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"The European Union after the Lisbon Treaty"

4th Joint Parliamentary meeting on the Future of Europe

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Six months ago, here, in the European Parliament, during the 3rd Joint Parliamentary Meeting on the Future of Europe, I discussed how a Reform Treaty would bring real progress to the European Union. That was just one week before the June European Council, and I expressed my hope that European leaders would arrive at an agreement. In particular, I said that a new Treaty should reinforce the Union's capacity to act, its democratic nature and its cohesion in external affairs: in short, to make the Union better placed to shape globalization.

We know now that, thanks to the leadership of the German Presidency, the June European Council agreed on a detailed and comprehensive mandate. Then, the Portuguese Presidency carried the torch of success, through a skilfully oriented IGC, to the Lisbon Informal Council, in October. Next Thursday, we will sign the Treaty of Lisbon, and leave behind us six years of discussions, hesitations and some set backs on institutional issues.

As many others, I feel somehow frustrated with the number of opt-outs. However, as I have said before, the opt-outs are the price that we pay for progress and for an ambitious Reform Treaty. Respect for European diversity often means institutional compromises. The crucial point is that, despite our differences, the Union remains united in its fundamental values and its fundamental goals.

For 2008, the successful ratification of the Treaty of Lisbon should be one of our overriding priorities. It is important to explain to European citizens how the Reform Treaty will improve the Union's capacity to act, will better protect their interests and will deliver results. The Commission is ready to work in partnership with other European Institutions and with Member States to communicate the Treaty of Lisbon to European citizens.

In particular, I would like to make a special appeal to all national parliaments to engage in explaining what the Treaty of Lisbon does for our citizens. 'Europe' is not 'Brussels'. You are also 'Europe'. The Treaty will have profound and positive implications for your electorates. It also brings more competences to national parliaments, and rightly so, as the Commission always defended. But this brings more responsibility. It is now the moment to actively support the Treaty.

Let me discuss, today, in more detail two progresses introduced by the Lisbon Treaty: a more democratic Union, and a more cohesive Union in external affairs.

[A More Democratic European Union]

The Treaty of Lisbon will reinforce the democratic nature of the European Union.

First, thanks to the efforts of the European Parliament, supported by the Commission, the Treaty of Lisbon introduces a clear definition of what European citizenship means. Europeans will benefit from such a clarification.

Second, the Treaty of Lisbon also gives legal force to the Charter of Fundamental Rights, which will strengthen the Union's legal system of checks and balances. Next week in Strasbourg, together with President Pottering and Prime Minister Socrates, we will proclaim the Charter before the signature of the Reform Treaty. The solemn dignity of the Charter will thus be properly recognised by the three European political institutions.

Third, the Treaty of Lisbon increases the rights of national parliaments, which will reinforce accountability and help us all to guarantee the respect for the principle of subsidiarity. The Treaty will allow national parliaments to give a reasoned opinion on whether a draft legislative act complies with the principle of subsidiarity. The Commission will then review or re-examine its proposal in light of the concerns expressed by national parliaments.
Without questioning the right of initiative of the Commission and the institutional balance of the Union, the Treaty of Lisbon recognises the important political role of national parliaments. Over recent years, we have also been working to develop a deeper policy dialogue with national parliaments. I hope this process will be further developed in the future.

Finally, the European Parliament will have a greater role in the legislative process of the Union. With the Treaty of Lisbon, the vast majority of European laws will be adopted jointly by the European Parliament and by the Council. Under the new provisions, the European Parliament also elects the President of the Commission on a proposal from the European Council and approves the composition of the College of the Commission, chosen by the designated President.

As a result of the deepening of Union's democracy, the Commission reinforces its political nature. The increased political responsibility of the Commission goes hand in hand with the growth of the competences of the European Parliament and of the national parliaments. The Commission is ready to play its full part in the new democratic system of the Union and to consolidate its role as agenda-settler and as the catalyst for the direction of European policy.

More democracy means also that the European Union will be more and more the arena for European political and ideological debates. And this will enrich the Union's political life and European politics in general. It is, however, crucial to turn these debates into consensual policies that represent the general European interest. In other words, we need a permanent exercise in finding the right political balance:

- the balance between the European interest and national interests;
- the balance between social justice and economic competitiveness;
- the balance between openness and protection.

To find the right balance is the task of the Commission and the Treaty of Lisbon will reinforce its legitimacy to do that job.

[The Interest of an Enlarged European Union in a 'Global World']

During the first five decades of its history, European construction achieved great results. Europeans built legitimate ways to resolve their political, cultural and ideological differences in a peaceful way and to promote common values and economic and social prosperity. To preserve and to improve what we achieved during the last fifty years, we need to influence and to shape the world around us.

Together, the European Union and Member States can achieve results that they could never dream of on their own. Working in close cooperation with our main partners, namely the countries that share the common values of freedom and democracy, we are in a position to decisively shape globalization.

United, the European Union and Member States are stronger and in a much better condition to tackle the challenges of the globalised world: to create and to maintain a just world order, to address climate change and global poverty, to guarantee energy security, to fight terrorism and organised crime, to deal with mass migration, and to succeed in a more competitive economic environment.

Common challenges require common solutions. The task for the coming decades is how to use the power and the capacities we built during the last half century to promote our values and interests at the global level.

At the same time, global order will benefit from the European experience.
The world needs the European method of putting together different national practices,

The world needs the European principles of open societies and open economies,

The world needs the European way of linking the imperative of freedom to the idea of solidarity and justice,

The world needs the European priority in tackling climate change and promoting sustainable development with respect for our planet.

By promoting its values and its interests, the Union not only delivers to its citizens but also helps the world to be a better place.

This is why, for the Commission, it is crucial to defend and to promote the European interest in the age of globalization. ‘Offensive openness’ is the key idea to protect the European interest without falling into a protectionist agenda: openness without naïveté, but with an activist stance that calls on partners to respond in a reciprocal way. An open European Union in an open world has been at the heart of our policy agenda, and will continue to be a top priority. The Treaty of Lisbon will be a step forward to achieve this.

Only the right institutions and policies can give Europe the capacity to act. We cannot face successfully the 21st Century globalisation with the institutions of the 20th Century. With the Treaty of Lisbon, the European Union will strengthen its political, its strategic and its economic voice in diplomatic, security, defence, trade and development issues.

The new Treaty will turn the European Union into a full external political actor by giving the Union legal personality. In particular, the Treaty establishes common principles and objectives for the EU’s external action in all its aspects, including the external aspects of internal policies. Thus, the consistency between the different areas of external action and between these areas and the Union’s internal policies will be substantially reinforced.

In more specific areas,

the Treaty of Lisbon will update the Petersberg Tasks to contribute to combating terrorism.

It will allow the emergence of a true common European defence.

It will introduce a mutual defence clause and a solidarity clause, including energy security.

It will strengthen development policy and humanitarian aid.

In short, the Treaty of Lisbon will reinforce the Union’s cohesion, coherence and effectiveness in external affairs. As such, it will improve the Union’s capacity to pursue one of its central tasks: to shape globalization.

Thank you very much