

**SPEECH BY VICE-PRESIDENT WALLSTRÖM
COSAC CHAIRPERSONS MEETING
LUXEMBOURG, 9 FEBRUARY 2005**

Structure:

- Introduction + Commission's targets for relations with national parliaments
- Partnership, role for national parliaments
- Summary of the content of the strategic objectives: prosperity, solidarity, security
- Work Programme 2005

Chairman, honourable chairpersons,

Let me first of all thank you for giving me the opportunity to come and meet you. I believe this is the first time a Commissioner is invited to a COSAC Chairpersons meeting, and I hope my being here, and what I'm going to say, will not put you off from continuing this new practice.

I believe we can only benefit from meeting each other – the Commission and the national parliaments together with the European Parliament.

This Commission – inspired as it is by the strengthened role foreseen for the national parliaments within the Constitution – this Commission has set itself the priority of reinforcing its relations with the national parliaments [and the European Parliament] and through/together with them communicating our message to the Member States.

This very important objective is an integral part of a culture where European institutions at large work together. And moreover, it is also a communication tool for increasing a shared ownership of the European project, by connecting with people and their elected representatives.

At the Commission meeting just a few hours ago, I presented to my 24 colleagues my aims for the Commission's relations with the national parliaments. And I can think of no better opportunity than now to present these ideas also to you.

As you know, this is the first time in the Commission's history that we have a Vice President with the special task of our relations with the national parliaments. I am very happy to have been given this important responsibility. And I think we have to act quickly and efficiently. That is why I this morning presented a set of short and long term goals.

I know you are expecting me to speak on the Commission's Strategic Objectives and Work Programme – and I will come to that shortly. But let me take this opportunity to present to you – as the first ones outside the Commission's meeting room – let me present to you the targets the Commission has set for our relations with the national parliaments.

1. As you may know, I intend to visit all the national parliaments of the Member States; hopefully during this year. I will also go to the EU Speakers Conference in Budapest in May, and I hope we will have the possibility to meet within this "COSAC context" again fairly soon.

2. I will issue an annual information report on the Commission's relations with the national parliaments (stocktaking and perspectives; fulfilment and planning of short and medium term goals).
3. I have asked that all Commissioners, as well as Commission officials, should strive to be accessible and prepared to assist national parliament committees in their enquiries into EU policy.
4. "The Commission should start by listening", and therefore we will seek to establish, in detail, the national parliaments' requirements for types of information and ways of co-operation. We will do this in order to avoid moving in any such direction that could be perceived as circumventing the national parliaments and the citizens.
5. The Commission administration will produce a regular newsletter – to be distributed internally as well as to the national parliaments and to the European Parliament – highlighting current Commission activities regarding relations with the national parliaments and, possibly, selected information directly from the national parliaments.
6. My Office and the Commission administration will seek to maintain close contacts and exchange information with the existing network of EU affairs liaison officers in the national parliaments and with the national parliaments permanent representatives in Brussels.
7. The Commission should also play an active role as "facilitator" in the important work of the electronic exchange of EU-related information between the national parliaments, for example via the IPEX co-operation.

8. The Commission should do what it can to facilitate the work foreseen in the *Guidelines on interparliamentary co-operation between parliaments in the European Union*, adopted by the Conference of EU Speakers in the Hague in July 2004.
9. The already successful organisation by the Commission administration of information meetings for national parliament civil servants on specific (technical) topics should be maintained and increased, if such requests are made.
10. The Commission Secretariat General will designate a service/person to be the main contact person and co-ordinator for requests directly from national parliament administrations.

These are the short-term goals. And by short term I mean that they should all be implemented during this year: 10 concrete goals for this year.

When talking about the long-term goals, we have to keep in mind that the Commission is very much depending on your input – the national parliaments' views and ideas. In a serious undertaking like this, we can not define in detail any long term goals until we have heard the views and processed the requests from you. This is because we want to nurture a climate of openness, mutual respect and attentiveness to each other's constitutional prerequisites.

Moreover, once concluded, the outcome of the Constitution ratification process will of course have to be taken into due account.

However, in broad terms, in the long-term perspective, the Commission's relations with the national parliaments should take its starting point in three key objectives:

1. **Mutual service – a continuous and open dialogue**: we are interested in and depending on each others views and possibilities in order to perform our respective tasks in an efficient, open and transparent manner;
2. **Concrete networking**: make full use of each others expertise at political as well as administrative level, always in line with current Treaties and national constitutions;
3. **Connecting with people and their elected representatives**: a greater voice to parliaments is a greater voice to Europe's citizens.

This is how I see the future – this is how I hope we together can embark upon an interesting and challenging journey.

But now let me get back to what I originally was supposed to talk to you about: the Commission's Strategic objectives and Work Programme.

The strategic objectives adopted by the Commission last month are subtitled "Europe 2010: A partnership for European renewal". This was a carefully chosen title. Objectives cannot only be about what the Union should do, but also how they should be realised.

We need to be realistic about the concerns expressed by citizens: that the EU is often seen as cut off from everyday realities, and as expending its energy on institutional reform.

The EU has many different actors, many different tools, many different responsibilities. When everything points in the same direction, we can achieve a lot. The Single Market, the Euro, enlargement – these were huge steps which succeeded by harnessing a real consensus. For Europe to be where it should be by 2010, we need to act together. We need a partnership for European Renewal.

Renewal because the challenges ahead need a fresh approach and renewed energy. Partnership because it is all too clear that we need to work together to be effective.

Partnership cannot be confined to Brussels: we need to engage with actors across the Union, with civil society, with social partners – and, of course, with the national parliaments.

From the start, this Commission has stressed the importance it attaches to stepping up our relations with national parliaments. A vigorous debate on EU issues in the key national political fora is essential if we are to stimulate the interest of citizens and engage them in the Union's work. I and my colleagues look forward to maintaining this dialogue over the next five years.

I hope the aims I just presented to you clearly show just that.

More coordination, more consultation, better implementation: the Union's work needs to meet higher standards to ensure quality and reinforce legitimacy. Better regulation means that initiatives should be thoroughly prepared, using tools like impact assessment, and as simple as possible. As the Strategic Objectives say, the Union must work well, and be seen to work well.

There are two key steps which are needed if the Union is to work well. First, the adoption of the Constitution is critical to the democracy, transparency and effectiveness of the Union: we need to work together with the Member States and your Parliaments to make the Constitution a reality. Second, the Union needs sufficient resources to give it the means to deliver on its commitments.

The Commission believes that common ownership of the Strategic Objectives should be the first step in this partnership. The Constitution provides for a fully-fledged system of programming to be shared by Parliament, Council and the Commission. Once the Constitution comes into force, this will allow us to rationalise the 3 institutions' programming into a single system – and help national parliaments to track the Union's work. But without anticipating ratification of the Constitution, it can also inspire us to start working together.

At a time where our institutions are perceived to be cut off from citizens' concerns, are seen as divided or even in conflict, we must show that we are working towards the same goals. Prime Minister Juncker has noted that the contents of the Strategic Objectives already echo the Council's Multi-annual Strategic Programme. It also mirrors European Parliament resolutions. The three institutions should therefore be able to find the

right vehicle to give a public demonstration that we share the same approach.

Prosperity, Security and Solidarity

The Strategic Objectives distil Europe's aspirations into three key goals: prosperity, security and solidarity.

1. The primary focus is on **prosperity**. It is the cornerstone on which the European model of social solidarity and sustainability is built. Prosperity does not mean focusing only on economic growth, only on competitiveness, or productivity. The Treaty provides for sustainable development to be the framework of all EU policies. This will therefore underlie all our work. And lasting prosperity is only possible in a climate of solidarity and security. But in the present context of declining growth, our first task must be to help restore growth and create more and better jobs. Unemployment is far too high, and European citizens have too many skills and too much potential for this to be squandered in poor quality jobs.

If we can work together, the Union has the potential to offer a new dimension to European growth and employment: with an environment which stimulates enterprise and innovation, and investment in the key drivers of growth, we *can* make a real difference.

2. The next strategic objective is **Solidarity**. This means:

- Economic solidarity: Cohesion policies must remain at the heart of how the Union works – in the wake of enlargement, it would be

perverse to retreat from our obligations. The key to this, of course, will come through an agreement on the Financial Perspectives.

- Social solidarity through a revised social agenda offering a safety net and a springboard for change. This also means the promotion and defence of European common values. Europe has a special responsibility to fight against discrimination, protect cultural diversity, and guarantee fundamental rights
- Solidarity in preserving and developing the environment around us, with action on climate change and to preserve our natural resources. Immediate action to cope with the damage inflicted by climate change and irresponsible resource management must be at the forefront of our agenda. These are major threats to the stability and prosperity of European society, and must be tackled together.

3. In addition to prosperity and solidarity, we have identified **Security** as our third priority. Citizens increasingly look to the European Union to find solutions to tackle the risks they face in their daily lives.

For freedom, justice and security, the Hague programme has given us a roadmap to move ahead: but we need to bring this work to completion. Prevention and the fight against crime and terrorism must remain a top priority for the following years.

But there are other security concerns that affect our citizens' daily life. Natural disasters, environmental or health crisis, transport and energy threats have a direct impact on citizens' security and well-being. The

Union has a role to play both in reducing risks and offering rapid response.

The rapid deployment of European aid in the wake of the Tsunami disaster showed how common intervention by the Union can be swift, effective, and efficient.

4. Finally, Europe's values and goals have an application and relevance far beyond Europe's frontiers. Prosperity cannot be divorced from economic relations with our partners. Solidarity requires a European response to help in crisis situations worldwide. And it is all too clear that security can only be tackled through international cooperation.

The Objectives highlight a number of areas for action: in the first place, the upcoming accession negotiations and the need to work for a stable and prosperous neighbourhood.

But partnership worldwide should also promote both effective multilateralism and effective relations with key partners. A new strategy for Africa, and injecting fresh blood into the transatlantic relationship; these are priorities for early action.

The first year of action: the Work Programme

The Commission's 2005 Work Programme is designed to be the first concrete set of measures to make a reality of the Strategic Objectives. I would like to make three points about the Programme.

- First, I know that it is important for national parliaments' own planning to have a clear idea of when and what the Commission intends to adopt. The reliability of the Work Programme is the first step. As Chair of the Commissioner's Group on Communication and Programming, I will be steering a political monitoring of the Work Programme to ensure that the Commission delivers on its commitments.
- Second, the Commission is also anxious to maintain high quality in its proposals. The Work Programme echoes many of the details in the Strategic Objectives about how the Commission should do its business. But in particular, this year all Work Programme items, except Green Papers and social partner consultations, will be accompanied by an impact assessment. This should explain how the Commission has arrived at a particular policy out of the options available; and set out the economic, social and environmental impact. National parliaments should find these of genuine assistance in understanding the thinking behind proposals.
- Third, finally, you will notice that a number of the items for adoption this year are consultation documents. This is no coincidence. The Commission is committed to full consultation on key initiatives – and to listening to the results. And one group with whom we would be delighted to step up dialogue is national parliaments. Consultation gives an opportunity to have an input in policy-making at an early stage. This gives more opportunities to influence. It leaves more time to find compromises. It makes disagreements less confrontational. I would urge national parliaments to devote energy

to taking part in these consultations and putting your views on the table at an early stage.

In conclusion, Chairman and honourable chairpersons;

Some of the headline actions for the next five years will already come forward as proposals this year. But the Commission's emphasis is on delivery. By working together, we believe that we can make the Europe of 2010 significantly more prosperous, united and secure.

I very much look forward to working in partnership with you and your fellow Members of Parliament to this end.

Thank you.
