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President of the European Commission

Results of the European Council

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Le Conseil européen de la semaine dernière a été le point d'orgue de travaux d'une intensité sans précédent pour faire face à la crise économique en Europe. Il a écarté le risque de mesures prises au coup par coup et sans coordination pour parvenir à une position commune en vue de rétablir la stabilité du système financier européen. Je souhaite rendre hommage au Président Sarkozy, dont le dynamisme et la détermination irremplaçables ont permis d'insuffler l'élan nécessaire à l'action des 27 autour d'objectifs et de principes communs.

Je suis également très fier de la contribution de la Commission, qui a toujours insisté sur le fait que seule une réponse européenne pouvait avoir un impact à l'échelle requise.

Cet élan que nous avons constaté lors du Conseil européen, et qui nous a d'ailleurs permis l'adoption d'un pacte très important pour l'immigration, doit aussi nous guider pour gérer l'agenda européen dans la perspective du Conseil européen de décembre:

Il faudra notamment définir une feuille de route pour le traité de Lisbonne, afin de bien préparer les échéances de 2009.

En ce qui concerne le paquet énergie et changement climatique, il faudra un très grand effort pour conclure un accord avant la fin de l'année. La Commission collaborera étroitement avec la présidence pour trouver des solutions qui répondent aux préoccupations des États membres. Nous comptons sur l'engagement continu du Parlement pour trouver un accord.

(Crise financière)

Je voudrais aujourd'hui concentrer mon propos sur ce qui doit être notre préoccupation majeure: l'économie européenne. Nous devons travailler à trois chantiers:

Premièrement, les actions immédiates au niveau européen pour sortir de la crise financière,

Deuxièmement, la réforme du système financier international,

Troisièmement, le renforcement de ce que l'on appelle l'économie réelle, afin de minimiser les conséquences de la crise financière et de créer les conditions d'une relance de la croissance et de la création d'emplois.

Le Conseil européen est intervenu à point nommé. Il a contribué à rétablir progressivement la stabilité nécessaire et à mettre en place une série de mesures pour reconstruire le système financier. L'Europe est en position, par ses choix, de peser sur la réponse internationale à la crise. La rencontre de Camp David, le week-end dernier, a démontré avec force ce que l'Europe est capable de réussir lorsqu'elle est unie.

Nous vivons une période sans précédent, qui requiert un niveau de coordination lui aussi sans précédent. Nous avons besoin d'une véritable réponse européenne. L'Europe doit façonner la réponse globale aux problèmes globaux. Je suis heureux et fier de constater que l'Europe est à la hauteur de ces défis.

Let me give you some more detail about our response to this crisis. First I would like to stress the excellent cooperation we have had with Member States and with the ECB. Our first priority was to play our part in the rescue of financial institutions in difficulty.

Our next step was to come forward with a package of precise, targeted measures to address specific shortcomings – on capital requirements, deposit guarantees or accountancy rules. Speed has been essential, and we have responded by accelerating our work. In the same vein, I was grateful to the rapidity with which this Parliament was able to conclude its consideration of the accountancy rules. I know that you fully appreciate that the other proposals on the table deserve the same urgency.

We also have to look at what other proposals will be needed to update and fill in the gaps of today's regulatory regime. We will have the credit rating agencies proposal next month. We will come with an initiative on executive pay based on a review of our 2004 recommendation. We will look at regulating derivatives. We will work constructively with the European Parliament on the follow-up to your recent resolutions and will look at the implications for the 2009 Commission work programme.

One important input for future action will be the results of the High Level Group I have set up under Jacques de Larosière to look at cross-border financial supervision. I am happy to announce to you today the composition of this group:

Leszek BALCEROWIECZ

Otmar ISSING

Rainer MASERA

Callum Mc CARTHY

Lars NYBERG

José PEREZ FERNANDEZ

Ono RUDING

I am asking this group to present first results in time for the Spring European Council. And I will be discussing this afternoon with your Conference of Presidents how to make sure that Parliament is plugged into this work.

(Global governance)

We will also have to promote a reform of the global financial system. The last months have shown that the Bretton Woods Institutions have not kept up with the pace of integration of global financial markets.

EU-US co-operation will be essential – not only to get us out of this crisis, but even more to avoid another one. In this respect, the discussions President Sarkozy and I had with President Bush last weekend were a major step forward. But it is not enough: we have to get other major players on board. I will be going to China later this week where I will raise this issue with the Chinese President and Prime Minister and with our other Asian partners at the ASEM Summit. We need a critical mass of players involved. The goal should be to devise a system of global financial governance adapted to the challenges of the 21st century – in terms of efficiency, transparency and representation.

Europe is leading the way – and this is something we can collectively be proud of. And I want to work with this Parliament to make a forceful European contribution to this international debate.

(The real economy)

We all know that day by day, the evidence builds that the we are facing a serious economic slowdown. The impact is being felt on jobs, on household incomes, on order books of businesses large and small.

One thing must be clear: There is no national road out of this crisis. Our economies are too intertwined – we will swim or sink together. We must not give in to siren calls for protection. We must not turn our backs on globalisation or put our single market at risk. This will remain the motor of growth in the EU.

Neither can we go on with "business as usual". Europe's economy needs a boost to recover, to continue to grow and to provide employment. First, inside Europe. We will have to redouble our efforts to address long term issues and to be in better shape to tackle the challenges ahead – making Europe a knowledge economy, investing more in R&D and in innovation.

The revised stability and growth pact leaves sufficient flexibility for Member States' budget policies to react to the current exceptional circumstances and to promote growth and jobs.

But we also need to look beyond our borders. Trade has been key to European growth over recent years. Now is the time to be proactive about market access, to make the case that trade barriers will help nobody. I hope we have all learned the lesson that protectionism only makes recovery harder.

European industry needs support. SMEs need to be free to concentrate on their market. That is why, for example, we recently proposed that our smallest businesses should be exempt from the excessive burden in terms of accounting rules and statistical reporting.

Large manufacturing needs help too. I want to be sure that we are using EU programmes to best effect, like our competitiveness and innovation programme and the research framework programme. We need to reinforce the synergies between our Lisbon strategy and our climate and energy agenda: promoting investment in low carbon technologies and energy efficiency measures will at the same time support our competitiveness, our energy security and our climate change agenda. The EIB will be a valuable partner in this endeavour.

And Europe's citizens need support, too. It is critically important that at a time of rising unemployment, we maintain investment in training, we develop new skills and prepare people to take advantage when opportunities return. Advancing on our Social Agenda for Access, Opportunities and Solidarity is more important than ever. We shall review the role the Globalisation Adjustment Fund can play.

In all these areas, we need to be intelligent about how we act. We need to get the most out of every step we take. Smart action means hitting two targets with one shot. Helping the construction industry, yes, but doing this by promoting an energy-efficient housing stock. Using state aids where necessary, yes, but in line with the guidelines directing state aids towards environmental support and R&D. Helping key industries like cars, why not, but preparing them for tomorrow's markets of clean cars. Smart support, this is what our industry needs.

Our Lisbon strategy package in December will be the opportunity to bring these different strands together. There is no magic bullet to turn around the EU economy. What we have to do is take every option, explore every potential way in which EU policy can help Member States to seize every opportunity to put Europe on the road to growth. That is our task in the coming weeks. And it is a task I want to tackle together with the European Parliament.

Mr President, Ladies & Gentlemen,

We are living historic moments. The kind of occasion where the crisis calls into question old certainties and minds are more open to change. These are moments when we know that today's decisions will have a decisive impact on tomorrow's reality. Change is what we need now. Change not to come back to the solutions of the past, but to find the solutions of the future.

Today, Europe can propose the principles and rules that will shape a new global order. We have an opportunity to come forward with proposals based on European values, based on open societies and open economies. Open societies need the rule of law and democracy, open economies need rules of transparency, sensible regulation and supervision.

Ladies & Gentlemen, Europe shows its true colours in times of crisis:

In Georgia, Europe was able to stop a war.

In the financial crisis, Europe is leading the way towards a global solution.

In the next few weeks, we must show that we are able to continue to lead on the fight against climate change and to build an energy policy for the future.

Because we owe it to our citizens, our economies and our partners around the world, as well as to future generations of Europeans.