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Introductory remarks - Pre-European Council Press Conference of President Barroso

*Check Against Delivery
Seul le texte prononcé fait foi
Es gilt das gesprochene Wort*

Pre-European Council Press Conference

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Bonjour,

Le 1 octobre, j'ai exigé dans cette salle une réponse coordonnée de l'Union européenne à l'accélération de la crise financière que nous avons dû constater depuis la mi-septembre, venant une fois de plus des Etats-Unis.

J'ai par la suite détaillé certains éléments de cette réponse, notamment dans un article publié par de nombreux journaux européens. J'y lançais un appel fort à une réponse européenne coordonnée et cohérente pour rétablir la confiance.

A la veille du Conseil européen qui se déroulera ici à Bruxelles demain et après-demain, je peux constater que la réponse européenne est en route. A travers son action coordonnée, l'Union européenne a démontré sa capacité d'agir et de présenter des solutions. Et la réponse des marchés montre que les effets positifs de ces solutions ne se limitent pas à l'Europe elle-même, mais entraînent des effets positifs pour le monde entier.

Il a fallu un grand effort pour y arriver. Le Conseil européen en sera la culmination. Je me réjouis qu'il existe désormais un consensus sur la nécessité et la substance d'un effort cohérent. C'est le résultat d'un effort commun de la Présidence du Conseil, et de la Commission européenne et aussi de la Banque centrale européenne, de la Présidence de l'Eurogroupe, et des Etats membres.

J'attends du Conseil européen la confirmation et le renforcement de cet effort cohérent.

La Commission n'a ménagé aucun effort pour y arriver. Nous avons pleinement joué notre rôle fédérateur. Nous avons instigué l'ambition commune et nous avons établi les ponts entre les différents points de départ dans nos différents Etats membres.

Cela n'a pas été facile. Il y avait des doutes, des réticences, des obstacles. Vous les connaissez d'ailleurs très bien. Mais l'impact des événements couplé avec la force des arguments en faveur d'une coordination plus étoffée s'est imposé de par un travail patient et solide.

Nous sommes parvenus à une action conjuguée entre les Etats membres de la zone Euro et les autres Etats membres. C'était d'ailleurs le premier sommet des chefs d'Etat et de gouvernement de la zone Euro.

Je suis heureux de constater que la confiance des uns et des autres dans la Commission en tant que dépositaire de l'intérêt général européen est et reste une clé de voûte pour la recherche d'une approche commune.

Et je suis content de pouvoir constater que la volonté politique des Etats membres va désormais dans la même direction.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We have now reached a comprehensive agreement and a detailed programme for the Euro area and the EU as a whole.

A programme to restore liquidity. A programme to recapitalise banks and to protect savers and taxpayers. A programme to lay the foundations of recovery and future sustainability.

It is a programme that ensures that each national response works for the rest of Europe, too.

Member States lost no time in translating this into action. Substantial announcements were made by several Member States yesterday. The combined EU effort stands at almost 2.000 billion €.

Central banks have throughout the crisis acted to provide liquidity. We have also seen unprecedented coordination in adjusting interest rates. I repeat again my full support for the role played by Jean-Claude Trichet and the European Central Bank.

Meanwhile the Commission has underpinned this programme with a number of initiatives of its own. We have acted decisively and fast. Our action is aimed at making the common action sustainable and at laying the ground for a better and more robust framework for the future.

We have provided guidance for national measures to fit with the internal market, the state aid rules and the stability and growth pact. In other words, we have provided guidance to make sure that the action of one Member State has no harmful spill-over on the others. This is fundamental for trust between Member States and also for the players in the market and for a sustainable recovery.

We have proposed a directive on capital requirements and group supervision for banks.

We will tomorrow adopt a proposal for a revised directive on deposit guarantees. It will consolidate action already taken at national level under the Commission's guidance into a common instrument. This will confirm to citizens that Europe is serious about protecting their savings, while taking action to stabilise the financial system.

We will shortly bring forward a proposal to improve the regulation of rating agencies.

We are asking the Council and the European Parliament to fast-track the adoption of these proposals.

We have accelerated the procedure for modifying accounting rules. This will prevent healthy assets being undervalued. It will ensure EU companies are not at a competitive disadvantage with companies based in other jurisdictions. The Accounting Regulatory Committee will approve our proposal tomorrow, on Wednesday.

This is an unprecedented crisis. This is precisely why it is unprecedented EU action. We have created nothing less than a Community package for financial recovery and future sustainability.

But let me be clear – this is and remains work in progress. We see light at the end of the tunnel. But we are not yet there.

I ask that all actors stay united and continue with the joint effort.

An urgent priority now must be to further deepen coordination at international level, and specifically with the USA.

The Commission is ready to help bring to fruition President Sarkozy's call for an urgent international conference.

We also need to look to the longer term.

Once we have put financial markets back on their feet, we must ensure that in the future they function properly so as to serve citizens and businesses rather than themselves.

There must be no more business as usual.

We must rethink regulatory and supervision rules for financial markets, including banks, mortgage lenders, hedge funds and private equity.

We will bring forward proposals on executive remuneration.

We must tackle short-termism and perverse incentives.

We need to remove the mismatch between European financial markets on the one hand, and purely national supervision on the other.

This is why I have set up a high level group chaired by Jacques de Larosière, former managing director of the IMF, that will come forward with more far-reaching proposals early next year.

At the same time, we will intensify the work on the Lisbon strategy for growth and jobs so that the strategy will fully address the effects of the financial crisis on the real economy.

I want to make one point very clearly. Everything we are doing, we are doing for Europe's real economy. Not to save some financial actors from their own mistakes.

Europeans need affordable and available credit. So that families can buy homes. So that workers can build up a decent pension. So that small businesses can start up and expand. So that jobs can be created. So that our leading edge companies can invest in research. For example in environmental technology to help fight climate change.

That brings me on to the other key issue for this European Council. I also expect progress on the climate change and energy package. This is not a "luxury" we now have to forego. Saving the planet is not an "after-dinner drink", a "digestif" that you take or leave. Climate change does not disappear because of the financial crisis. Tackling climate change is central to Europe's future prosperity and to preserve the quality of life on our planet. We must therefore keep to our goals agreed unanimously last year.

We need a more modern, more clean, more green, more secure energy.

I am confident that we can reach agreement, while showing the necessary flexibility. It was possible last week at the Council level on the energy and climate change package whereas some months ago some people would not have expected this. I hope the European Parliament will manage to agree now as well. It is particularly important to reassure industrial operators that they will not be disadvantaged when facing international competitors without low-carbon disciplines. I want industry to stay in Europe.

We are looking seriously at the problems of industry, especially energy intensive industries. We have been working on that for a long time. If there is one lesson learned from the financial crisis it is that, yes, we have to do more – not less. We have to accept that this package is a great opportunity for our companies. We also have to convince others to follow the same line, in particular when they are now coming closer to our position. Climate change is a global threat, it needs a global response, and it needs European leadership.

Rising energy prices and the Georgia crisis have also raised the economic and political implications of Europe's energy security. At the European Council, I will outline our plans to bring forward a detailed EU Energy Security and Solidarity Action Plan in November, as the core of the Strategic Energy Review.

This will tackle the various different strands of energy security: more reliable imports, cutting domestic demand through energy efficiency, maximising Europe's own energy production, and making intelligent use of the energy we have, to make sure that nobody goes short. For example, I will propose that we should commit clearly to making the Southern Gas Corridor, and Baltic Sea Interconnections, priorities for the EU. Tonight I have invited seven Prime Minister's to discuss how we can make concrete progress on the Baltic / Nordic dimension to energy security.

I am also very pleased that the European Council is set to bring consensus and progress on yet another issue: the immigration pact, le pacte pour l'immigration.

Here again, the Commission's contributions and efforts, together with the French Presidency, have been fundamental.

We will also use the summit to hear from the Irish Prime Minister on the state of play on the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty.

I hope this will be a stepping stone to a more detailed road-map in December.

Reality makes the case for the Lisbon Treaty everyday.

The Lisbon Treaty will increase the EU's capacity to respond to crises as well as its capacity to prevent crises through coherent and consistent policies.

To conclude, let me return a moment to the financial crisis. If we learn the right lessons, Europe will bounce back both stronger and more close-knit, as it has done from previous setbacks. Crises like this are an opportunity to understand that we need an EU response. Events have shown that no country is immune from global turbulence. Joint EU action is indispensable – not for the sake of the EU institutions, but for the sake of European citizens. Even the sceptics have been calling for more of it! I hope this lesson has been learned.

These are tough times. But there are signs that the tide is beginning to turn. Europe is showing that, if we hold our nerve and continue to work together, we can meet this challenge and emerge stronger.