

Three priorities for Europe

Joseph Daul hopes the Portuguese EU presidency will be as successful as the German presidency in tackling the many challenges facing Europe

The Portuguese EU presidency is ambitious, since it has affirmed its desire to build a “stronger EU in a better world”. The EPP-ED group wishes the presidency all the success possible. Indeed, its success will be that of Europe’s citizens.

I have two wishes. The first is that Portugal may encounter the same success as the Germany presidency, which did a good job of preparing the ground for the months ahead. In the current European climate, the success of a presidency is not the fruit of chance, but of strong political will and well-chosen priorities. The recent successes on difficult topics like the fight against climate change and treaty reform are mostly due to the determination and the tenacity of the German chancellor and her government, and the support of several very active allies.

My second wish is that the Portuguese presidency will associate the European parliament as closely as possible to its actions and decisions. In the view of the EPP-ED, there are three areas which will enable us to say, by the end of this semester, whether or not we think this presidency has been a success.

The first point is institutional reform. For our group and particularly for EPP MEPs, the conclusions of the 21-22 June European summit are clear and definitive. It is a political agreement at the highest level which should not be put into question. It is a good agreement which builds on most of the progress made in the previous text, and it will enable the EU, if the member states ratify it by spring 2009, to take decisions in an efficient, transparent and democratic way on the real European challenges: security, growth, energy, climate, demography.

The second “hard core” of this EU presidency is the security of Europeans. The recent terrorist attacks, in the UK and elsewhere in Europe, the end of the ETA ceasefire in

Spain, and the high degree of alert of our police, military and intelligence forces show that this is a burning topic for Europe right now.

We are all aware of the reticence of most of our member states to truly cooperate in this field, but the highly organised international terrorist networks are forcing us to act fast. It is the responsibility of the EU presidency, and of all the EU’s heads of states and governments, to make our countries capable of tackling these threats.

Gijs De Vries, the EU’s anti-terrorism coordinator, left his job several months ago. Is anyone worrying about this? The means he disposed of were not sufficient to face the challenges – and they are still not sufficient. Can we tolerate this much longer?

Third and last key priority for the EPP-ED: the construction of the internal market and the consolidation of growth in Europe. Who better than the Portuguese presidency can be inspired by the Lisbon strategy? Europeans will only truly see the advantage of Europe when they see that the European social model, free movement, and the promotion of education, training and innovation are tangible realities.

Finally, external policy. Yes, our group supports the Portuguese presidency’s wish to make progress in Europe’s relations with its African partners, notably in the difficult question of managing migration. Yes, we are in favour of reinforcing Europe’s relations with Brazil, and with all the emerging countries. But transatlantic relations, which have done a qualitative leap in the last six months, must remain a key priority for Europe.

Similarly, a common ground must be found, without disowning our values, with our neighbours: the Balkans and particularly Kosovo, the Ukraine, Belarus, and of course Russia. The EPP-ED will always be on the side of those who defend the values of peace and solidarity, if they are allied with the values of courage and responsibility. ★



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