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Statement on the Berlin Declaration

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

European Parliament, plenary session

Strasbourg, 14 March 2007

Mr President, Mr Minister, Honourable Members,

The meeting in Berlin on 25 March is an important occasion. 50 years European integration is certainly worth a celebration. It is an occasion to highlight all that unites us, and to emphasize our common values and principles. But we can make it even more important by looking forward as much as we look back. This is an opportunity to put forward our shared objectives and ambitions, to underline our mutual respect and solidarity, and to reiterate our determination to build a better and stronger Union for the benefit of all Europeans.

That is why the Commission took the initiative, in May last year, to suggest an inter-institutional declaration on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the signature of the Treaty of Rome.

The German Presidency has been working hard to find a text which meets a number of different goals. We all agree that the text should be short and accessible, that it should be an easy read with a shelf-life of more than a few days or weeks. We all agree that it should celebrate the achievements of fifty years of European integration, but also look ahead to inspire Europeans for the future. And we all want to see reflected in the text what it is that makes Europe special for us, in what we value and in how we work.

This is not an easy task. But we are in excellent hands with Chancellor Merkel, Foreign Minister Steinmeier and their competent staff. I think that the decision to directly involve both the European Parliament and the European Commission has proven fully justified. The discussions that we have had, between the Parliament and the Commission and with Civil Society representatives, have provided valuable food for thought that can contribute to the overall reflexion and to the essential work of the Presidency. And the bilateral discussions and the exchange at the European Council last week have pointed to a broad consensus on the purpose, scope and flavour of the Declaration. The end result will be a truly European commitment to move forward.

Much of the discussion in these final days will be centring on how to give the right flavour to the text on the Union's future ambitions. In January, President Barroso set out in this House our thinking on some of the key points. Last week's European Council should give us renewed confidence that we need not be shy. We can be both ambitious and credible. The European Union can and will continue to be a motor for positive change in Europe and across the world.

We believe that text should be concrete without being too specific. It should reflect the genius of the European Union in striking the right balance between the general and the particular, the common and the individual. We promote growth and economic development, within a strong social framework. We enhance security, and we promote individual rights. We work hard to support the interests of Europeans, but with a keen sense of responsibility to the global community.

This is sometimes misunderstood as a recipe for a lowest common denominator Europe. This is wrong. It is rather a practical recognition of the fact that in a complex, fast-moving world, we have to be light on our feet, and we have to find new solutions to deep-seated challenges. This is exactly what we are now doing on climate change and energy.

It is also important to give a sense that the EU is defined not only by what Europe does, but how the Union does its work. Democracy, transparency and accountability are important guiding principles for the Union today. It would be an important signal for the Member States, and the institutions, to underline the Union's commitment to a democratic way of working.

Mr President, Mr Minister, Honourable Members,

The Berlin meeting comes almost exactly half way through the German Presidency and also represents an important stepping stone on the path to a re-launch of the Treaty review to strengthen the institutions of the European Union.

It follows an exceptionally successful European Council meeting last week, a European Council which has proven doomsayers wrong and has demonstrated that an EU of 27 is just as strong and bold as its earlier incarnations. Enlargement has added purpose and dynamism to our work, and I am convinced it can continue to do so.

As we look ahead, the June European Council will provide the other key test – can we agree an outline of the way forward for the constitutional and institutional debate? Last week's work will certainly help – it has surely help to put to rest the myth that the EU is in some way obsessed with navel-gazing, and detached from citizen's real concerns. The message should come out loud and clear that if we are concerned about our institutions, it is because we want them to work well – so that we can deliver on our citizens' expectations and meet high standards of democracy.

Mr President, Mr Minister, Honourable Members,

To conclude, I believe we are on track to a Declaration in Berlin on 25 March which meets the goals sketched out by the Commission last May, endorsed by the European Council, and backed by this House. It will bring a momentum and urgency to the efforts to settle the constitutional and institutional debate. It will mobilise the efforts of all around core priorities. It will show a European Union united in its commitment to meet the aspirations of our citizens, and to bring to the future work of the Union the same dynamism and achievement that we have enjoyed for fifty years of the European adventure.