

José Manuel Barroso

President-Designate of the European Commission

Building a Partnership for Europe: Prosperity, Solidarity, Security

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

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Mr President, Honourable Members of the European Parliament

I feel privileged to stand here before the first democratically elected Parliament of an enlarged European Union. You are the representatives of 450 million Europeans. Your election brings an end to half a century of division.

This assembly symbolises the renaissance of freedom and democracy – spreading to every corner of our continent from the Mediterranean to the Baltic Sea.

We are united in our rich diversity - national, regional, cultural, linguistic and political.

Never before has there been an experiment like ours: to forge, democratically, a union out of the diverse nations of Europe.

Over fifty years we have designed a new and unique way of working together. We have pooled limited parts of our sovereignty to face common challenges. We have shown that our Nation-states are stronger when we act together in areas where Europe delivers the best results.

Let us never underestimate this great European achievement. We must be optimistic, visionary and courageous for the future.

Our vision of integration provides an example for other regions. As Jean Monnet has said:, « *la Communauté n'est qu'une étape vers les formes d'organisation du monde de demain.* »

The 1st of May was an event of historic proportions with the accession of ten new Member States. But now we have to work to ensure that the success of a reunited Europe, in order to guarantee prosperity, solidarity and security of our continent.

Mr President, Honourable Members,

I come from a small country which has known the transition from dictatorship to democracy; a country on the edge of our continent, but with its heart in the centre.

I stand for the basic values that underpin our Union:

Freedom

Respect for Human Rights

The Rule of Law

Equality of Opportunity

Solidarity and social justice

I have seen the benefits of the Union in my country. But I have also seen that the accession of Portugal has enriched our Union.

My values and my experiences will allow me, if I receive your endorsement, to build bridges across the Union. This is why I believe I received the unanimous support of the European Council.

I am conscious that one of the main tasks of the President of the Commission is to manage the dynamic consensus that Europe needs. Our Union must more than ever have a strong and independent Commission. Only then can we create results that translate into concrete benefits for our citizens.

Mobilising Europe: Meeting expectations

Mr President, Honourable Members,

It is these beliefs, these convictions that lead me today to launch a challenge.

I would like us – together with Member States, the Social Partners, businesses and citizens across the Union - to build a **Partnership for Europe**. A **Partnership for prosperity, solidarity and security** in our Continent.

We must build our Europe together. Words must be transformed into actions. We must argue every day the case for our Union. And the best argument is our results.

We must show to our citizens that Europe can deliver what it promises. Effectively, efficiently, transparently. But we must also be aware of the level at which things are best done - European, national or regional, in full respect of the principle of subsidiarity. What we do we must do well. This means we must concentrate on questions that are most important to our citizens.

Mr President, Honourable Members,

In building our Partnership for Europe, we must recognise that the biggest challenge we face is not the Euro-scepticism of the few, but the Euro-apathy of the many.

We must listen to those that voted in last month's European elections.

But we must also hear the silence of those, who for whatever reason, chose not to vote.

Our goals are prosperity, solidarity and security. And for that we must show concrete results.

- The euro – delivering monetary stability and investment.
- A single market - fuelling growth, competition and jobs.
- A unique social model - protecting the weakest in our society and helping people adapt to changing circumstances.
- Quality public services – offering affordable access for all.
- A sustainable approach to the environment.
- And – perhaps of greatest importance - peace and stability in our region and beyond.

Last month, we put the final touches to our Constitutional Treaty. This is also Europe in practice – delivering a vision and adapting to change.

That Treaty consolidates and simplifies the Union. It strengthens our democratic base, by extending this Parliament's powers, and by finding innovative ways to give a greater voice to national Parliaments and to Europe's citizens.

It will make us more effective in tackling areas where common action is needed.

The challenge now is ratification.

It will be a crucial moment and lead to a broad discussion on the kind of Europe that people want.

The new Commission, this Parliament and the Member States must be ready with answers. We must make the case for Europe and this will be a huge communication challenge. To win that debate we should not have a technocratic approach. We need instead political leadership and courage.

Mr President, Honourable Members

The partnership I propose must, therefore, respond to the concerns of our citizens.

Today is not the moment to unveil a detailed programme. If I receive your backing, I first want to discuss policy ideas within the College and then with you and with the Council.

The new Constitutional Treaty already foresees that we must set our objectives together. If confirmed, I would bring before you and the Council early in 2005 proposals for the overall strategic priorities to guide our work for the years ahead.

Such an agenda – an agenda of prosperity, solidarity and security - must deal with the most pressing challenges for our peoples today:

- **Europe and the world are changing and we need to change too.** Reforms are needed. If we want Europe to work, we must give people jobs. But employment will only be created if we get the right environment for enterprise. And, at the same time, we must invest more in skills and training.
- We must put growth centre stage. Our social ambition must be fuelled by economic success. Wealth creation is the key to our model of social solidarity and sustainability. This is at the core of the Lisbon agenda. Entrepreneurship and innovation must be harnessed to deliver a better quality of life.
- We must never forget the economy is there to serve the people, and not the other way round. This is the spirit in which we must also interpret the stability and growth pact. This means ensuring the flexibility needed to keep us on the path to growth and employment, whilst preserving monetary stability.
- We must meet the **challenges of globalisation**. This means facing up to competition in open, global markets. It also means spreading prosperity and opportunity around the world.
- The Union needs to **match its political ambition with its financial resources**. You cannot have more Europe for less money, especially if we want a similar level of solidarity towards the new Member States as we have shown to the less developed regions in the past. However we must also be able to show to taxpayers that the money they entrust to Europe is prudently spent.
- We need to ensure that we foster stability and invest for growth. This means sound public finances but also twenty-first century networks and strong services of general interest to knit our economies and continent together.
- **Health and social protection systems need to prepare** for an ageing population. And together with education, these services must be more than just a safety net.
- Our future success will depend on **our willingness to take risks, be ready for change and to introduce reforms**. Our scientists, universities and companies should keep us at the cutting edge of technology.

- We must ensure that understandable public fears about new science are properly and democratically addressed.
- We must deliver a **better quality of life**. This means taking decisions now to create the right incentives for cleaner energy and cleaner transport. We must live up to our international agreements in Kyoto and make sure that our partners do the same.
- We must balance decisions today against their impact on growth, jobs and the environment tomorrow if we are to offer coming generations a truly sustainable future.
- The construction of an **area of freedom, security and justice** remains one of our most important strategic objectives. The Commission should remain a driving force, helping to create the conditions needed for the removal of internal borders, and the strengthening of the Union external borders.
- Taking forward policies on immigration, asylum and on the integration of immigrants in our society are other key elements. In addition we must implement the Counter-Terrorism Action Plan. Terrorism is the biggest threat today to freedom in Europe and in the World.
- On the world stage, we must spread peace and stability. This applies as much to our nearest neighbours as to the **support that we give to the role of international institutions** such as the United Nations. We must keep the spotlight on conflict prevention and on the eradication of poverty and disease, particularly in Africa.

These are some of the issues that will provide a policy backdrop for our action.

In all of these, our challenge is one of changing attitudes, not changing values.

What sort of Commission does Europe need?

Mr President, Honourable Members

The European Union represents a bold and unprecedented experiment. The Commission is a unique institutional innovation in our European journey.

A strong Commission must be open. It must consult and listen through a permanent dialogue with civil society, the Social Partners and the regions.

To do all this, the Commission depends on the quality and independence of the Commissioners and on the ability and dedication of its officials.

I can assure you today that I am determined to lead a Commission that acts as a team and combines the very best of national traditions, diverse skills and talents; a Commission that must adhere to the highest standards of public life.

I want the next Commission to have a higher proportion of women Commissioners than any previous Commission, but to achieve this I will need your help. We make this clear to the Council, which shares with me the responsibility for drawing up the list of nominees.

I will make full use of my powers under the Treaty in selecting nominee Commissioners, in allocating portfolios at the start and during our term, and in steering the work of the College.

Underpinning all this is the importance of collegiality within a College and of ensuring that a 25 Member College can act quickly, coherently and effectively.

But let me make one thing clear:

There will be no first and second class Commissioners in my Commission.

Partnership with the Parliament

We need a close positive relationship between the Commission and the Parliament, while respecting their respective roles and responsibilities.

I therefore give you a firm commitment to work closely and in a transparent manner with the Parliament and always to take your views into account, even if there will be times where we do not agree.

I would like to make three specific promises:

- First, if a Commissioner clearly underperforms or fails in his or her duties under the Treaty, I will not hesitate to ask them to resign.
- Second, I recognise the importance of the democratic oversight role of this Parliament. I will work to provide full and timely information on matters needed for you to exercise that control. I also commit to provide the Parliament with information about documents sent to other institutions, as well as information concerning the consultative bodies which provide expertise to the Commission.
- Third, I will continue a regular dialogue with this Parliament. In addition to coming to the first Plenary Session each year to set out the State of the Union, I will meet at regular intervals with the Conference of the President's of the Political Groups.

Conclusion

Mr President, Honourable Members,

The Commission is most effective and Europe comes out on top whenever it has your active engagement and support.

You are the voice of the peoples of Europe.

I need your strong endorsement.

My promise is to actively work to build a Europe that is much more than just a simple market place. I want a Europe with a social and cultural dimension; a Europe where everyone can find their place.

Let turn together a new page in European integration and send a strong signal of our joint will to work in the interest of Europe's citizens.

We must not fear the future; the future is in our hands.