

Address given by José Manuel Barroso on the achievements of the Luxembourg Presidency of the Council of the European Union (Brussels, 22 June 2005)

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[José Manuel Barroso] Mr President, Mr Juncker, ladies and gentlemen, once upon a time, one of my teachers advised me always to be pessimistic because, that way, all my life, I would either be right or pleasantly surprised. To judge from the reactions and events of the past few days, pessimism would seem to be fully justified, but I must tell you that I do not believe in pessimism. I think I can say that, now more than ever, we need to show our determination. It is true that there are problems in Europe, and it is true that they are serious problems, but we must confront them and be able to find a solution. During the Luxembourg Presidency, we have witnessed the implementation of grand initiatives and innovations which will guide the activities of the European Union over the years to come. Let me start by going back, from the Commission's viewpoint, over these last six months, a period that has been marked by the experience and the European conviction of my friend Mr Juncker. First of all, we succeeded in adopting our strategic objectives for the EU over the coming five years. It was the first time that they were approved jointly with the Council and Parliament. Today, those same broad guiding principles in terms of prosperity, solidarity and security provide us with a framework, a framework shared by all the institutions of the European Union. We therefore have the opportunity for our actions to be much more effective and focused, and to be able to translate our actions into a true partnership for renewal. It is also thanks to the Luxembourg Presidency that we have negotiated an agreement on how to base the Stability and Growth Pact on a more realistic and practical foundation. This reform has neither weakened nor relaxed the pact. It has even given governments greater flexibility, via the financial instruments, to optimise growth over the economic cycle. However, the greatest success of the Luxembourg Presidency, from the point of view of the Commission's priorities, may have been the relaunch of the Lisbon Strategy during the Spring European Council. This was a step forward, not only for the institutions and governments, but also for all European citizens. It is worth remembering that, however important the interinstitutional debate is, the majority of Europeans, when they get together as a family, at school, at work or at leisure, do not discuss the possible configurations of the blocking minority in the system of qualified majority voting. What actually concerns our fellow citizens is the slowdown in the economy. Above all, they are anxious about their jobs or the difficulty of finding work. That is why we have relaunched the Lisbon Strategy: growth and employment. That is why we think that we must, all of us, the European institutions, increase our efforts in areas that directly affect the lives of our citizens. That is the route to take to reforge the links between Europe and its citizens and to respond to the concerns of Europeans. That said, there have been other successes during the Luxembourg Presidency, particularly in our external relations. President Juncker has already mentioned this: the summit with Russia, those with Canada and the United States, the better relationship we now have with our great partner on the other side of the Atlantic, all of that can be credited to the Luxembourg Presidency. During the last European Council, we primarily discussed two questions: what should we do during this period following the referenda in the Netherlands and France and what should we do with regard to the financial perspectives? First of all, the debate on the future of Europe. The European Council's decision seems to me t

to be a wise one. The European leaders decided to have a period of reflection and have opened the door to debate, dialogue and democracy. You doubtless remember that the Commission said, just on the eve of the European Council, that it, for its part, wanted to launch this debate by going, if necessary, and this is what we are going to do, to all the Member States of the EU to debate and to listen, not only to the governments, which is certainly important, but also to the parliaments, the social partners and young people in these countries. We are very proud that the European Council has given us a mandate to have a special role in this enterprise, in this debate that must be organised in each Member State, but that must also be held at European level. We are going to do that, and we hope that, at the end of this exercise, we will be able to present to all Europeans our strategic vision for Europe. What will Europe be like in the coming years, in the six or fifteen years to come? We must launch this debate without being afraid of any of the subjects, even those that are more difficult and more complex for the institutions. We must discuss not only expenditure but also our aims. We must talk about the European social model. How can we work on it in the 21st century? How can we modernise this European social model? How can we reach an equilibrium with regard to Community legislation? How can we avoid bureaucracy at European level? How can we deal with further enlargement, such that Europeans can support it and understand the importance of having a united Europe? We are sure that the European Parliament will have a contribution, a very important contribution, to make to this debate and we, the European Commission, want to work with you because we think it is necessary to build a new consensus in Europe. I shall now turn to the other main subject of last week's summit. It was very disappointing that we were unable to reach a conclusion on the financial perspective. The presidency worked tirelessly for a breakthrough and I have to say that we were near an agreement. Unfortunately, discussions on the budget have seldom brought out the best in the Member States and, sadly, last week it was no different. There are some fundamentally different views and some clear national interests, but this in itself is not so unusual. What makes the situation especially delicate is that this no solution for the financial perspective comes after two noes in two national referenda. I regret that, during the European Council, no leaders were able to show a true spirit of compromise and solidarity on that very important occasion. But it would be wrong to give the impression that we have gone nowhere as a result of last week. The committed work of the Luxembourg presidency over the last six months has brought us a long way. This is important because there is a real urgency to get an agreement. If we do not reach agreement, then there is a risk of paralysis which will have a very negative effect on our policies and on all the Member States, particularly the new Member States. I want to underline the very constructive approach taken by the new Member States. Sometimes people ask me whether it is not more difficult to be in the Commission now with 25 and very soon to be 27 Member States. Is it not a much more complex and difficult European Union? I say it is, but let us be frank. The problems we now have in Europe are not the result of the demands of the new Member States; they are not the cause of the problems we have in Europe today. When we consider the work of the Luxembourg presidency we have to say that we cannot go backwards. We m

ust build on the outgoing presidency s achievements in order to get an agreement as soon as possible. The incoming presidency has made it clear that it also intends to take these dossiers forward and we now wait with interest for the UK presidency to relaunch the process. The Commission is ready to work with this presidency and all the Member States. More work is needed. I made it clear last week that I have real problems with the downgrading of some of the policies that the Commission and Parliament have emphasised. This is particularly true of those policies aimed at renewed economic dynamism. Genuine reform comes at a price. Reducing the Commission s proposed spending in areas such as research, innovation, education or transport and energy networks will have a real policy cost. Our citizens are unlikely to be forgiving if we fail to deliver on our promise regarding growth and jobs. But let us be frank. The problem, when the Council reduced the ambition of proposal by the Commission and Parliament, and when the Council decided to follow the one per cent club , was that the areas that were particularly sacrificed were precisely those of competitiveness, growth, education, innovation and research. Cohesion was more or less kept. The common agricultural policy was, of course, maintained in accordance with the agreement made three years ago, but there were major cuts in the areas of competitiveness, growth, innovation and research. This shows the price of that famous letter from six of the Member States asking for one per cent. It is a pity that the Member States that agreed on one per cent expenditure the ones agreeing on that cannot now agree in the European Council. In fact, they were divided on the issue. It shows what happens all too often today in Europe. It is easier to get a coalition for a no vote than to get a coalition for a yes , when what we need in Europe now are coalitions for yes and not more coalitions for no . These important coalitions are needed for the project for Europe to go forward. The Commission will go on with its work and will pursue the goal of reaching a balanced agreement with the Member States. This must involve Parliament. We want to be sure that when the European Council is ready to reach an agreement it can be swiftly followed by the signing of an interinstitutional agreement between all parties: Parliament, the Commission and the Council. The negotiations will only be over at that moment. I count on Parliament s support in this respect. I do not want to underestimate the degree of difficulty nor the disagreements on priorities, but this necessary debate should not delay an agreement. This is why, even before the European Council, the Commission proposed a review clause. I was very happy to work with President-in-Office Juncker and, as he said earlier, we were discussing a review clause with the Member States. This means that, as we do not know exactly what the world will be like in 2013, we should not have an overall debate before we approve the financial perspective. On the contrary, we should approve the financial perspective as soon as possible and then arrange a meeting later in order to adapt our budget to changing priorities and the international environment. This is wisdom itself. What we cannot use now is an overall debate on priorities as a reason or pretext for not reaching an agreement on the financial perspective. However, at the same time, it is true that we should engage in a serious debate about the reform of the Community budget. We must look forward. It is also true that we should have a meeting at a later stage in order to address all those important questions. T

his is why we should keep to the deadline for the next phase of the negotiations. If we do not do this, we could fail, and it is my duty to draw the attention of this Parliament to a risk of paralysis in the European Union. We must avoid that risk. Even during this very difficult situation, we are continuing to take decisions. As President-in-Office Juncker said, after the European Council we were taking decisions with our partners in the United States and Canada. Yesterday I was in Italy for the inauguration of the European Food Safety Authority. Today the Commission took important decisions on a Green Paper on energy efficiency and a new regime for the sugar markets. We are continuing to make decisions. I promise you that the Commission does not feel any kind of inhibitions about taking the decisions or initiatives that Europe deserves. However, it is important now to engage the Council, all partners and all institutions and to move in the same direction. I ask you not to overlook the other achievements of the European Council. We have seen the endorsement of the new integrated guidelines for growth and employment and an action plan to implement The Hague Programme for freedom, security and justice. These two results address our key objectives of prosperity and security and the mainstream concerns of our citizens. The European Council also approved guiding principles for sustainable development. This should ensure continuing improvements to the quality of life, not only for current generations but also for future ones. There was also the very important decision to confirm at the highest level at a European Union summit the decisions taken by the development ministers following a Commission proposal about our commitment to overseeing development aid and our commitment to Africa. This was a very important step taken by the European Council. What follows now? Is the glass half empty or half full? As I said before, the problem is serious but we can turn it into an opportunity. Sooner or later this clarification had to come and, let us face it, we now have that opportunity. We are closer to agreement on the financial perspective than many people realise. We should also remember that never in the history of the European Union have financial packages been approved during the first round of negotiations. Therefore, I call on all the parties concerned to reflect on the consequences of deadlock and to show some flexibility. I call on all the parties to show less nationalistic rhetoric and to engage in a truly European solution. The fact remains that both the Luxembourg presidency in general and the European Council in particular have achieved much of which we can be proud. It is true that there is still much to do. Together with the Members of this House, the Commission will work for a future that confirms Europe's capacity to do business, even if the times do not call for business as usual. We will then be able to prove that the pessimists and the cynics are not always right and that there are reasons to have confidence in the future. I would like to finish with a few words for my friend Mr Juncker. Not only for Mr Juncker, but also for the whole of the Luxembourg Presidency, for the Minister for Foreign Affairs, for the Minister for European Affairs, for the diplomats and for the experts. I have been really moved to see the conviction, the determination and the enthusiasm of everybody in this extraordinary team. On behalf of the European Commission, I would like to thank you, Jean-Claude, and all your colleagues, for what you have done for Europe. I sincerely hope that I will be able to say the same thing to the next Preside

nt of the European Council. I will say the same thing if I think it, but I will not say it if I do not think it. Presidencies come and go, but the Commission remains. The Commission defends the general interests of Europe and I would say to you that the Commission, with the support of this Parliament, I hope, will continue to give its full sincere support to the various Presidencies. For its part, the Commission expects the various Presidencies to have the same vocation, the same determination and the same enthusiasm for our European Union.