

Address given by Josep Borrell to the Brussels European Council (17 December 2004)

Caption: On 17 December 2004, Josep Borrell Fontelles, President of the European Parliament, delivers an address to the Brussels European Council in which he states that the European Parliament supports Turkey's full membership of the European Union.

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Speech by President Josep Borrell European Council (Brussels, 17 December 2004)

[...]

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Before moving on to the central issue facing this European Council gathering, namely Turkey, allow me to touch upon other issues also on the agenda.

The controversy surrounding the decision on Turkey prevented the importance of your decisions on Bulgaria, Romania and Croatia from being properly appreciated. We support the efforts made in connection with Bulgaria, because they enabled that country to make a start on the road towards accession on schedule.

As regards Romania, we continue to believe that further efforts are required in order to make the judicial system more independent and to ensure that less use is made of emergency decrees and that more is done to eradicate corruption at all levels. In Parliament's view, Romania must quite clearly be subject to the same conditions as Bulgaria. I can, however, tell you that, despite the technical difficulties, Parliament will do all in its power to hold the assent vote on the conclusion of the negotiations on 13 April.

EU Human Rights Representative

Your decision to appoint an EU Human Rights Representative is being viewed with some concern in Parliament. As you know, our institution has played a pioneering role in this policy and was the instigator of the human rights clauses that are now included in our international agreements.

On the one hand, human rights have always been a central pillar of our approach to the Union's external policy, and such an appointment could enhance the importance of human rights in this work.

On the other hand, there is concern about Parliament's ability to scrutinise the Union's work in this field. Parliament has worked well with the Commission in this area and we are keen to ensure that this work continues.

How would such a representative report to Parliament on his or her work? I would ask you to consider such questions before signing up to an idea which could cause difficulties or is at risk of becoming purely symbolic.

Middle-East peace process

Last month, King Abdullah of Jordan told Parliament that a window of opportunity had opened for the peace process, but that it would be open for two years only. The presidential elections to be held on 9 January in Palestine are an important stage in keeping this process open, which is why Parliament will be sending 30 MEPs, the largest electoral observation delegation ever sent by our institution.

Ukraine

For once, the European Union has demonstrated that it is capable of showing leadership on the world stage. I think that we can congratulate the High Representative for Foreign Policy, Mr Solana. I intend to visit Ukraine after the elections and the inauguration of the new parliament in Kiev, as a symbol of Parliament's support for the democratic process.

Turkey

Parliament, in its vote two days ago, called on you to open negotiations with Turkey 'without undue delay'. Last night Mr Balkenende announced that the negotiations with Turkey will be opened on 3 October.

The date chosen is in line with Parliament's position.

I hope that Turkey will, this very day, be able to accept the conditions which you decided on yesterday.

The outcome of the vote was clear: 407 votes in favour and 262 against. However, what Parliament voted in favour of and what it rejected are equally important. Parliament roundly rejected any Plan B, any 'privileged partnership' and any other alternative to full membership. Our position is clear and final. Of course, the fact that negotiations are opened does not mean they will be completed. No one can predict the final outcome of any accession negotiations. But the objective of opening negotiations has to be full membership.

It is clear - and I know that this point has been intensively negotiated with Mr Erdogan - that the opening of negotiations implies the recognition of Cyprus by Turkey. There will be 25 countries at the table, among which will be Cyprus and Turkey.

It is obvious that if you negotiate with someone you are by that token recognising them.

Parliament has debated its position at great length. Over the last few months, the Turkey issue has absorbed almost all of Parliament's energies: we have had lectures, visits including those of Prime Minister Erdogan and Leyla Zana, independent reports, visits of delegations to the region, hearings on women's rights and human rights, and so on.

During my visit to Turkey, I found that everyone, from the authorities to the human rights lawyers, from the Greek Orthodox patriarch to the trade union leaders - everyone, I repeat - was pleading for negotiations to be opened. It was clear that the prospect of membership has been THE driving force for, and is already the guarantor of political, social and economic reform. A NO to full membership would send this process into reverse.

On the other hand, it is equally clear that the task of bringing Turkey into the EU is an enormous one, and I am not convinced that anyone I met in Turkey was fully aware of the scale of that task. Most of Parliament's report concerns what needs to be done after negotiations open. Parliament needs to forge closer relations with civil society in Turkey.

We are also faced with the major task of providing Europe's public with the necessary political explanations. If the Turkish question is perceived as a new Battle of Lepanto or Siege of Vienna, then we will get nowhere.

It is for this reason that Parliament is asking to be consulted on any proposal to suspend negotiations with Turkey. If Parliament holds the key to accession at the end of negotiations, it would be rather strange if it were merely informed of the decision taken, particularly in view of the need to involve Parliament in the task of explaining these negotiations to the general public. How would Parliament go about explaining a decision in which it was not even involved?

[...]