

**The Danish Prime Minister's speech in the European Parliament**

**the 18 January 2012 in Strasbourg**

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Mr. President of the European Parliament,  
Mr. President of the European Commission,  
Distinguished Leaders of the Political Groups,  
Members of the European Parliament and the European Commission.

I am honoured to stand before you today to present the priorities of the Danish Presidency.

One of the greatest Europeans of our age, the late Czech President Václav Havel, said:

“For twenty years now, Europe is no longer severed in half. I firmly believe that it will never again allow itself to be divided, but, on the contrary, it will provide scope and initiative for ever deeper solidarity and co-operation.”

Havel was Europe at its best. A champion of liberty and creativity. A guardian of rule of law and democracy. A driver of progress and integration. A helping hand under the weak and vulnerable.

At this critical time in our history, it is our shared responsibility to fulfill Havel's belief in Europe. We must do our part to fulfill, and to keep on advancing, Europe's potential of peace, opportunity, freedom and prosperity.

That is the challenge facing Europe as Denmark takes over the Presidency of the Council.

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I have been looking forward to speaking to you today as Prime Minister of Denmark but also as a former member of this great, unique Parliament.

Every day, in the political engine rooms of this house, decisions are taken that form the building blocks of tomorrow's Europe.

Like in any parliament, there are lines of division and heated debates. As there should be. But what makes this assembly special is the shared commitment to Europe and its citizens that runs through the veins of the great majority of members.

You are a parliament of Europe and for Europe.

It has been truly fulfilling for me to be part of the crucial work that you do here. I was honoured to serve in improving Europeans' right of free movement in the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs and in furthering European integration as part of the European Convention that led to the Lisbon Treaty. And it was a particular pleasure and privilege to be active in achieving the changes which have significantly and rightly enhanced the legislative powers of the European Parliament.

Over the coming six months, I ask for your support, cooperation and partnership. This will be crucial if we are to achieve real progress on the heavy agenda in front of the European Union today.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I belong to a European generation that was young in the eighties. For many, it was a time of hardship with high unemployment and with limited job opportunities. Especially for the young who were also disadvantaged by cut-backs in our education systems.

We were sometimes described as “the No Future generation”.

But in Europe, we saw a path to a more prosperous and promising future. We saw leaders of vision and vigour. Like Havel.

And as the years passed, Europe delivered the conditions which

- Brought the Single Market.
- Helped to breach the Berlin Wall and promote the re-unification of Germany.
- Produced the Maastricht Treaty.
- Secured the Enlargements.

Out of the gloom and pessimism came an era of growth, progress and optimism. Europe inspired the world with a truly unique model of cooperation.

It is an achievement that we must be proud of when we recall that, in the course of just a few decades, Europe moved from being a continent of repeated conflict and division to a Union of 27 nations based on openness, rule of law and democracy.

In our Union, we have created an unparalleled framework for decision-making at the European level – the Community Method – that enables us to raise standards of freedom and fairness in economies and societies without diminishing the diversity of cultures and communities.

And the keystone of that construction is the common values of solidarity, participation and inclusion.

For us they are not only noble ideals – they are practical working realities. That is why we have built a Europe with a strong social dimension.

We aim at both prosperity and solidarity because we know that, in the modern World, they are not merely desirable, they are interdependent. In this century, even more than in the past, justice, care and opportunity are components of efficiency whilst efficiency is the vital source of investment in justice, care and opportunity. That mixture is at the core of the European success.

I draw very particular attention to it today not only to honour the past but – more important – to give confidence and guidance for the future.

No one here needs to be told that Europe is in a profound economic crisis that has rocked the very foundation of our cooperation.

Growth is low. Debt is high. Businesses are struggling. Jobs are being lost. Insecurity has become part of everyday life for millions of European families.

And because of the nature of the current afflictions, citizens throughout Europe are experiencing and will experience cutbacks and reductions.

We must confront the economic challenge with decisive action. To restore confidence in Europe. To create a new foundation for growth and progress. To ensure the long-term viability of the European model.

We owe it to all generations throughout Europe and, in particular, we owe it to our youth.

What our youth demand of us is only fair: access to the same education and job opportunities that previous generations have enjoyed. A chance to contribute to their societies and to build a secure future.

They will work for that – but they can only be sure of achieving it if we encourage and enable them. If we want them to be providers for us in the future, we must be providers for them in the present. That is the contract between generations. We must honour it with determination.

And we have to show the same steady resolve in ensuring robust public finances. Because ensuring robust public finances are the true bulwark against shortsighted speculation. The only sustainable future for our social market economies is to embrace change and increase competitiveness. The essential basis for that is stability that fosters growth, and opportunity that maximizes innovation.

Restraint in spending is not a departure from solidarity – in present conditions it is a precondition for dependable solidarity. I am certain that the great majority of people understand that, and are prepared to be part of it, if it is fairly applied. People are ready to make sacrifices – but they will not be sacrificed.

People will accept austerity with justice. But they will resist austerity that is manifestly unequal and unfair. As leaders of Europe, we must work in that knowledge and respond to that reality.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Europe's destiny is Denmark's destiny. This has been the leitmotif of Denmark's European engagement for decades:

40 years ago, Denmark was part of the first enlargement of the Community. And our partners trusted us with the Presidency the same year we became a member.

30 years ago, Denmark held the Presidency in a period of Cold War and economic uncertainty – but also in the first period with an elected European Parliament.

20 years ago, we held the Presidency at a time when the Single Market was launched.

And 10 years ago, Denmark held the Presidency when the EU fulfilled its historic obligation and united Europe.

Like now, these were crucial periods in the history of the European Union. In the coming six months, we will again work hard to move Europe forward.

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European citizens expect their political leaders to act – and rightly so. We must keep one thing in mind: Democratic politics are judged by results, not by intentions.

The Danish Presidency will work tirelessly during the next six months to ensure that the EU continues to produce tangible, useful results. Results that benefit all Europeans, young and old, students and workers, in the North and in the South.

To illustrate that, I want to highlight our key priorities:

Firstly, the Danish Presidency will aim at ensuring a responsible European economy.

That is the only path out of the crisis. We need to put Europe back on track so that we can ensure the prosperity and security of our citizens.

This requires discipline and political will from all of us to implement and comply with the new rules on economic governance. We need a modern and responsible budget. And we must bring public deficits under control.

Secondly, we will work for a more dynamic Europe.

Growth in Europe must be restored and sustained. We need to stimulate long-term growth and job creation, not least for the younger generation.

Modernising and developing the Single Market will be a key part of this effort.

And looking outward, we must do more to help our companies exploit trade opportunities with the emerging economies outside Europe.

Thirdly, we will work for a green Europe.

The EU has developed an ambitious policy on energy and climate issues. We are a leader on the global stage. But to maintain our position, and to encourage others, we need new initiatives in areas such as energy efficiency and renewable energy.

More than 20 million European jobs are linked to the environment in one way or another. There is a huge potential here. But we face a real risk that high-tech research and knowledge-intensive jobs will move out of Europe to more attractive regions.

The Danish Presidency will work hard to ensure that the center of green research and green jobs stays in Europe in the future.

Fourthly, we will work for a safe Europe.

In a globalised world, only a joint European effort will be truly effective. To ensure the safety and freedoms of our citizens. To combat terrorism and cross-border crime. To manage our borders. To establish a well-functioning European Asylum System.

Beyond our own region, the EU's voice must be heard even more clearly as we promote our common values and protect our interests. The Presidency will support and assist the High Representative and the European External Action Service.

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Budget discipline. Growth and jobs. Green policies. And ensuring the safety of our citizens and the voice of Europe in the world. These are our priorities.

We need to be bold and ambitious. In the middle of an economic crisis, I do not expect the Danish Presidency to be easy. But I can assure you that our Presidency will not be daunted either. We are not built like that.

Obviously, a Presidency cannot fulfill its ambition on its own. We need active cooperation from all stakeholders – the Member States, the European institutions and civil society. We need a European Union that is united in meeting and overcoming the challenges facing us today.

Your input and your support in this Parliament will be critical in this effort.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As I stand here today as Prime Minister of Denmark, I can assure you of my personal commitment to Europe. I am a European at heart and, most of all, I am a European for my children. I know that, ultimately, their security, opportunity and liberty will depend upon the safety, the life chances and the freedom of their generation everywhere. This Union is the best implement for helping to spread and strengthen those conditions in our continent and throughout the World.

Mr. President, Ladies and Gentlemen: the ultimate measure of our Union and our solidarity is not where we stand in moments of comfort. It is where we stand in times of challenge.

This is such a time.

As I have stressed today, the challenge facing the EU today is basically three-fold:

Firstly, we need to rely on the strong rules and institutions for decision-making that are already firmly established in our Union. We are a Union based on cooperation, rule of law and democracy.

During times of crisis, when tough decisions and compromises need to be made, these fundamentals – our Community Method – are more important than ever.

Relying on our fundamental rules and procedures is not only in the interest of small countries like Denmark. It is what sets our Union apart. It is what makes our cooperation so strong and so durable. That is in the interest of all of us.

Secondly, we must maintain that Europe is part of the solution to the current crisis, not the problem. The path out of this crisis goes through more Europe, not less Europe. In current conditions, to be inward-looking is to be blind to reality. It is up to the leaders of Europe to show this to our citizens and to the outside world. It is the practicality of Europe that will restore faith in the European project.

Thirdly, we must bring Europe out on the other side of the crisis with our values intact. Fiscal restraint is crucial to stabilize our economies and restore confidence. But when the social market economic model has proven so successful for us over the decades, it must continue to be our guiding purpose through and beyond the current challenges.

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There is no doubt that the current crisis has put the European Union to the test.

The countries of the Eurozone have taken on a huge responsibility in securing economic stability in our region. The Fiscal Compact will play a key role in stabilizing the Euro.

This is in the clear interest of the entire European Union.

However, the crisis should not lead us astray. On the contrary, it is more evident than ever that we share a common destiny. It is of paramount importance that we work together and stand together.

If we are to realize Václav Havel's vision of cooperation and solidarity, we need to secure a Europe at work again. And together we will.

Thank you.