

Speech by Mr Jerzy Buzek, President of the European Parliament, at a plenary discussion in the Senate on 29th March 2011 with representatives of both Houses of the Dutch Parliament

Dear Mr President of the Dutch Senate, dear Madam President of the Dutch House of Representatives, dear members of the Senate and the House of Representatives.

It is a great honour for me to deliver a short speech at the beginning of our discussion. Let me start by saying that the President of the Senate is absolutely right that we must be well aware of today's situation. We have to start to respond to everything that is happening around us. Let us not get into something like a babble. Insight into our own problems and the outside world is a matter of taking curb of something quite different. Let me say that sometimes there is a lack of information and communication, it is not necessarily so that wrong decisions are taken. That is the reason why we should be as close as possible. First of all this relates to the European institutions. Your European committee can influence European law on the basis of the Lisbon Treaty. A quite new era has begun in our European integration process. The most important thing, of course is to have a close contact with our citizens. I am quite sure that our discussion will be very clear as well.

It is also a great honour for me to be here because I realize that I am in one of the founding member states of the European Union. It is extremely important for rather new countries in the European Union not to talk anymore about old and new Europe, because now we are united and we take the common responsibility for everything what is going around, but let me say that, having been an important pillar of the European integration from the beginning, the Netherlands is still an important member today. Your opinion and your point of view could influence many other member states. You are very active and mobile. There also this big tradition in the Netherlands, called the "polder model". You know very well what it means: a triangle of negotiations. Let me remind you that I have some experience with this mode. For more than years I was very active in a trade union, not only fighting the communist system, but also conducting negotiations on behalf of workers. After that I had to take responsibility in the government. It is a very unusual combination, but you are not unfamiliar with such a combination, because one of your prime ministers had the same background.

I would like to bring up a couple of issues for discussion. The issue of interparliamentary relations is very important for the future, because we would like to be relevant. We do not only need instruments, but also the political will to use them. From this point of view I would like to say that the cooperation with your national parliament is excellent. Quite recently six committees of the House of Representatives as well as the European Affairs committee of the Senate paid working visits to the European Parliament. Why am I saying this? Because if we would like to assume responsibility for the European legislation we should contact as often as possible, at the level of rapporteurs and at the level of committee chairpersons. You have also opted to examine the Commission's annual work programme, in order to check particular proposals against compliance with the principal of subsidiarity. It is a very good idea not only to examine legislative proposals which are

ready, but also the annual work programme. So far, no yellow card was shown, let alone an orange one.

European laws must not only be passed, but also be implemented. We should cooperate on the preparation of legislation, but also on its implementation. The latter is sometimes even more important. We can only realize full implementation if we all agree to the laws we pass. We can only agree if we are all part of the decision making process. Thank you very much for your engagement. I had an appointment with the presidents of both the House of Representatives and the Senate, where we discussed all the possibilities.

Another important issue is the budget and the EU's multiannual financial framework. The discussion about this started at the end of last year. We will also discuss the annual budget for 2012. There was a lot of discussion and I am open for further discussion on this issue, because it is very important. Maybe there have been some misunderstandings at the end of last year about the idea not to reduce the European budget. There is one reason for that: 94.4% is spent on investment in the European economy. However, I understand the position of member states very well. In times of austerity measures this is difficult to understand. As you know very well, we reacted very quickly on the proposals from member states, so the figures were absolutely the same as member states proposed. It is also connected with European added value in such important areas as European research and European innovation policy. If we bring together our scientists and our companies, we can build development fantastic things. It is impossible for a country on its own to do so. Even bigger countries cannot achieve the same results. Another issue is the single market. We cannot build a single market without money. Building a good infrastructure, for instance, means developing a better single market. A single market also means that we need a common market for energy. A single market without a common market for energy is not a genuine single market. This requires investment in cross-border connections. This is also a European matter, because not all trans-border connections are commercially profitable. Sometimes, investment from the EU-budget is absolutely necessary. We know that very well from our experience.

The next issue is the European stability mechanism. Let me underline that all the measures taken to support the euro do not imply a transfer of sovereignty to the EU. They are instruments we need to prevent future crises. They reassure the markets, which is very important. However, this is not enough. We need exit strategies. This is something different from recovery. Stability and recovery are very close to each other, but exit means growth by 2,5%, 3% or 3,5%. We would like to avoid stagnation. Probably, we also need some money from the EU, for our 2020 strategy. It is an excellent exit strategy, but if there is no money from the European Union, it would probably be difficult to get started. We should, we can and we are ready to spend money to improve important things at the national level. That is absolutely necessary as well. But let us always keep in mind that in some cases investment by the European Union could be more effective.

In your speech, Mr President of the Senate, you mentioned Africa. The Dutch polder model is a model of solidarity between three institutions, representing all the citizens and the

public authorities. The dialogue between trade unions, employers' organizations and representatives of public authorities is the most important dialogue in our community. Solidarity is the first issue, but it must be grounded on responsibility. It is not possible to go ahead and to have solidarity without responsibility. This is connected with the European stability mechanism. There is also a close connection with the common foreign and defence policy. As we see in North-Africa, we are not efficient enough. It is very difficult for us to take decisions. What happens in both our southern and eastern neighbourhoods should be a wake up call for us. We were probably the first European institutions to call for the imposition of a no-fly zone over Libya, together with the Arab countries. This is the best solution, of course. I spent five days last week in Egypt and Tunisia and met the leader of the Arab league, Mr Moussa and we discussed all these problems. It is very important that your government and you, as a parliament, decided to contribute soldiers, ships and planes to the international coalition. This is part of our crucial feeling about solidarity with the innocent people who are murdered now. We remember very well our actions in the Western Balkans, for example. If we are united and if we know what to do we are much more effective. On the basis of the Lisbon Treaty we have established the European External Action Service, but now we need a common foreign policy and a common defence policy. It would mean a great step forward in our project. We need to be players, not only payers. From the point of view of development policy we are certainly the best all over the world. As a matter of fact all the development projects in Central Africa and the Middle East, especially in Gaza, are based on the European Union and its member states.

The next issue is immigration and asylum policy. This must be a common European policy. The European Parliament believes we need a joint immigration policy, so that we avoid that certain countries are overwhelmed by illegal immigrants. However, for a joint immigration policy we need solidarity among 27 member states. I also mention the issue of the Roma people, who have been European for at least eight or nine centuries. We must tackle all the problems, because we are true Europeans. We should consider ourselves as European citizens, but that is very difficult for us. Strengthening Frontex comes at a cost, but is still a common responsibility. It is not enough to strengthen our external borders. We need to channel illegal immigration, maybe through some kind of legal immigration, the same way in every member state, for instance by introducing the blue card. For this to work, we need common rules and common standards. That is where the EU can add value.

We, in the European Parliament, believe that what the EU offers in terms of common policies depends on the laws we pass and the money we spend. In order to face the challenges of the 21st century and to be successful we need to be united. With countries like India and Brazil growing in power, we can play a global role. This is necessary to defend our citizens, to fulfil their expectations and to tackle the challenges they face. We are a community of shared values, the most important of which is solidarity. Moreover, there is consensus. In the European Union we always take decisions in consensus.

The third point of the triangle, of course, is responsibility. This triangle is similar to that of your tremendous polder model. We always need solidarity, we need to take decisions in consensus, and we always need responsibility, also in our European stability mechanism.

Why do we need such a mechanism? Because responsibility of every member state is absolutely necessary.

I share these remarks with you, because on the European continent this model is one of the best concepts in practice. We need your leadership, especially the leadership of the so-called founder members of the European Union, and your readiness to deepen our integration. That is very important. We need your signal, maybe together with that of Belgian or German citizens. I say this because I come from a country which lies far away. The situation is not so bad now, but 25 years ago we still had the iron curtain. It was not easy to go to my country and from my country to your country. Today, it is no problem at all. But still we feel that you are a nation responsible for the future of Europe.

That is why, today, I would like to know your feelings about and your approach to the integration, knowing that we are going through a crisis and knowing that 80 years ago Europe was in a very similar situation. We finished up quite wrong and horrible then. We must improve ourselves. Everybody. The European parliament as well. If you have any complaints, I am open to discuss them, because we all must improve all. That is very important for me.

Thank you very much.