

**COSAC Chairpersons Meeting**

**Riksdagen  
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**Speech by  
European Commission Vice President  
Margot Wallström**

**A GREATER VOICE TO PARLIAMENTS –  
5 YEARS' PROGRESS IN EUROPEAN CO-OPERATION**

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

Chair,  
honourable chairpersons,

Today is this Commission's – and my own personal – last possibility to address a COSAC Chairpersons meeting. The first time I did it was on 9 February 2005 in Luxembourg. I then presented the Commission's new policy for relations with national parliaments that had been decided that same day. 10 concrete targets to anchor and to increase ownership. I am happy to say we have been able to deliver on all these 10 points.

One of the long-term goals we set was "*Connecting with people and their elected representatives: a greater voice to parliaments is a greater voice to Europe's citizens.*"

Today, this last time, I want to take the opportunity to "balance the books". And I want to do that by adding an assessment and an appraisal to that long-term goal: *5 years' progress in European co-operation*. Because that is what I'm proud of we have achieved together: progress – remarkable progress.

And we really need this progress to be able to cope with the big political questions we now have on the agenda. The challenges for the EU and for the Swedish Presidency are phenomenal.

But I'm confident that together we will be able to deliver.

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The economic and financial crisis and an ambitious agenda to fight climate change are just two examples of major challenges where the EU delivers – and where it is obvious to everyone that European co-operation brings a concrete added value.

Where would we have been without a joint response to the financial crisis? The global scope of the problem makes it impossible for individual countries to find solutions on their own. We need a co-ordinated response. What the Commission has done is to complement the growth and jobs strategy with targeted short-term measures creating immediate effects.

For example, we have targeted rescue operations in the banking sector; we provide the framework for a targeted fiscal stimulus at national and European level.

But one of the top priorities before and beyond the crisis remains investing in people, in innovation and in research. Because we have to create the right climate for businesses to reach new markets and to create new and safe jobs, with equal rights and opportunities for all.

This is politics – this is what the EU is good at and should concentrate on. There are many other examples of what we can do and what we have done, big and small. I can mention, for example:

- Equal rights for passengers with reduced mobility

From last year the disabled, the elderly and other people with reduced mobility have easier access to air transport. Airlines and airports must provide them with the same access to air transport as all other passengers — and at no additional cost.

And with the recent disastrous flooding in the Czech Republic, Hungary, Austria and Poland, we should not forget that

- EU countries help each other cope with disaster

The EU's civil protection mechanism means that pooled resources ensure a better response, and that European countries can rely more on each other for necessary resources when disaster strikes. And it does far too often.

Last but by no means least – climate change.

To meet this complex global challenge we need global action and European ambition and coordination.

Europe has committed to the so-called '20-20-20' targets and to transforming Europe into a highly energy-efficient, low-emission economy. By 2020 our emissions will be 20% lower than in 1990 and we will be getting 20% of our energy from renewable resources.

The aim is also to reduce the EU's energy intensity by 20% and to bring carbon capture and storage technology into the mainstream within the same timeframe. No other part of the world has such ambitious targets and the measures in place to meet them.

Against the backdrop of an unprecedented financial crisis, the next few months will be decisive for reaching a post-2012 climate agreement in Copenhagen. This agreement probably represents the world's last chance to bring climate change under control before it is too late.

And it falls onto the Swedish EU Presidency to take the lead and steer us through the negotiations.

I am an optimist by nature. So I honestly think the economic crisis constitutes an opportunity. It is a tremendous opportunity for Governments to reform financial systems in order to underpin the development of a green economy and sustainable development.

Investing in the development and diffusion of green technologies and renewable energy is a sustainable way to stimulate the economy and create new jobs. With a sustainable economic growth we can reinforce efforts to combat climate change while respecting development needs.

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Let me briefly turn from political substance to form. Because, after all, without the right form and the right mechanisms we won't get very far with the substance.

And since that day in February 2005 you have been a very important part of that form and mechanism – for the benefit of the substance!

It would be easy for me just to quantify our relations and mention figures. But the remarkable progress we have made together in just 4,5 years of course goes far beyond that.

But I would nevertheless like to mention two figures that I'm particularly proud of:

- Almost 400 opinions from you on our proposals in less than 3 years – a mechanism that started out as a modest experiment has become both appreciated and something we all take for granted.
- About 500 meetings between Commissioners and national parliaments – that is about 10 meetings every month all year round during the whole mandate!

But has all this made any difference? Has it improved "the process of policy formulation", as we expressed it in the Citizens' Agenda in May 2006? The short answer is: yes, it definitely has.

First, if I look at it purely from the Commission's side we should not underestimate the value and importance of the "early warning mechanism" that your opinions are to us. You are instrumental in making us put our ears to the ground. Needless to say that is a great advantage to us when we later on reach the stage when we negotiate with the legislators.

And I know for a fact that nowadays civil servants and Commissioners alike, always "think national parliaments" from day one, when a Commission proposal is prepared. We know you will be very clear about your views once the proposal is there, so we had better keep that in mind when we start drafting. And we do!

And national parliaments' concerns are often mentioned by Commissioners in discussions at our College meetings.

Second, if I try to see it from the national parliaments' side, I hope it has meant that there is perhaps a bit more "appetite" for European issues. That they are more discussed and better anchored. And, not the least, that you now get more and better information at an early stage, meaning you have better possibilities to do your firsthand priority: to scrutinize your governments.

"A greater voice to parliaments is a greater voice to Europe's citizens". If that was my starting point almost 5 years ago, I am confident to say that today Europe's citizens indeed have a greater voice. And that is much thanks to our co-operation and efforts.

We have made both a political commitment and joint political gains. We should be proud of that. And don't forget – this is just the beginning!

Right now we don't know exactly what the future holds. What we do know is that the dialogue mechanism we have will be maintained. This is a firm commitment from this Commission.

If the Lisbon Treaty comes into force the Commission will start very quickly with the work to implement all the new Treaty provisions, for example the yellow and orange card procedures. They should be in place for you to use immediately when the new Treaty is effective.

But there are other things we should do as well. We have made good progress and come far in five years. But I think we should go even further. We should get better at information exchange and contacts. We should get better at openness and publication. For example, we will start Internet publishing your opinions and our replies. But first and foremost we should listen carefully to what you want – what improvements you want us to make.

As national parliaments you have great responsibilities, also when it comes to European affairs. It is you and your political parties who meet with citizens, that inform them – and each other. It is you who anchor European questions in your political discussions and in everyday issues – nationally, regionally and locally. It is you who put European affairs on the political agenda – not only once every 5 years for the European elections, but every day. It is you who make European affairs a normal, well known, understandable and interesting household item.

This is how I wish the books can be balanced.

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Chairpersons,

We have some important challenges ahead of us in Europe. I mentioned two of them: the economic and financial crisis and climate change. Some would say that's a tall order – it is.

We can only succeed by taking our responsibility and doing the job together – by letting the European Union be a "solutions united".

And the solutions will be better with active national parliaments. Anchoring and debating European affairs nationally and locally is the door we have to pass through for success. And you – the national parliaments – hold the key to that door.

I hope you feel this Commission has done something valuable to help that process.

Thank you.