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"The challenge of democratic accountability"

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The situation in European economy is alarming. We see a worrisome combination of bad trends in growth, price movements, unemployment, debt and competitiveness of European economy.

Growth will not just happen. We need strong pro-growth policies combining actions providing liquidity, credit, capital to finance so badly needed investment, using fully and safely fiscal space to stimulate growth and actions on the supply side, in areas of education, research and training. We need also strong governance mechanism fostering structural reforms.

I mention it because if we, parliamentarians, politicians, policy makers want to reconnect Europe with its citizens, we must deliver on growth and sustainable jobs.

At the same time, in this post crisis reality, the democratic legitimacy of policy making is essential. Parliaments are crucial actors here. And we cannot separate the reflection on the role of national parliaments in European policy making from the one of the European Parliament. They are in reality two sides of the same democratic legitimacy challenge, important to generate public confidence in Europe and in public policies.

The Treaty of Lisbon has broadened substantially the scope of competences of both European and national parliaments. But they have to face new challenges to democratic accountability generated by the crisis. Reforms triggered by the crisis led to Europeanization of an increasing number of policies.

Also, changes in the global world have brought a different society. The ICT revolution we have witnessed over the past decades has generated a new audience, one which, owing mostly to social media, has unlimited access to information. With more access to information come more demands and a more informed, but also a potentially misinformed, public. Transparency has become a real issue. As our citizens become more aware of politics, they wish to become more involved in the decision-making process. Parliaments will have to provide for this and think of new ways to involve stakeholders and boost the role civil society representatives could play in discussions and decisions.

This changing world and form of political participation is also echoed by the Treaty. Under article 11 of the TEU, it is clearly stated that the institutions shall provide citizens and representative associations with the opportunity to participate in decision making in all areas of Union action and that the institutions shall maintain an open, transparent and regular dialogue with representative associations and civil society.

We live in a world of increasingly blurred frontiers. Europe is certainly confronted with a growing number of transnational issues. Democracy is one of them. A Europeanization of domestic policies, often of those with a very strong attachment to national sovereignty, is a fact of life. However, transnational democracy mechanism has not developed. The European tradition is the one of national democracy.

Parliamentary responsibility for integration is ultimately based on the contribution of both layers of parliament, national and European. The dual citizenship concept implies also dual legitimacy as the foundation for a genuine European democracy. The basis for an effective cooperation between the two layers is provided by the principle of subsidiarity control, as well as by exchanges of views on interparliamentary cooperation platforms. We have already several of them.

Unfortunately, the mechanism to implement the principle (the yellow card) suffers from a number of shortcomings, as a result its potential is not fully used. The

drawbacks relate mostly to an inadequate use of the principle by national parliaments due to lack of information or to a bias towards domestic politics, as well as a faulty communication channel with the Commission, when breaches of the principle are flagged out. More specifically, national parliaments are inclined to make a broad interpretation of the principle of subsidiarity. They also often struggle to separate subsidiarity from proportionality. They frequently refer to the content of a proposal as opposed to a violation of the subsidiarity principle.

And to conclude, let me say a few words on the big issue of EU law making. Better law making is not only about less red tape for small businesses, it is also about legislative programming and about secondary legislation, about transparency, efficiency and simplification. I hope the European Commission will stand up to this challenge of a comprehensive approach to the better law making.