

Lyon 2005 - European Ideas Fair Speeches

European Ideas Fair

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I will speak about the role of our parties in this construction. Our political family and our political group in the European Parliament, the EPP-ED group, shares the vision of President Barroso in his plans for the future. The EPP-ED group is in favour of economic reform. We want Europe to work, we want to harness globalisation and not to prevent it. We favour less and better regulation. We want to address long-term issues like demographic change or building a knowledge-based society. And we also believe in a united and strong west based on strong transatlantic relations. We also are in favour of a unified Europe which helps the new members of the European Union to deal with their problems. The agenda of the Commission, or the President of the Commission - not accidentally because he is one of us - is one we share.

We also want to engage in the institutional debate about the Constitution, which is a very important debate. I think that we have to finalise this project because so far, it's really one of the elements which paralyse us and prevents us moving forward. So we have to ensure a successful completion of this project.

But in the meantime those who work in institutions such as the Commission and the Parliament must find ways to make the present system work.

In my view, the Commission and the Parliament are designed to work together, much more closely than we have been doing so far. And we can provide that kind of missing - or maybe missing or presumably missing - legitimacy to the Commission because we are the representatives of the people in the Parliament. We are directly elected. In that sense, we are the link between the citizens of Europe and the European institutions. And here comes the role of the political parties. If you really want to maintain long-term goals, we have to strengthen our parties. We have to make them real parties, to create a political sphere, a political public, because so far we are very often limited to the inhabitants of the Brussels village. And in that sense the Parliament is the institution, together with the Commission, that can remove a lot of political blockages and obstacles. So in that sense too, strengthening the parties is a very important thing.

And if we go deeper into some political aspects of this story, then in the history of mankind, in the history of democracy, there hasn't been yet better transmitters or mediators invented between citizens and institutions than political parties. In that sense we should be braver, in the Parliament, and in the Commission, to lead on these issues. The Christian Democratic parties in the history of Europe were always at the vanguard of the European construction. We have our ideas, although I wouldn't say that we are alone in that, but we should take and build on that legacy, and we should remain the most important force which mediates between the public and the institutions.

We talk a lot about communication; that there is insufficient communication and so forth. I think it's partly a question of communication. If there is no European public sphere, the communication gets much more difficult because these are national debates on the different issues. But at the same time it's not only communication. The European Union hasn't yet invented the approach which reaches to the heart of the people. The symbol of our political group, the EPP-ED group, is a heart, but nation-states, national governments can create this link. On the European level we are only in a preliminary phase.

For young people, moving from one country to another or studying elsewhere, being a common European is common sense. It's not like my generation, or the older generation. So in this sense we really have to create the links and the identity points of our common values, also in an emotional way and not only in the practical way.

Europe's success is due to very pragmatic approaches, and great EU developments. But we are at a very dangerous stage. If we fail to create this kind of identity through our values, through our traditions, through our future perspectives, then we will lack this kind of popular support in the future and then the political elites who are in the vanguard of building and creating the European construction may lose this battle for popular support to the populists and other anti forces.

So I think in this sense the political responsibility of the parties is very important inside both the Commission and the Parliament to help each other and give impetus and energy to a real leadership in Europe.