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**A Europe of Rights and Results**

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Let me start by expressing my great pleasure to be here with you today. As a former member of the Portuguese Parliament, I believe that national parliaments have not only a crucial role to play in political life in general but also in European affairs.

Today's meeting comes at a very special political moment: just three days before the Informal European Council, in Lisbon. I am satisfied with the results of the IGC and fully

confident that a balanced Reform Treaty will be agreed on in Lisbon, at the end of this week. In fact, we already have a text, which closely reflects the mandate of the last European Council. I wish to pay tribute and applaud the work of the Portuguese Presidency. This is a major political achievement and we in Europe should be grateful for the way the Portuguese Presidency moved the institutional process forward.

Many people thought that it would be impossible to prevent Member States from re-opening the mandate and raising new issues. Member States proved them wrong and I also wish to salute all governments and the European Parliament for their commitment

during the IGC. This shows that we all share a strong political will to resolve the institutional issue.

Some people are not happy with the number of opt-outs. Yet, as I tend to say, this is the price that we pay for progress and for an ambitious Reform Treaty. Diversity is a central feature of the European Union and sometimes it requires political and institutional compromises. The crucial point is that, despite our diversity, we remain united regarding fundamental goals, fundamental values and fundamental principles.

Today, before you, I want to talk about a Europe of democratic rights and results.

## **[A More Democratic European Union]**

With the Reform Treaty, we have a more democratic European Union. Compared with the Nice Treaty, there are four areas of clear progress. First of all, thanks to the efforts of the European Parliament and of the Commission, a clear definition of what European citizenship means is now included in the Reform Treaty. I believe that the issue of European citizenship is a central concept in a democratic European Union.

Secondly, the Reform Treaty gives legal force to the Charter of Fundamental Rights. The Charter will be a safeguard both for European citizens and for national institutions, and will

be a central part of the system of checks and balances in our Union of law. There is now also a consensus among Member States to formally proclaim the Charter sometime between the political approval of the Reform Treaty and its signature. The solemn dignity of the Charter will thus be properly recognised.

Let me take this occasion to say a special word on the crucial significance of the notion of European citizenship and of the Charter of Fundamental Rights. What unites all Europeans is democracy and citizen rights. We speak different languages, we are the product of different cultures, we follow different religions, or none, we favour different policies on many issues, but on a set of fundamental principles we share the same

beliefs. This is Europe in 2007: a continent of democracy, freedom and rights. All Europeans should be proud of what we achieved. And we will say it, together, when we approve the Reform Treaty and the Charter of Fundamental Rights.

The third case of democratic progress is the greater role given to the European Parliament in the legislative process of the Union. With the Reform Treaty, the vast majority of European laws will be adopted jointly by the European Parliament and by the Council.

The fourth and final advance introduced by the Reform Treaty regards the rights of national parliaments. The Treaty reinforces

the principles of accountability and subsidiarity by increasing the role of national parliaments.

This is established in two protocols attached to the Reform Treaty, one on the role of national parliaments in the European Union, and the other on the application of the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality. In particular, national parliaments will be able to give a reasoned opinion on whether a draft European legislative act complies with the principle of subsidiarity within eight weeks after its transmission. There are two mechanisms enshrined in the Reform Treaty. The Commission will then review or re-examine its proposal in light of the concerns expressed by national parliaments.

This Commission has always welcomed a greater role for national parliaments. Despite the setback of the Constitutional Treaty, we nevertheless went ahead with measures to closer associate national parliaments to the European political process.

In May 2006, I announced the intention of the Commission to transmit its new proposals and consultation papers to the national parliaments, inviting them to react so as to improve the process of policy formulation. Since September 2006, this new Commission mechanism has been working in a smooth way. The Commission has received 138 opinions from 24 national parliaments on 67 of its proposals. Our analyses so far of the results led us to draw a very positive

assessment of this new process. Our contacts with national parliaments suggest that they have found the new mechanism useful in three ways: it provides an opportunity for them to take a more pro-active attitude about European issues; it reinforces the right of information; and it allows them to better scrutinize their own governments. The interest of national parliaments in using this new mechanism is also proof of their commitment to the European Union.

Other Commissioners and I have visited, discussed and given speeches in national parliaments. Indeed, I have committed myself to visit all of the national parliaments during my mandate, and I have already visited more than half of them. We have also presented our

work programme to national parliaments. I can safely say that no other Commission has had such frequent and systematic contacts with national parliaments. This is due to my strong belief in the principle of subsidiarity, itself a reflection of three central values of European construction: liberty, pluralism, and respect for national political processes.

In this sense, the Commission is pleased to see that national parliaments will be more involved in the application of subsidiarity. At the same time, it is also positive that the institutional balance of the Union is preserved in the Reform Treaty.

The democratic progresses that I just discussed answer many concerns of

European citizens. The majority of Europeans wish to live in decentralized and pluralistic societies, where their rights and their diversity are guaranteed by the rule of law. To consolidate such aspirations, the Reform Treaty will introduce the notion of citizenship, will give legal force to the Charter of Fundamental Rights and will reinforce the principle of subsidiarity and the role of national parliaments. Contrary to what some say, rather than reinforcing the 'power of Brussels', the Reform Treaty will strengthen the rights of European citizens and the democratic accountability of the Union.

## **2. [A Europe of Results]**

Just over a year ago the Commission adopted an approach which I called the "twin track approach". The first track is for the European Union to use the existing Treaties more effectively to deliver results for Europe's citizens. This we have done, for example, through our package of measures on energy and climate change, through our focus on innovation, on growth and jobs and on economic competitiveness, through our drive against red tape, and through legislation which delivers benefits for consumers in many areas.

The second track is the institutional one. To celebrate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Rome Treaty, the Commission proposed a political declaration about Europe's values and

ambitions. The result was the Berlin Declaration. According to the twin track approach, "the declaration should serve as the basis for decisions by the European Council to launch a process designed to lead to an institutional settlement". This was achieved last June, with the mandate for the Reform Treaty.

In short, Member States accepted and followed what the Commission proposed. Why? Because the twin track approach is the right approach. Governments and citizens have the confidence to tackle institutional issues if they have confidence in the institutions to deliver on their concerns, such as growth and jobs, and the new agenda, such as energy and climate change. As the

most recent Eurobarometer demonstrates, the support for EU membership and the perceived benefits of membership have considerably improved during the last two years.

The Reform Treaty will also reinforce the European Union's capacity to deliver results to Europeans. I have said on many occasions that the reinforcement of the European Union's capacity to act would be the crucial test. I would like to stress, in particular, three areas where the Reform Treaty will bring important advances on our capacity to act:

**First**, the most substantial advances are in the area of justice and home affairs. The more than 40 cases of Qualified Majority Voting in the Reform Treaty include external borders

control, asylum, immigration, criminal law and police cooperation. The Treaty will also fully integrate these areas in the Community method of decision-making. This is a fundamental reform, which will create a true space of freedom, security and justice in Europe, with the exception of those Member States that decided for opt-outs, and it will be a priority for the Commission.

**Second**, the Reform Treaty will offer new possibilities and reinforced legal bases to deal with the challenges of energy policy and climate change. In particular, the Commission is very pleased with the solidarity clause on energy security, and the agreement to add combating climate change to the Treaty. Energy security and climate change are now

core priorities for the Union: it is right that this is reflected in the new Treaty.

**Third**, the Reform Treaty will reinforce the Union's cohesion in external affairs. In the 21<sup>st</sup> world, it is only by combining the forces of our Member States and of our institutions that we can compete with other leading great powers. Our internal prosperity, our freedom, and our security depend on the capacity of the European Union to compete and to act decisively at the global level. The Union will be able to behave in a more cohesive way in diplomatic, security and defence issues, in trade, in humanitarian aid, and in development, and as such will be better equipped to defend our values and interests in world politics. We will have the conditions and

the instruments to shape globalization, and we cannot miss such a historical opportunity.

In this light, the Commission approved a paper, "The European Interest: Succeeding in the Age of Globalisation", that will be discussed in the Informal Council. This paper defines the European interest and how to deal with the challenges and the opportunities of globalization. In short, a paper which sets the route to promote the interests of European citizens and to deliver results for Europe.

European citizens are concerned about violent and extremist threats to their personal security, and about the social and economic instability caused by illegal immigration. To answer these concerns, the new Treaty will

develop the Union's capacity to act in the area of justice and home affairs. Energy security and climate change are also at the top of our citizens' preoccupations. The latest studies of public opinion confirm this. The Reform Treaty will give the Union legal bases to address these questions.

European citizens want the Union to shape globalization and to be able to defend their interests in world politics. The Reform Treaty will reinforce the capacity of the Union to be an influential political actor in international relations. Therefore, we can once again say that the Reform Treaty addresses the concerns of European citizens. They will be the great winners of the new Treaty.

After the Informal Council, Member States need to ratify the Reform Treaty. We need to explain to the European public why this Treaty will be a necessary and positive step forward. And national parliaments have to play an important role in engaging with European citizens during the ratification process. The Reform Treaty is indispensable, not for the sake of transforming institutions, but because it will reinforce the capacity of the Union to meet the challenges of the 21st century. Indeed, the Reform Treaty will be a crucial step for a Europe of more rights and better results.

