

Speech by Mr Josep Borrell Fontelles following his election as President of the European Parliament (20 July 2004)

Caption: Speech by Mr Josep Borrell Fontelles following his election as President of the European Parliament on 20 July 2004.

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Speech by Mr Josep Borrell Fontelles following his election as President of the European Parliament

Ladies and gentlemen, my first words as President of the European Parliament must be ones of gratitude. They are words of commitment as well, and words which look forward to the future - but they are primarily ones of gratitude.

Those words go out first of all to our oldest Member - Mr Berlinguer - in order to thank him for the way in which he has conducted our first sitting of the new parliamentary term, ...

(Applause)

... and, secondly, to the candidates who have offered their skills and demonstrated their willingness to serve Europe as members of this Parliament's presidency.

I am sure that I shall be able to work loyally and constructively with them as I draw upon Mr Wurtz's extensive political experience of this Parliament and on Mr Gueremek's experience of the events which have shaped our continent.

I must express my respect for, and my willingness to work with, those who - for whatever reason - did not vote for me, and my gratitude to all those who have placed their trust in me - beginning with the European Socialist Parliamentary Group, which proposed me as a candidate.

The majority which I have secured is a source of stability for this Parliament and now that the debate is over and the democratic decision has been reached, I consider myself to be invested with all the legitimacy I need in order to be able to conduct the proceedings of this Parliament, and I now call upon you all to help ensure that Parliament operates effectively and efficiently.

I should like to pay tribute to our outgoing President - Pat Cox - for the way in which he has performed his duties over the last 30 months.

(Sustained applause)

His has been a brilliant presidency: respectful towards all groups and all Members, highly active in its support for the process of European reunification and constantly mindful of this Parliament's political standing. The very existence of the Convention and the impetus which Parliament gave to its work are largely due to Pat Cox's determination to rescue the European Union from its intergovernmental 'drift' and to ensure that Parliament is indeed (as is now specifically acknowledged in the draft Constitution) the representative of Europe's people.

Having mentioned the Convention, I should like to thank the MEPs from all countries who represented our Parliament in the course of the Convention proceedings. I know from my own experience how important their contribution was. I cannot mention them all by name but I should like to draw attention to the major role played by those who represented us within the Presidium: Klaus Hänsch and Iñigo Méndez de Vigo. I should also like to mention Elmar Brok, who followed the proceedings of the Intergovernmental Conference.

(Applause)

And finally, as a member of this Parliament's presidency, I should like to extend my greetings in particular to the representatives of the 10 new Member States - and I hope that we shall soon be joined by ones from Romania and Bulgaria, which would bring to an end what Milan Kundera once described as 'the kidnapping of one half of the West'.

On the subject of that major European writer, please allow me to point out that in the film version of The

Unbearable Lightness of Being the roofs and domes which we believe to be in Prague are in actual fact in Lyons - firm evidence of the fact that the two halves of a continent which is heir to one and the same culture share a common identity.

For that reason I feel - at what is for me a highly emotional time - that democracy is not just a system of political organisation revolving around a few institutions elected by the people. Democracy - and especially our multinational and hence more complex democracy - is based on a concept of humankind which is older than any system of government.

Aware as I am of the immense responsibility which will rest on my shoulders from this moment onwards (a moment at which a passion for democracy and a passion for Europe stand together before one and the same challenge), I should like to wait until our next plenary sitting - after the summer - to set out my strategic vision for the coming parliamentary term.

I believe that to be the better course of action, for two reasons: firstly, I need time and opportunity in order to exchange impressions and draw up that strategic vision jointly with the Vice-Presidents (when they are elected) and with the leaders of the political groups. We must all contribute to a vision which is not only mine but also that of the Chamber as a whole.

The second reason is that the Council President is here today and in a few hours' time we shall be listening to the candidate proposed by the Council as President of the Commission (Mr Barroso, who will be the subject of a parliamentary vote). I believe we need a better media 'window of opportunity' than we are likely to find during these event-filled days.

As I said earlier in my presentation, it is my political responsibility to do all I can to ensure that Parliament supports the process of ratifying the constitutional Treaty, especially in those countries which are to do so by means of a referendum. We are all aware that, quite apart from this major issue, our agenda is already overflowing with matters which need to be dealt with: the new Commission, initiating a working relationship with it and the Council, considering the EU's financial prospects, analysing the current state of the Growth and Stability Pact following the recent Court of Justice ruling, future enlargements, exercising Parliament's new legislative powers and continuing the work begun by Pat Cox in association with the national parliaments and the Euro-Mediterranean Assembly.

Furthermore, many international issues will require our attention. The world will knock at Europe's door and, in particular, at Parliament's. The most urgent issues are perhaps those relating to the parlous state of affairs in the Middle East.

It merely remains for me to assure you, dear colleagues, that I will put all of my skill and determination - all of my reason and passion - into successfully performing the high-level institutional and strategic tasks with which you have entrusted me.

My final thanks are extended to all of Parliament's staff, without whose efforts all of our efforts would be in vain.

Many thanks to everyone.

(Tumultuous applause)