

## Letter from Romano Prodi to Bertie Ahern (Brussels, 24 March 2004)

**Caption:** On 24 March 2004, on the eve of the Brussels European Council held on 25 and 26 March and in the light of the terrorist attacks in Madrid, Romano Prodi, President of the European Commission, forwards to Bertie Ahern, President-in-Office of the Council of the European Union, a letter in which he emphasises the need for the EU to adopt a Constitution in order to strengthen the links between its peoples.

**Source:** Prodi, Romano, Letter to President Ahern, in view of tomorrow's European Council. [ON-LINE]. [Brussels]: European Commission, [10.05.2005]. Available on [http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/archives/commission\\_1999\\_2004/prodi/speeches/20040324\\_en.htm](http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/archives/commission_1999_2004/prodi/speeches/20040324_en.htm).

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**URL:** [http://www.cvce.eu/obj/letter\\_from\\_romano\\_prodi\\_to\\_bertie\\_ahern\\_brussels\\_24\\_march\\_2004-en-a3fb7ef0-ad03-46a5-9fd3-6c596184c6cd.html](http://www.cvce.eu/obj/letter_from_romano_prodi_to_bertie_ahern_brussels_24_march_2004-en-a3fb7ef0-ad03-46a5-9fd3-6c596184c6cd.html)

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## Letter to President Ahern, in view of tomorrow's European Council (Brussels, 24 March 2004)

Dear Bertie,

Once more the European Council is meeting in a difficult and uncertain political context and Europeans are looking to the Union to respond to present and future challenges. The terrorist attacks that struck Spain, and through Spain the whole of Europe, demand a clear, strong political response from this week's European Council.

At this time our fellow citizens expect the Union and our democracies to assume their responsibility and respond to the terrorist threat by pulling together and showing determination and firmness.

So I hope that the coming European Council will resolutely affirm our political project, our democratic values and our will to unity and progress for Europe. This is the profound political meaning of the Declaration that the Union and the Member States will issue to the Union's citizens and to the world. It involves a crucial choice to step up our joint action in the future.

Nonetheless, we cannot confine ourselves to issuing declarations. The Commission has presented numerous proposals to combat terrorism and, despite being formally adopted, they have often not been implemented by the Member States. Words must be matched by action and it is vital for the Member States to rally around this absolute priority. This political agenda must serve as our guide because a lot remains to be done in terms of stepping up cooperation between the Member States, improving the exchange of information and striking at the financial heart of terrorism.

But if we want to be effective over time, the measures we take must not focus solely on enhancing security.

In the face of terrorism, conflicts and threats to peace, Europe must be capable of looking ahead and proposing action to create confidence in the future among our fellow citizens and among all the peoples and countries that look to the Union in hope. In hope of security as well as hope of development and freedom.

That is why a decision to adopt the European Constitution as soon as possible would send a strong message of very great political importance. In the wake of the Madrid attacks, it is even more difficult to explain why the Member States should hesitate to agree on a solid pact on which to build the future and on more effective instruments for acting together. An agreement on the Constitutional Treaty will show our determination and will be welcomed by our fellow citizens. To reach an agreement at the earliest opportunity, and if possible before the European Parliament elections, the Presidency has carried out patient, careful work of preparation which has our full support. More than new texts, what is needed is renewed political will. And I want to make it very clear that what is at stake are better decision-making rules that allow us to take decisions more swiftly, and not to make this even more difficult than under the current rules.

The Union's determination to build a climate of confidence must also focus on another area that affects Europeans profoundly in their daily lives and expectations: namely, sustainable growth and employment, which is the main topic of the Spring European Council. People and businesses expect practical results that allow the Union to become more competitive, to grow at a sustained rate and to create jobs. Here too we must provide a strong response that is based on shared objectives and a common strategy.

In the report the Commission presented in January, I set out what I feel are the key priorities in promoting a return to growth in the enlarged Union. Discussions within the Council and the Member States' contributions show there is broad agreement on the Commission's analysis and consensus on the objectives and the means of achieving them.

But we must be honest and recognise that the reform process has slowed down and the rate at which the Union and the Member States are turning those objectives into practical decisions is very slow. So although there is progress in various areas, I am disappointed to note, for example, the continuing lack of agreement

on the Community Patent. More generally, efforts are needed to create a competitive, stimulating environment for research and for European researchers, Europe's scientific excellence must be enhanced, and Europe's visibility and ability to attract the best scientific minds must be strengthened. The Union can and must work to achieve this and the Commission has put forward clear proposals along these lines for the coming years. The political project for the enlarged Union is to put substance, credibility and solidity back into the Lisbon process.

Big efforts are still required if growth is to create jobs and reduce the effects of social exclusion due to current unemployment levels. Here too we must show solidarity and far-sightedness by opening our labour markets to workers from the new Member States. This is in the interest of all and in line with the principles that govern our Union.

The mid-term review of the Lisbon Strategy scheduled for 2005 should allow us to structure our objectives and our instruments better and to work out together a sounder strategy adapted to all parties, in order to bridge the gap between our solemn policy statements, our action and our results. This calls for a clear roadmap.

The Commission has put forward a clear political project for the coming period (2007-13). In the debate that will now start between the Member States and the European Parliament, I hope the Union can show it is equal to the many challenges that await us and can give Europeans confidence in the future.

The Commission supports and will continue to support the Irish Presidency fully in the excellent work it is doing in all areas, despite the difficulty of the task.

Romano PRODI