

Speech Mr. Jerzy Buzek at the Spring Summit for Financial Stability
Brussels - 24/03/2011

Dear President Van Rompuy,
Dear Presidents,
Dear Chancellors,
Dear Prime Ministers,

We are living through historic times. I have the feeling that history is speeding up.

Before I deal with the main topic of our meeting today, I would like to raise three brief points: the Southern Neighbourhood, the tragedy in Japan, and the future of the nuclear industry.

SOUTHERN NEIGHBOURHOOD

This burning issue was the key point of the European Council two weeks ago. It is important to say what has changed since then. On behalf of the European Parliament, I was calling for the introduction of a no-fly zone, with the broad participation of Arab states, on the basis of a UN Security Council resolution. This is now in force. The European Parliament fully supports the no-fly zone and other efforts to protect the Libyan population. This is our moral obligation.

We also believe that we need to enforce the sanctions, and make them impossible to get around. It is important to widen their scope to include the funds managed by the Libyan Investment Authority and freeze all assets of the regime.

I have just returned from Tunisia and Egypt. I met leaders of the transitional governments, and of the Arab League - where I discussed the introduction of the no-fly zone. I also met NGOs, student organisations and other representatives of civil society. I met hundreds of citizens in my walk through Tahrir Square. They told me that what Europe is doing is very positive.

The referendum in Egypt on the change to the existing Constitution has shown that a hunger for free elections and democracy exists. In Tunisia, the proposals are far reaching. I think - based on my own experience in Poland - they have a good chance to succeed in bringing about deep democratic change.

From our side, it is important to show our ability to help and to offer people and states concrete projects. In this way, we could avoid some of our mistakes, and the backward steps in democracy and economic development which we can recently observe in some parts of Eastern Europe.

As I said two weeks ago, the Parliament believes we need to implement a short, medium and long-term plan for the entire region. But, it is also obvious that our entire neighbourhood policy, both in the South and in the East, which we should not forget now, needs to be strengthened.

For the nearest days and weeks, the European Parliament is calling for greater EU involvement in humanitarian aid in North Africa. What they need now is food, water, medicine, shelter, and sanitation equipment.

The lesson of Libya is that although we have a European External Action Service, we now need to build a common foreign, and a common defence and security policy of the EU.

TRAGEDY IN JAPAN

This leads me to my second issue - the continuing tragedy in Japan. I would like to praise the response of member states and the European Commission. The reaction was quick. Rescue teams were sent promptly. But as in Haiti before, the EU can and should do better. The European Parliament has called in the past for the creation of "European Civil Protection Force" which is on permanent standby. Let us remember that such emergencies seem to happen more and more often.

In situations like these, the first hours are crucial if we wish to find survivors. Effective coordination is the added value which the EU can bring. It is time for us to look at this question again.

THE FUTURE OF NUCLEAR POWER

Dear Colleagues,

The Japanese people have shown great courage and dignity, and great organisational skills, in the face of unspeakable disaster. However, the lack of transparency by the Japanese nuclear industry is a lesson for us all. Our citizens expect much more openness.

The European Parliament held a debate on nuclear power today. We will have another one next month. I praise the initiative of the European Commission to carry out stress tests in all 143 nuclear power stations. Our European neighbours should join us in making these tests too.

We need to review our common safety standards. Even though they are voluntary and the results are non-binding, the tests have to be comprehensive. Otherwise they will not be convincing.

Nuclear power is still important for Europe. Let us not step back from any energy sources at our disposal - fossil fuels, nuclear power and renewables. Of these, renewables have to be developed most actively. First of all let us implement our Energy Efficiency Plan as soon as possible, because it is an answer for both environmental and climate protection, and for security of supply.

What Japan and Libya have shown is that external factors can have an enormous impact on energy security. We need to accelerate our work to make the EU less dependent on the outside world. We need a European Energy Community more than ever.

TREATY CHANGE

Dear Presidents, Dear Chancellors, Dear Prime Ministers,
Let me now go to the two main economic points - the Treaty change and Economic governance.

Yesterday the European Parliament, as a responsible partner, delivered its opinion on the change to Article 136 of the Treaty. We believe that a clear commitment from the European Commission to play a central role in the management of the new European Stability Mechanism is essential. The letters received both from yourself, President Van Rompuy, and from Prime Minister Juncker and Commissioner Rehn, have paved the way for yesterday's vote and a future solution. It would be helpful to the Parliament if these letters could be noted in the minutes of today's meeting.

We prefer action in this field to be adopted in the future on the basis of proposals by the European Commission - over time involving all the European institutions.

ECONOMIC GOVERNANCE

This is the last time the European Council will meet before the June deadline for the adoption of six legislative proposals for economic governance. Work is under way in the European Parliament. We expect the vote in committee in April - hopefully in time for negotiations with the Council to take place before the Easter break.

However, in order to meet this timeline, the Council will have to be more open to the positions of the Parliament. We made a good start yesterday when I invited Prime Minister Orbán to meet our six rapporteurs. Previously our rapporteurs had a good meeting with you President Van Rompuy.

The Parliament, in general, wants to make the package more ambitious. Unusual methods adopted so far work well for unusual situations, but long-term projects need the EU institutions.

The Parliament is convinced that the Commission should be responsible for overseeing the economic policy surveillance framework.

The Parliament supports the semi-automatic sanctions mechanism of "reversed Qualified Majority Voting" as proposed by the Commission. The EU needs to send a signal to the markets that it is serious in fighting for financial stability and economic growth.

We can differ in our opinions, but let me repeat once again the view of a vast majority of my colleagues in the European Parliament: the open method of coordination has never really worked. The Parliament is concerned that our Europe 2020 Strategy does not have the proper governance structure for it to be effective. The same risk applies to the Euro Plus Pact.

We therefore believe that the Europe 2020 Strategy, the Euro Plus Pact, and the European Semester should be included in one coherent legal framework for economic policy coordination.

We all know that the future of Europe's economy and our success still depends on fundamental structural reforms: pension systems, the retirement age, the labour market. These reforms are very difficult to introduce. But we will only end the economic crisis by growing out of it.

A further crucial point is to complete the single market. We look forward to the Commission's legislative proposals in this area. They should help make our economies more competitive and create growth and jobs.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The European Parliament believes in the added value of action by the European institutions. At a time of economic difficulties, political crises and even natural disasters, we need our partnership more than ever. It is the best guarantor of finding solutions which are good not just for some of us, but for all!

Thank you.