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Opening remarks at the European Parliament Hearing

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

European Parliament Hearing

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I am delighted to be with you this afternoon and discuss how I intend to act as the EU's first-ever double-hatted High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President of the European Commission.

As you all know, I have the highest esteem for this House. Close co-operation with the European Parliament will be a key part of my new responsibilities.

The Lisbon Treaty is now in force. This is a moment of tremendous opportunity. It offers the promise of many things that the citizens of Europe - and members of this House - have long wanted.

A more democratic Union. A more effective Union that delivers results in the areas that matter most to citizens, including the economy. And above all, a stronger and more credible European role in a fast-changing world.

Big power shifts are taking place. New crises are popping up every day. We have to ensure that our response keeps up. I say "we" deliberately, as this is very much a collective European responsibility.

Like many of you, I am convinced there is a clear call - inside the EU and around the world - for greater European engagement. To promote peace, protect the vulnerable, fight poverty and address the many problems of our time.

We have to answer this call. Combining leadership and partnership. Defending our values and promoting our interests. Listening to what our partners say. And making sure that when we speak, our voice is heard.

This is exactly what I intend to do. With the help of all of you in the European Parliament. Working with President Barroso and other colleagues in the Commission as a team, with all Ministers in the Foreign Affairs Council and appropriately with the President of the Council.

I know my new role entails enormous responsibilities. And we all know that results do not happen by themselves or by merely stating our views. They flow from choices we make and actions we take.

So we owe it to our citizens and those around the world that look to Europe for help, that we seize the opportunities that the Lisbon Treaty offers.

One of the biggest tasks flowing from the Lisbon Treaty is the creation of the European External Action Service. This will be a top priority for me. Let me tell you why.

This is not just a bureaucratic exercise. But a "once in a generation" opportunity to build something that brings together all the elements of our engagement – political, economic and military – to implement one coherent strategy. That is my vision.

We need to create something that adds value for citizens to what our member-states are already doing and that gives non-Europeans a reliable partner. We need the best and the brightest working for it. From all relevant backgrounds in the Commission, the Council Secretariat and the Member-States. We should also consider opening this further in the future.

Work has begun and I am personally stepping up preparations, so that I can present a proposal to allow a decision by the Council in April.

In all this, the European Parliament has a crucial role to play. You have already made some contributions. And I look forward to working closely with you, right throughout the process.

But while we are creating the Service, we also have to tackle the immediate issues that confront us.

We need to be active and operational both on the global issues, where Europe is expected to play its full role. And in our immediate neighbourhood, where we are expected to take the lead. As Chair of the Foreign Affairs Council I will try to ensure that we live up to these expectations

Afghanistan and Pakistan, Iran, the Middle East, Somalia and Yemen are clearly some of the top priorities. I have already taken part in the NATO Ministerial on Afghanistan which also provided a good opportunity to meet with NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen. We agreed to work pragmatically for a very effective EU-NATO partnership.

I intend to travel to Washington soon, to discuss with Hillary Clinton and other top US officials how we can pull together our strategies and actions on the global issues. And I hope to visit Moscow and Beijing soon thereafter.

On the Middle East, I will be meeting tomorrow with Senator Mitchell and Tony Blair and I intend to travel to the region as soon as possible.

On Iran, my services are in close contact with all the relevant actors, including the E3+3. We need to decide on next steps in light of Iran's refusal to accept its international obligations.

Alongside these global issues, we as EU have primary responsibility for our neighbourhood. This is important per se. But our wider international credibility also depends on how we interact with our immediate neighbours.

This means promoting genuine political reforms in the Western Balkans and making sure the whole region succeeds on its path of eventual integration in the EU. We have taken positive steps on visa liberalisation with Serbia, Montenegro and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. In addition, we need an effective strategy to overcome the political stalemate in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Beyond the Balkans, I intend to play an active role in Ukraine, where Presidential elections are looming and clear European interests are at stake, including on energy. Belarus, Moldova and the countries of the Southern Caucasus also call for active EU engagement.

The wider Mediterranean region similarly is a top priority. There are deep historical ties and common interests that bind us, as well as common problems including illegal migration. We need to take forward the work started under the Union for the Mediterranean.

Beyond our neighbourhood to the East and South lie Continents of crucial importance to Europe: Africa, Latin America and Asia. In all these we must remain engaged with creativity and determination.

Apart from these regional issues, I intend to develop on-going work on some thematic issues: non-proliferation, counter-terrorism, human rights, energy and climate change. These are not "stand alone issues" but part of our broader agenda. And our strategies for dealing with them need to be joined-up and comprehensive.

The same applies to our crisis-management operations under what is now called the Common Security and Defence Policy. I know many of you have a clear interest in these missions and agree with me just how important they are.

They save lives. They create the space in troubled areas for politics to work. They are a crucial part of what Europe is doing on the ground.

We need to build on the progress made in recent years, making sure that our missions are well-staffed, well-equipped and well-led. So that we are ready to take action whenever our engagement is needed.

Finally, a word on international partnerships. The complex problems of a global world require comprehensive, multilateral responses. For me, this is what the notion of sustainable security is about.

To achieve this, we need effective partnerships with all relevant players: the US, China and Russia. But also Turkey, Japan, Canada, India, Brazil and South Africa. With the UN, NATO, the African Union and many others.

Nurturing these partnership will be a big part of my day-to-day work. So that we have the necessary relationships to forge effective responses to individual challenges. But also to build the rules-based international system that we seek.

Members of this House,

I see this as a unique moment in Europe's journey. Above all a moment of opportunity. We need to be ambitious and result-oriented. Making sure that our words are backed up by actions. The Lisbon Treaty give us the tools.

This is very much a team effort. My job is to try and pull it all together and provide impetus and leadership.

Clearly, active public support is essential. That is why I will be accountable to this House, whenever the Treaty has provided for it.

Furthermore, I am keen to promote wider debates across our Union on all these issues.

I look forward to your questions and our debate.