

Address given by Pat Cox on the achievements of the Nice European Council (Strasbourg, 12 December 2000)

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[Pat Cox] My Group welcomes the fact of a Treaty at Nice, and that is my point of departure, Because without a Treaty at Nice, we would be in a significant political and institutional crisis; without a Treaty at Nice, we would send a clear signal to candidate States that there was, indeed, a roadblock on the way of some serious weight, and therefore, in those terms, the outcome is to be welcomed. With regard to the content of the Treaty of Nice, as others have said here today, we must reflect, we must see the texts, we must take a measured judgement. What I *can* say in that regard is that there are parts we like and much about which we are concerned. The ambition which was carried into Nice was the greatest European ambition: in concrete terms, to face a Summit meeting now for many years, because it was the ambition to prepare the way for a continental-scale enlargement in Europe. And that is the test by which we must reflect on and judge the content of Nice. Is it capable to deliver an effective, operational, continental-scale enlargement? That was the ambition, and many in this House fear that, in those terms, it may have stopped short of what was required. But my Group has reached one definitive conclusion which others have referred to also here today. And that is the conclusion that the current intergovernmental model of deciding these things has reached and passed its sell-by date with Nice. For nine months, for more than 330 hours of preparation in formal sessions, for thousands of hours of preparation surrounding those sessions, it ended up in a spectacle where you had an extraordinary difficulty, where you were stuck, still at the end, having to try to resolve everything, because in all that had gone before, yet nothing of substance had been decided. It is not the way to do business for Europe, and, in fairness to the French Presidency, nor is it the way to ask any presidency to have to conclude such a complex process. We believe the time to change has come.

I should also like, if I could, to comment, and here one has it — of course, it's second hand — but from following the detail of what happened at Nice, about the general atmosphere surrounding the discussions. If I should take the progress which has been made in the reweighting of votes: there, this has been remarked, it is complex and difficult to explain, but more than that, the great emphasis that was coming out of Nice, in terms of the reports coming to media from different delegations, was how things could be blocked more than how things could be promoted. There was an atmosphere more of negativity to do with the great European project and vision than a positive promotion of what is deep and good about the European dream, and that is disappointing from Nice.

I want to salute the work of the European Commission, I want to salute the European fortitude of Romano Prodi, I want to salute the detailed work of Commissioner Barnier, I want to salute the European spirit to the very end, at four or half past four in the morning, of Mr Verhofstadt, the Belgian Prime Minister. But those who stood most for Europe, I think found it rather a thankless task, and that's greatly to be regretted.

And I want to say, for my Group, that when it comes to dealing with the European Commission, when it comes to the model that has made Europe achieve what we want to see, when we look at the dual legitimacy of the European process based on a Monnet method with a strong intergovernmental input, I want to say that we do not look to the European Commission and their advisers as the 'petit fonctionnaires'. They are central to our European politicians' mission, and they are central to their task.

There are, Madam President, tensions now. There is a creeping tendency towards intergovernmentalism. But the Schuman–Monnet method has helped us not only to create but to deliver the European dream, and I would say to those who trample on that: 'Do so with great caution because you trample on our dreams when you break up a method which has worked so well.' I know some sceptics don't like it, but they never will. But the substantial majority in this House believe it, and a substantial majority in this House appreciate why it has worked.

Finally, Madam President, to contemplate the next phase, 2004. I'm pleased to hear President Chirac remark: 'It will not be an obstacle to enlargement.' But I believe it will be an opportunity, and we must grasp the opportunity, also to raise the question of reforming the Council, also to raise the question of reforming the method that we carry to these important tasks, also to make sure that the Charter on Fundamental Rights becomes meaningful in terms of law and not simply in terms of proclamation, and it

gives us a real opportunity, Madam President, to address the shortcomings of Nice which so many feel are there. I've listened carefully to what Romano Prodi has said. He has said: 'Be ambitious, but temper our ambition with reality.' It's an important message, and it is understood.