship.

After the war in Iraq, there were many who claimed the divide between the two continents was unbridgeable.

I never believed that because I have always been convinced that in those areas where the Union **can** take action, where it is not hamstrung by national vetoes, major results can be achieved if we work with Washington.

We have worked hard, and effectively, with our American partners on practical issues of great importance -- in the security field and the fight against terrorism, and in certain regions of the world, such as the Balkans.

I have said, and I will say it again: in this complex and often tragic world of ours, Europe has been capable -- indeed has been the only player capable -- of exporting democracy.

The euro and the new economic and social agenda

In the economic field, the euro has clearly been the major event of our term of office.

From the start the euro was intended to underpin the new Europe.

That is why we saw the euro as a great political project from the outset -- not just an economic one. A project for political leaders, not just for central bankers. A project that calls for vision, authority and coordination.

Throughout our term of office, we have stressed the need to step up economic governance because the lack of a stronger EU dimension in this area is still costing Europe too much.

That is why we have made various proposals to adapt the Stability and Growth Pact to the new needs and the new economic facts of today's Europe. And why we opened a debate that many felt was necessary but did not have the courage to say so.

After being attacked so harshly for the stand I took, I must say I smiled when a well-known French daily said the Commission's recent proposals made the Pact "more intelligent".

We have worked assiduously to help make the Lisbon Strategy succeed. We have put forward the proposals needed to meet the objective: turning the Union into the world's most competitive and dynamic economy by 2010.

There is, for example, the European Research Area, the focus on innovation in enterprises and the information society, the new education and training programmes for lifelong learning, the opening-up of our universities to the world.

The reform of competition policy is a major contribution of ours to enhancing competitiveness.

In the social field, the Social Policy Agenda has provided a reference framework for a raft of measures to encourage employment, social protection, health and safety at work, equal opportunities and social inclusion.

But many objectives have not been met in this area.

Above all, we have not managed to meet targets where the Community method could not be applied and decisions had to be unanimous.

The difficulties we came up against with the Community Patent, which was repeatedly blocked on linguistic grounds, speak volumes.

If the Member States do not behave differently, the Lisbon strategy is at risk.

A better quality of life for all

Much progress has been made and many proposals put forward to establish the area of freedom, security and justice, to protect the environment, in the energy and transport sectors, and to boost health and consumer protection.

There is the implementation of the Tampere agenda and work to respond to the new challenges of international terrorism in the wake of September the 11th.

There is the Gothenburg Sustainable Development Strategy, the Johannesburg Summit and EU action in support of the Kyoto Protocol. In these areas, we have taken world leadership and demonstrated practically how the Union brings added value in a multilateral context.

We have combined strategic choices of crucial importance for the future of the Union -- such as the Galileo European satellite navigation system and the global strategy for a "Single European Sky" -- with prompt action in emergencies, such as the sinking of the *Erika* in 1999 and the *Prestige* in 2002.

When we took office, another sector where consumer trust just had to be restored in the aftermath of the "Mad Cow" crisis was food.

We responded with the integrated "farm-to-fork" strategy, together with instruments such as the European Food Safety Agency.

The common agricultural policy has been reformed to meet the new challenges, both domestic and global, to apply a more sustainable strategy that pays greater heed to rural development.

Preparing for the future: the new Financial Perspective 2007-13

Lastly, we have put forward our political project, our vision for the post-enlargement Union, with our proposals for a new Financial Perspective.

A new political project to give real substance to the concept of European citizenship across a Union on a continental scale. A Union that has to take on new responsibilities towards its citizens and play its part internationally.

Because that was our goal too: to make Europe a leading player on the world stage, so Europe can make its voice heard and take action in support of peace, security and balanced development throughout the world.

Honourable Members,

I will wind up with another point that I feel should be put on the credit side of the record of this Commission and Parliament -- the framework agreement between our two institutions that has applied for the duration of the term.

Our agreement has strengthened the initiatives we agreed on -- such as our practice of officially informing Parliament as a priority of the Commission's major initiatives.

These agreements have strengthened the role of politics between the Commission and the basis of its democratic legitimacy, which largely resides in Parliament. This undeniably takes democracy forward, which is very important to me.

Lastly, I want to emphasise the close understanding between Parliament and the Commission in the legislative field. There have been conflicts in just a handful of cases. That is cause for rejoicing. It is one of the great merits of the co-decision procedure and it is to the credit of the three institutions concerned that they have used it properly.

I am very pleased at the constructive relations that have developed between the Commission and Parliament. I am hopeful -- and confident -- that they will continue.

If this is the case, it will mean the outgoing Commission has not only built up the relationship with Parliament but has also laid the foundations for further strengthening of democracy in Europe.

I am firmly convinced of the need for even more "Europe" and even more "Union" in Europe.

The European political project needs our full commitment and it needs all our strength, conviction and courage to make it succeed.

Over the last five years, that is what we have done.

Thank you.