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A New Era of Co-operation for Progress in the Next 5 Years

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

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Ladies and gentlemen,

I am very glad to be here. As you say in your Manifesto, Europe is at a cross roads. I deeply respect any organisation - or group of organisations - that give serious thought to the direction we should go in. So, I have read the Manifesto with considerable interest. Time will not allow me to respond to all the points today. But I will try to outline my broad reaction to it and discuss it with you.

The Spring Alliance is an unusually broad coalition. The Manifesto reflects this. I am glad that you have adopted a horizontal approach. We live in an age when the divisions between different policy fields are increasingly artificial. Achieving the necessary degree of coherence is a political and intellectual challenge for us all. I very much welcome your contribution.

I am proud of what we have achieved over the past 5 years. Europe is the first region in world to have set legally binding energy and climate change targets. Last December, we pressed ahead with the energy and climate change package, despite the looming recession. Both with this package, and our ideas on climate finance, Europe is leading the change towards an ambitious global agreement in Copenhagen.

And, while the Lisbon Strategy has fallen short on some counts, it has increased the resilience of our economies. It has helped us to weather the crisis better than we would otherwise have done.

Equally, I am proud that this Commission adopted the Recommendation on Active Inclusion – something which I know many of you actively advocated for. It is an important basis for further work.

I agree with you that certain aspects of the pre-crisis economic model were unsustainable. That is why the crisis occurred. And we definitely need a new model of growth – one which does not result in the degradation of the earth's resources.

This is a battle which must be fought at international level. The crisis has shown us how interdependent we are. It has demonstrated beyond any doubt that globalisation is irreversible.

The problem is that globalisation has developed spontaneously. It has never been shaped by rules or governing principles. I believe that we now need a "new globalisation" – one that is based on a clear set of values. This requires effective global governance.

With nearly 60 years of experience of trans-national rule making and the management of inter-dependence, Europe can make an important contribution to developing this. But Europe can only make that contribution if it remains strong and united.

We need to work together to build that strong and united Europe. We all have different convictions. We do not always agree. But that should not prevent us from co-operating.

When it comes to giving the world the global governance it needs, the institutionalisation of the G20 for economic matters is immensely significant. The G20 has already proved its worth by helping to avoid the economic meltdown. Last week, in Pittsburgh, it showed that it can continue to deliver. Europe contributed to this. Because we were united around a clear position, we were able to wield maximum influence.

At the G20, we made a series of important decisions. We agreed to keep the stimulus in place until a durable recovery is assured. We agreed to tighter co-ordination of our main economic policies and tough new financial regulations to prevent another crisis. We agreed to curbs on bonuses, so that sound decision making is rewarded, not reckless risk taking.

In short, we made it clear that there can be no return to the 'bad old days', and that the 'old style' financial system that failed last year, and plunged us all into recession, will have to change. And let me tell you that, in all these areas, Europe was leading the way.

On climate change, I have already said that, with such a short time to go before the Summit of Copenhagen, I am seriously concerned about the slow progress in the negotiations.

So, I was very encouraged by the renewed sense of urgency and engagement I witnessed last week, not just at the G20, but also at the climate change summit convened by UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon. Copenhagen is a vital meeting, giving us the best chance to put together a global deal to tackle climate change. And it goes without saying that I will use every occasion in the coming weeks with a view to securing a positive result.

The position of the EU is very clear. Because we have put our cards on the table, we are able to push others to do the same. We are helping to identify the elements of a possible bargain.

On financing, the Commission has set out our estimates of what the developing countries will need by 2020, and made practical suggestions as to how to source the 100 billion EUR likely to be necessary.

I think that we have made people see that the amounts involved, although large, are realistic – and that a properly functioning carbon market could be the main source of funds.

And we have stressed that development budgets should not be raided to pay for action against climate change. Achieving the Millennium Development Goals is critical to achieving our climate change goals. The two are inseparable. Development and climate change must be tackled together. I have been making this point very often.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The guidelines I presented to Parliament set out my vision for Europe in 2020. To use your words, this vision puts "people and planet first." Yes, it is about developing a successful strategy for exiting from the crisis. But it is also about taking the long view. The date 2020 was chosen to tie in with our climate change ambitions. We want to use the same deadline for a broader transformational agenda, to give us a vision of the kind of society and economy we need to have by the end of the decade, and to show how to get there.

As far as the environment is concerned, I naturally want to focus on actions which will help us to achieve our climate goals: research which can result in clean technologies. European Supergrids for gas and electricity which can meet our growing energy needs in smarter ways. And the de-carbonisation of our electricity supply and the transport sector – including maritime transport and aviation.

But, as your Manifesto reminds us, climate change is not the only threat to the environmental health of our planet. Bio-diversity loss may not attract as much attention, but it is just urgent. It will reduce our ability to mitigate and adapt to climate change.

Full implementation of EU nature legislation and the Natura 2000 network is indeed essential. We will also show international leadership in the important international negotiations next year.

You are right too to highlight unsustainable fishing. In April this year, we launched a major debate on the future of the Common Fisheries Policy. We are legally bound to review certain elements of it in 2012, but have decided to seize the opportunity for a root-and-branch reform. We must make ecological sustainability the basic premise of the policy; economic and social sustainability will follow from that.

It is because the Commission sets such store by ecological sustainability that we proposed EU support for the temporary ban on international trade in Atlantic bluefin tuna. Unfortunately however, Member States did not back this proposal.

On the social side, our focus is on jobs. Ever since the crisis broke, we have been working intensively with the social partners to reduce its impact on employment. We were key movers behind the Employment Summit in May, which unfortunately was played down by certain Member States and reduced to a trio. I was disappointed about this. Our efforts will have to continue. Unemployment will soon reach double digits and, unfortunately, may well go on rising for some time, even once growth has returned. We must do everything to avoid jobless recovery !

I know that, when it comes to jobs, quality also matters. Whether the job is sufficiently well paid to lift the person out of poverty. Whether the person can combine it with their family responsibilities. Whether, in fact, it provides an adequate basis for stable family and personal life. But, of course, having a job is always better than having no job at all!

We have to approach this in different ways. First, as we emerge from the crisis, our recovery must be sustainable and equitable. We must go for growth that is based on innovation and research and the production of high end, high value added products and services. Because this will generate high quality, meaningful and satisfying jobs.

Second, we have to provide people with the skills they need to move into these jobs. And we have to make it easier for low-skilled workers to access training. At the moment, there is huge divide between the training "haves" and "have nots." Tackling this is a top priority. We would welcome your help in identifying the barriers which low skilled workers face, and new ways of overcoming them.

Finally, the EU quality framework, which we are proposing, will help to drive up skills levels and the quality of employment in the social services sector. This is one of the fastest growing job creation sectors.

Given that the Spring Alliance includes representatives of both users and producers of these services, we would welcome your input into the development of the quality framework.

Let me add here a brief word about the European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion in 2010. I attach a great deal of importance to this. When we began to plan the Year, we did not know that the crisis would happen with such an impact. It is even more important now. It is a chance to show our renewed commitment to the most vulnerable who have been hardest hit by the crisis.

I hope that we can use the Year to re-connect European citizens to European values of solidarity and social justice. The key message that we want to get across is that we all have a responsibility for tackling poverty and exclusion and that we will all benefit from their eradication.

Let me highlight too our intention to carry out social impact assessments for all new proposals, starting with the revision of the Working Time Directive.

And, of course, I plan to create a Commissioner for Fundamental Rights, whose brief would include equal opportunities and action against discrimination – areas which I know are of major concern to all of you.

In terms of development, your priorities are very similar to ours. You are right to stress that development aid is particularly important at a time of diminishing private flows to developing countries. In May, the Council of Ministers confirmed its commitment to increasing development aid to 0.7% of GNI in 2015. The Commission will continue to push Member States to fulfil their commitments. We have consistently emphasised that the crisis should not be used as a reason for backsliding on them.

The other issue you raise is that of policy coherence. The report that we have just issued on this shows that we are making progress. In research, for example, EU and developing countries work jointly together in areas of interest for developing countries, such as health or food security. Researchers from developing countries are encouraged to participate in research programmes and mobility schemes. We want to build on this by linking future work more closely to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.

But I won't hide from you that policy coherence is a difficult business. It involves a large number of policies with diverging objectives and interests. I think that, thanks to our collegial method of decision-making, the Commission does a reasonably good job of reconciling these different objectives and interests, although there is always room for improvement.

But, of course, we only propose; it is the legislators who decide. True policy coherence will require strong political support from all the actors. For example it would be helpful if the parties could say the same when they are in the capitals as they do when they are in Strasbourg in the European Parliament. Stakeholders like you have a very important job to do in helping to generate this support.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I have made it very clear that my new mandate will be marked by this co-operative approach. I want a new partnership with the Parliament and the Member States. I want to work closely with local and regional authorities. And I want the same degree of co-operation with the social partners and civil society.

You have a great deal of knowledge, expertise and grassroots experience which I would like to tap into. For example, you can respond to the consultation on the post-2010 Lisbon Strategy which we will be launching soon.

I believe that we have a great deal in common. More, perhaps, than divides us. I hope that we can now open a new era of even closer co-operation between us. If we do this, I believe that, together, we can achieve a great deal in the next 5 years.

Thank you