SPEECH BY THE PRESIDENT, MR PAT COX
PRESIDENCY CONCLUSIONS

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SPEECH

delivered by the President of the European Parliament,

Mr Pat COX

to the European Council

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in COPENHAGEN

As delivered
Introduction

I wish to thank the Danish Presidency, Prime Minister Rasmussen and Ministers Møller and Haarder, for their active engagement with the European Parliament over the past six months. And I would also like to thank Prime Minister Simitis for opening doors to ever more intensive cooperation between Parliament and Council. You are setting the standard.

This is a very special Summit. Your primary focus has been on enlargement, but this has not been a single issue Presidency. Together we have delivered a considerable amount in terms of legislation, with a dozen conciliations successfully completed, including on air safety and cosmetics. The Presidency has participated in 38 plenary debates and has worked with all our parliamentary committees. We have made a useful start and good progress in a dialogue on improving the quality of EU legislation. We agree with the target date of the Spring European Council. Our co-operation is continuing to deliver results.

And we have other important business to conclude. The European Parliament would like this meeting to respond to the consequences of the major man-made disaster on the coasts of Galicia. We will accelerate our procedures to strengthen the Erika package. I wish through the Spanish Prime Minister, Jose Maria Aznar, to express our solidarity with the people of Galicia. But we need to show more than solidarity and sympathy. As one arm of the budgetary authority, we will respond with the utmost urgency to any proposals to provide practical financial support.

Enlargement

But as you would expect, I want to devote most of my remarks to the landmark issue of this Summit: Enlargement. I want to place on record our appreciation for the immense efforts of your Presidency, previous Presidencies which paved the way, and the Commission, and through them their services, in realising this great ambition and in preparing for this major event today. We in the Parliament have played our part. Now it is up to you.

There are two dimensions to this last "sprint" and I will offer you the European Parliament perspective on both. You are more than familiar with the arguments, but I would appreciate it if you would allow me the liberty of expressing the parliamentary standpoint.

On this date 21 years ago, General Jaruzelski introduced martial law in Poland. This date, 13 December, should now take on a new meaning in Polish history, effacing a black day in its past.
There is the remaining issue of the financing of enlargement, one of the trickier aspects of the complex of issues which you will undoubtedly unravel at this meeting. The European Parliament supports the efforts of the Danish Presidency to find a compromise. Of course, not everyone is happy with this compromise. Some Member States may feel that it goes too far; some Accession States, not far enough. I fully understand the legitimate and reasonable concerns of contributory Member States to minimise the impact on their own economy of the necessary commitments, at a difficult point in the economic cycle. At the same time, the Accession States have legitimate concerns too, in terms of minimising the fiscal shock of insufficient cash-flow and possible adverse impact on macro-economic development in the coming years. In some of the Accession States, we also note that public support for enlargement may be fragile. A breakthrough here should help to convince public opinion of the advantages of accession. Both sets of concerns need to be given due weight and the wisdom found for a balanced solution which is flexible, comfortably within the limits of the financial perspectives agreed in Berlin, and one which respects what has been described as the “historical imperative” of enlargement. Imperative may not be the right word. There is a choice. That choice is still open, but there is a moral-political contract which has already been entered into. On financing, we are not asking you to go the extra mile, but just a few more yards, if necessary.

Cyprus

Secondly, this reconciling Europe should include a reconciling Cyprus. A conjuncture of circumstances has gifted us with a generational opportunity to find a settlement for Cyprus. Cyprus will be signing its Accession Treaty on 16 April 2003. The question is: will Cyprus be signing as a common State, representing all Cypriots? Ultimately, this is a question for the two communities and for the United Nations mediation meeting in this city as we speak. We in the Parliament strongly support the efforts of Kofi Annan, and hope that even at this late stage the wisdom of a settlement will commend itself to all the political leaders on the island. The divided city of Nicosia is the last divided capital in Europe, a symbol of everything that should not be. In this regard, I ask you to use all your moral suasion to invite the key players in the discussions which are proceeding in different part of this city to make a great breakthrough, so that, as almost all of the representatives of the Turkish Cypriot community put it to me last weekend, no-one will be left behind in this Europe that we are building.
Bulgaria and Romania

The European Parliament explicitly supports making 2007 the target date for the accession of the second wave countries of the fifth enlargement. We therefore welcome the proposal before you today; but as regards the date, this is subject to conditions. Setting out a shared ambition for Bulgaria and Romania in no way removes the conditionality of acquis compliance, nor does it invalidate the principle of differentiation and own merits. What it does do, however, is to provide a focal point and a lever for mobilising the significant traction power needed to lift standards in legislative, implementation, administrative and judicial terms, to the level required. This is especially true of Romania where the recent Commission report made explicit reference to, and I quote, as I did to the joint chambers of the Romanian Parliament in Bucharest recently, “very serious corruption”. Action by the Romanian Authorities is required to bolster and encourage the fight against corruption and to develop best practice for media freedom and political pluralism.

Turkey

By a large majority (of 376 to 156, with 18 abstentions), Parliament voted for an open attitude, confirming the European vocation of Turkey while remaining prudent and necessarily conditional, and deciding not to pursue an alternative path which would deny membership and propose instead close partnership. This was heavy with significance. What Parliament was saying was that particular geographical or cultural conceptions of Europe would not constitute an obstacle to membership. What it says is that equality of treatment should be the basis on which we examine the application, but equality of treatment lays down obligations. Your decision to offer a definitive review in 2 years time demonstrates measurable and visible progress for Turkey's path going towards EU accession. By so doing, the European Council has shown the courage to support the new society in Turkey and the progressive, democratic and European agenda of the new government. Turkey should understand that this is a remarkable demonstration of a new phase in its relationship with the EU, in recognition of its efforts. This should be the message that should be broadcast by both ourselves and the Turkish leadership as the real result of this meeting.

The work on this enlargement does not end today. A new challenge is now posed: explaining to our citizens what their political leaders have decided for them; earning their consent and support in a way that will show to citizens what is “in it” for them. Once the ‘event’ has passed, it will be time to make the process of enlargement work. It will also be a time when communication needs to be carefully managed, to avoid generating false hopes or scoring own-goals by disappointing expectations. Our public opinion needs to be re-engaged in this process; it is a huge job.

The parliamentary perspective

For its part, the European Parliament will deliver by accelerating its work so that assent can be given to the accession treaties in good time for signature. We will, as one arm of the budgetary authority, deliver what is necessary, including on a “peace dividend” package for Cyprus, should you decide that a settlement could be shored up in this way. The European Parliament has agreed to welcome observers from the candidate States, in their adjusted Nice number, once the accession treaties have been signed.
As to the interinstitutional consequences of enlargement, we share the view that an agreement between us is required to ensure a transparent but rapid parliamentary procedure for appointing 10 Commissioners from the accession States as from 1 May 2004. We would also be prepared to accept an advanced departure date for the current Commission, but no earlier than 1 November 2004. We will work with you in January to conclude on this point.

**Participation in the Inter-Governmental Conference**

You had an opportunity last night to hear from the President of the Convention on progress. We have concerns about the timetable of the Convention, already likely to outlive its one-year mandate by three months. We therefore believe that a draft should now be prepared and drawn up by the Convention Presidium as early as possible. This would avoid the confusion created by the submission of competing drafts of would-be constitutions, of variegated status, being circulated, and their rushed deliberation. On this, I would like to pose a question: can you confirm that the Convention will end by the Thessaloniki European Council, allowing that Summit meeting to draw up the agenda for the IGC?

Without getting into the substance today, I would just make two general points. In the constitutional debates in the weeks to come, we must avoid getting locked into a debate which appears to the public as a ‘corporatist’ and inward-looking debate. Institutional “power-grabbing” and “corporatism” will ultimately give the Convention a bad name. People will just not understand why their down-to-earth and real concerns appear to be drowned out by quarrels over who should wear the Foreign Policy hat or who should be sitting at the top table.

People will judge the outcome on a number of criteria: does it bring the EU closer to the citizens? Does it enhance parliamentary democracy in Europe? Does it give ownership of the process to the citizens? Does it strengthen our ability to get practical results for the benefit of people on issues they care about - jobs, safe food, a cleaner environment - and in a way in which the citizen feels he/she can influence the outcome?

**Institutional issues and reform of the Presidency**

It is in that context that I address to you my only remark pertaining to the discussion you will have later on reforming the Council. Reform goes beyond the issue of rotating Presidencies. In Parliament’s view, the key reform is actually to ensure the maximum degree of transparency. The Danish Presidency has made important efforts but whenever you legislate, your proceedings at all stages should be in public, thus creating an unbroken chain of accountability when we decide on behalf of our citizens.

When the Convention reports to the Intergovernmental Conference, I would like you to bear in mind the strong plea from the Presidents of Parliaments of the candidate States, that they be fully associated in the Conference from Day One. Whatever the precise, formal, legal situation at the end of the IGC’s work, the Accession States have earned the right to participate actively and equally from the outset.
Future EU Perspectives

A consequence of your bringing closure to the fifth enlargement and confirming the inclusiveness and irreversibility of Bulgaria and Romania’s accession, without any new pre-conditions, will be to come face-to-face with the question of a political commitment holding out the prospect of membership to the countries of South-Eastern Europe in the West Balkans. It will be an early task of the Union to encourage the perspective of moving closer to the European Union and closer engagement.

New neighbours

A second consequence, on which the General Affairs and External Relations Council has already drawn up some useful guidelines, will be the need for a New Neighbours initiative, one which can provide a helping hand for the new border countries after the accession of the “Laeken ten”.

Kaliningrad

On Kaliningrad, the Council is to be congratulated for the successful conclusion on the intricate question of transit agreed with the Russian government. I would make the point that the European Union should not rest on its laurels and instead build on the positive momentum in the relationship to make Kaliningrad the platform for a regional deepening of our engagement with Russia. Now that the visa issue has been settled, President Prodi’s project from last year on regional development should be reactivated.

Relations with Russia

Our relationship with Russia is a key one and will become even more important for the wider European Union. In our strengthened dialogue with President Putin, we should not hesitate in raising human rights issues, particularly the situation in Chechnya. This is the strong view which the leaders of the political groups have asked me to convey to you.

Conclusion

This Union, the Union that today you will decide to enlarge and strengthen, is perhaps above all else about human rights and their promotion. We must never cease to assert the primacy of human rights in the world.