

Video message by president of the European Commission Jose Manuel Barroso at the conference “ Building Consensus about EU Policies on Democracy Support”

March 9, 2009
Prague, Czech Republic

For me democracy and democracy support are at the core of what the European Union is about, both inside our borders and worldwide. So I would like to congratulate the Czech presidency on organizing this conference, as well as the work to promote a European consensus on democracy. Article 11 of the Treaty sets it out clearly: One of the five objectives of the European Union's foreign and security policy is to develop and consolidate democracy and the rule of law and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. A European consensus on democracy will put this objective even more firmly on the table.

I want to reaffirm that human rights, democracy, security and sustainable development are closely linked. This will be an eminently political discussion. We will need to agree on what are the common elements and principals of democracies. Of course there is not a single blueprint. Just look at the variety of systems in the European Union and its member states.

And democracy is about much more than elections, more than the exercise of political civil rights. In Europe we see a strong link with human rights with our unique welfare democracy approach. Transparency and accountability are also themes with a strong European tradition. Democracy also has to come from within and needs to be shaped by the people themselves from democratic principles, but also taking into account their own traditions and their own aspirations. So Europe should not be looking to export a precise model of democracy, but to open the door in terms of political culture, democratic political culture and democratic political principles.

Europe in its own history and its own experience is uniquely placed to do this. And to do this effectively we need to use our different tools to best effect – political dialogue, development strategies, financing tools – all have a part to play promoting human rights and democracy most effectively. But before we need to persuade, to explain why we are convinced that democracy has proved to be the best way for human societies to organise themselves. And this requires vision and also imagination.

I really believe that the European Union has been a great, great actor for democracy worldwide. And let me quote to you my own experience. My generation in Portugal has made an equation between democracy and Europe. It was an indispensable condition and it is an indispensable condition to become a member of the European Union to be a democratic country. So the same applies to my generation in Spain and in Greece when our countries joined the European Union in the 80s and I know this is also shared by the central and eastern European countries that joined the European Union more recently.

So Europe is about democracy and democracy is also in Europe. And so the success of the European project as a project of political integration is also inspiring others. Also in our continent, within our borders, to consolidate their democracies, but also in Latin America, in Africa, in Asia, and so I think that we should be proud of the example that the European Union is setting for democratic promotion all over the world.

Of course we should not be giving lessons and our democracies are not perfect. This is one of the advantages of our systems. We don't pretend to be perfect. The totalitarian systems may think or they may say they are perfect. We are not. We are trying to put, all the time, more effort into

consolidating our democratic political culture. But I would like to underline the powerful example that the European Union can give to the rest of the world in terms of democratic development. That is why I'm looking forward to this conference playing its part in developing a strong vision for democracy, and to pursuing an effective strategy to promote democracy worldwide.

Thank you for your attention.