

Inaugural speech by Martin Schulz as President of the European Parliament (1 July 2014)

Caption: Inaugural speech made by Martin Schulz following his election as President of the European Parliament on 1 July 2014.

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Inaugural speech by Martin Schulz as President of the European Parliament

Strasbourg - 01-07-2014



Martin Schulz

Colleagues,
ladies and gentlemen,

Thank you for the confidence you have expressed in me. I hope that I shall also be able to gain the confidence of those who have not made me their chosen candidate today.
Thank you, Mr Iglesias, thank you, Ms Lunacek, thank you, Mr Karim, for this contest.
I wish to thank those who have voted for me.

As the first President to be re-elected to this office, I appreciate that it is an extraordinary honour. I realise that this – for this House – unprecedented step confers a particular obligation upon me, and I intend to show myself equal to it – I take it very seriously.

Our Parliament, ladies and gentlemen, is the beating heart of democracy in the European Union. We play the same role at EU level as our counterparts do at national level, our common tasks being to appoint the executive after an election, to guide its work by adopting legislation and to scrutinise its performance of that work.

One aspect of this role which has been regarded as normal and uncontroversial at national level has hitherto been lacking at European level. An overwhelming majority of Members of this House deplored this fact before the European elections and concluded that the head of the next Commission should be somebody who had previously presented him- or herself to the citizens as a candidate and stood for election.

In my language, such a person is called a 'Spitzenkandidat'. This term has found its way into many other European languages as well. It has become a European word!

As a result of this procedure, one of the lead candidates was nominated by the European Council as President-designate of the Commission last weekend and faces a vote of confidence here on 15 July. I believe, ladies and gentlemen, that this represents major progress towards a stronger position for Parliament and parliamentarism in the EU.

It is a success of which we, the Members of the European Parliament, and our institution, can justifiably be proud.

A procedure which will bring about radical change in Europe.

But, ladies and gentlemen, we still face major challenges:

The shocking level of youth unemployment, particularly among young women and men aged under 25, which is a source of desperation and hopelessness that constitutes a threat to our democracy.

The inequalities between countries and between sections of society, and above all, ladies and gentlemen, the persistent inequality between women and men are all reasons why we cannot allow ourselves to rest on our laurels.

The completion of the reforms in the banking and taxation system will require strong commitment from us in our continuing legislative work.

The negotiations with the USA on a free trade agreement will also undoubtedly involve much work and be difficult.

And I think that we have agreement across all party lines on the need for a charter of fundamental digital rights in the 21st century.

We also need a humane migration and asylum policy, to prevent any recurrence of such tragedies as we have witnessed in the Mediterranean in recent years.

We need justice for people and businesses in the internal market, and an energy policy which will make us independent, keep energy affordable and safeguard our energy supply.

Efforts to protect our natural resources and combat the threat of climate change will also remain a constant concern of ours during this parliamentary term.

There is a long list of tasks, ladies and gentlemen, that we must tackle together. And we have 396 newly elected colleagues, including many young women and men, who will surely also bring a breath of fresh air into this House: I should particularly like to welcome those new colleagues to their first sitting here.

You need have no fear that you may find yourselves short of work in the European Parliament: enormous challenges await us!

A parliament with 751 Members from 28 sovereign States, with Members representing the regions, from the Azores to the borders of Russia and Belarus, from the North of Lapland to Malta, such a parliament is, by virtue of its very existence, a place where the continent's problems are visible on a daily basis. An institution in which widely differing concerns and threats make themselves felt.

We therefore need a serious debate on the international role of the EU and our role as a parliament in this debate, as well as a debate on the international strategies to be adopted: those are matters on which we in this House should conduct a discussion to point the way ahead.

In the past five years, we in the EU have been very inward-looking because of the serious crises. Those crises are still not over, either. But dramatic things are happening around us. The civil war in Syria and the streams of refugees fleeing from it are a challenge to all of us, a challenge which confronts us daily, as do the breakup of Iraq, radicalisation and civil wars in Africa, the disintegration of whole states. We should not underestimate any of this.

We not only need to debate refugee movements and how we should deal with the refugee issue: above all, ladies and gentlemen – and what I have in mind here is the revision of Multiannual Financial Framework – we need more funds for development policy and a coherent debate on the arms trade! We shall only be able to resolve issues if we solve problems in the regions where they arise.

And this House, ladies and gentlemen, considered developments in Ukraine on innumerable occasions during the previous parliamentary term. What has happened, and is still happening, there has brought about a situation in which, 100 years after the beginning of the First World War

and 10 years after the beginning of the Second World War, people in Europe again have reason to fear the threat of war! That cannot be tolerated!

If we are serious about the EU as a force for peace, our economic power must be used politically in such a way that those who wish to trade with us accept the rule of law and are not guided by the law of the jungle. And for that reason, all those who suffer as a result of these strategies particularly need the solidarity of the European Parliament.

The way in which we can regain people's confidence is by giving them the feeling that the European Union is there for them, that it protects and strengthens them. The basis for the rule of law, ladies and gentlemen, is respect for human dignity – for the dignity of each individual, irrespective of gender, origin, skin colour, faith or life style.

This is the only fundamental principle on which a democracy can be built. The guarantee of mutual respect and human dignity must therefore guide our actions. And we here must make them the basis of our work. In this House and by means of this parliament in the EU's internal procedures, and by means of the EU in international politics. I know that the overwhelming majority of Members of this House support this position. I therefore say to you as President of the European Parliament that anyone who calls into question the rules of mutual respect and human dignity will encounter the strongest of resistance from me.

Much work lies ahead of us. Let us tackle this work in a collegial spirit, debating matters from our opposing points of view but constructively.

May I conclude by once again thanking you very personally for the extraordinary confidence which you have placed in me. I hope that I shall prove myself worthy of that confidence. Thank you very much.

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