

Address by Pat Cox on the future of the enlarged European Union (Strasbourg, 19 November 2002)

Caption: Opening address given by Pat Cox, President of the European Parliament, to the MPs of the EU applicant countries during the European Parliament's Historic Enlargement Debate held in Strasbourg on 19 November 2002.

Source: Opening Address by Pat COX to the European Parliament's Historic Enlargement Debate: "The future of the enlarged European Union" (Strasbourg, 19 November 2002). [ON-LINE]. [s.l.]: European Parliament, [10.12.2003].

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Last updated: 10/06/2014

Opening Address by Pat Cox to the European Parliament's Historic Enlargement Debate: "The future of the enlarged European Union" (Strasbourg, 19 November 2002)

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

President of the European Council,
President of the European Commission,
Excellencies,
Colleagues and Members of the European Parliament
Members and colleagues from Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia

My fellow Europeans,

Enlargement of the European Union is our greatest political priority at this time and a priority which has dominated much of the work of our Parliament and most of the focus of my presidency of Parliament since last January.

This unprecedented gathering of parliamentarians in Strasbourg today marks a special moment on our shared pathway to our old continent's rendez-vous with an exciting new chapter in our history - the first such gathering ever before an enlargement.

I warmly welcome our visiting parliamentary partners from the Accession States. I am deeply touched by your presence and by this moment, imbued as it is with the feeling that your time has come.

Today is not yet a premature celebration of what is but rather a foretaste of what can be. Today we rehearse tomorrow's reality.

As politicians we are challenged before history successfully to conclude this truly continental scale act of reconciliation and healing.

As parliamentarians we are challenged to give leadership, to win the calculus of public consent in the Member States and the Accession States alike. There is no public relations or information campaign substitute for real politics based on conviction and reason. Now is the time for politicians to repossess the enlargement agenda from the experts who have prepared the way.

I thank the European Commission for their leadership, expertise and dedication on behalf of the European Union. From now on, we the elected parliamentarians must play our part.

I thank the Danish Presidency and their predecessors for their determination to succeed and wish our Danish colleagues a successful and positive conclusion at Copenhagen in December.

The new momentum

Recent events have accelerated the inclusive and irreversible process of enlargement. There is a new momentum since the month of October.

On 9 October the European Commission -in the Plenary of the European Parliament- announced that ten candidate countries were ready to join the European Union in 2004.

On 19 October this momentum took very real form. As an Irish European, I am very proud to remind you that after a very active campaign, the Irish electorate gave an emphatic "yes" to enlargement - and metaphorically removed the last brick from the Berlin Wall.

This momentum carried forward to the Brussels European Council at the end of October which paved the way for a viable compromise.

Today is a further step forward.

This was the Parliament that set a timeframe for completing the first wave of the next enlargement, namely that it should be in time for the new Member States to take part in the next elections to the European Parliament in 2004, a prospect which soon awaits ten new Member States.

As for the others, let me repeat today what I told the National Assembly of Bulgaria and the Joint Houses of the Romanian Parliament last week: The fifth Enlargement of EU will come in two waves. It is inclusive and irreversible. There should be no new preconditions. It is my personal wish that this House and that the European Council in Copenhagen will commit the European Union to a headline date of 2007 for the membership of Bulgaria and Romania. I believe it is part of a moral and political contract, it can be an anchor of stability.

Such a target can enhance the necessary transformation still to be achieved by those states and, subject of course to their delivery of what is required, adds for them a real incentive to accomplish the necessary change.

Last week Kofi Annan's United Nation's plan for Cyprus offered an historic challenge. He has provided the people of Cyprus with a once-in-a-generation opportunity for a comprehensive settlement, and the best chance after decades of deadlock to advance and enable a united Cyprus to join the European Union.

It is now up for the leaders of both communities to seize this unique opportunity. It will require all the considerable reserves of wisdom and political and moral courage of which President Clerides and Mr Denktash are capable. After a lifetime of dedicated service to their respective communities, I do not doubt that they will seek to rise to the task: let me tell them clearly from this historic parliamentary gathering today that they can count on the full support of the European Parliament going forward.

In this context, it is a pleasure for me to give a particular welcome to the representatives of the Cyprus House of Representatives, sitting here in the Chamber, and also, to our guests from the Turkish Cypriot community sitting in the Gallery.

As you know, the Grand National Assembly of Turkey has just recently reconvened after that country's general election and has yet to nominate its delegates to the Joint Parliamentary Committee with the European Parliament. We look forward to meeting them at an early date.

Meanwhile I am pleased to inform you that the leader of the AKP, Mr Erdogan, is expected in Strasbourg later this week.

2003 - The year of parliamentarianism

Colleagues,

I recall to you that this year, 2002, the European Parliament celebrated and marked a significant anniversary, that of 50 years of continuous service in the construction of Europe. Appropriately, we devoted much of our parliamentary effort in 2002 to supporting and developing the enlargement agenda.

If 2002 is the year of preparation, assuredly 2003 will be the year of parliaments - with accession treaties to be ratified, with the enlargement message to be publicly sold and with our European parliamentary engagement with Accession States to be deepened.

We parliamentarians are the ones with direct contact to our constituents. We know the aspirations and anxieties of our peoples. We must take possession of the enlargement agenda and communicate it to our

citizens. We must bring vision and give leadership. We are the indispensable democratic link between our constituents, our regions, our countries and the European idea.

That is why today is so important and why it is also crucial that our media are here in Strasbourg to cover the event. I thank them for being here in such large numbers.

European Parliament / observers

Let me recall that we will invite you the accession states to send observers to the European Parliament, with all rights of participation in our Groups, our Committees and our Plenary, except the right to vote when you have signed your accession treaty.

Your observers will come to our Parliament to participate, to demystify, to better understand and to explain to your own public how the European Union works and the better to contribute to your own public debates.

At the same time, it will give us in Parliament the opportunity to cope with Europe's new political and cultural diversity and respectively to engage in a process of mutual understanding and political socialisation.

I use that word advisedly: we cannot build our new Europe without building the human relations between us. Today is an early investment in cultural diversity as much as it is a platform for relationship building.

The wider context

Dear Colleagues from the Candidate States,

Until the past decade history robbed you of your rightful place in our European integration project. Your time is now coming.

Yours is a generation of transition and transformation that can dream of and deliver new opportunity for your peoples, by signing up to the unique democratic experiment that it the European Union and by sharing the community of values that it represents the values of pluralist democracy, respect for the rule of law, the promotion of human rights, market economy, cultural diversity, solidarity and sustainability.

Together we can build a continent wide European Union that for the first time in millennia unites us through a Europe of common values, not at the point of a sword, not from the barrel of an ideological gun, but by the free will of free and sovereign peoples.

This is the glittering prize which awaits.

Let us resolve here today to seize this special moment

- to give our leadership
- to deliver our vision
- to do our duty before our peoples guided by our common European aspiration.

Together my friends let us make history.

Thank you.