



**EUROPEAN COUNCIL
THE PRESIDENT**



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**Acceptance speech by
President of the European Council Herman Van Rompuy**

I am very honoured that you have all decided to ask me to continue as President of the European Council for a second mandate.

It is with pleasure that I accept. It's a privilege to serve Europe in such decisive times; it's also a big responsibility. I want to thank you all for the trust you place in me. I take this as a vote of confidence in the way we have worked together.

I also thank you for the invitation to chair the euro summit meetings, which I accept. And I am particularly grateful to Helle Thorning-Schmidt, and also to Jean-Claude Juncker, for consulting with you in the past weeks and for chairing your debate just now, which led to my re-election.

Since the position of full-time President of the European Council is only a little over two years old, I hope you'll allow me -- between these two terms -- to share some thoughts on this role, drawing on my experience and looking to the future.

Obviously, the sovereign debt crisis, which erupted shortly after I entered office, is the starting point. It has shaped our work and the role I hold. I have tried to make the most of the continuity of this mandate, which allowed us to maintain a sense of direction in heavy weather.

In a way my job is to be the guardian of trust: fostering mutual understanding around this table among ourselves, knowing that for us together, our duty is to preserve the trust of citizens in the Union.

P R E S S

Dirk De Backer - Spokesperson of the President - ☎ +32 (0)2 281 9768 - +32 (0)497 59 99 19
Jesús Carmona - Deputy Spokesperson of the President - ☎ +32 (0)2 281 9548 / 5150 - +32 (0)475 65 32 15
press.president@consilium.europa.eu <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/>

Looking back: when I was first elected, one colleague asked me tongue in cheek what I would be doing in between the four annual European Council meetings called for by the Treaty! Well at least now we know... The role has been shaped most of all by events, by the sovereign debt crisis.

The crisis was unprecedented, in intensity and magnitude. In the midst of a storm we had to repair our ship. Drastic decisions were required. We tried to get to the roots of the crisis. Each reducing debts and deficits in their country. Making our economies more competitive. Helping one another and standing united. Some of our former colleagues put the common European interest -- and the long-term interest of their country -- above their national popularity, even at the price of leaving office. Their courage and statesmanship deserve our esteem.

In the process we realized how interdependent we have all become and we are drawing the lessons from this. It has been a long march -- from the "Task Force on economic governance" you asked me to chair two years ago, up to the "Fiscal Compact Treaty" that will be signed tomorrow. The European Union is now much better equipped to deal with the crisis at hand, and to prevent similar situations from arising in the future.

In dealing with these challenges, we also had to adapt the Union's working methods. Not only did this serve the immediate cause of mastering the crisis, I am convinced that it will also allow the Union in the future to fulfil its political destiny.

As guardian of the unity of the 27, I have insisted all along on involving all Member States -- all 27, even when it was about the 17 of the Eurozone -- and all institutions. My aim is to reach decisions which each and everyone of us can support and defend at home. To do that requires time, and -- even more crucially -- trust.

I have worked to establish relationships of trust with all of you, also in your capitals; with the institutional actors in Brussels, especially with the President of the Commission; as well as with our partners throughout the world.

As President, I consider it my duty to allow the European Council to play its role in defining the general political directions and priorities of the Union. Driving our work forward, facilitating cohesion and consensus. And also, at our level, ensuring the external representation of the Union, for instance in the G8 and the G20.

In my second mandate, I intend to remain true to my style and working methods. I have always acted in the spirit of the treaty and I will continue to do so. As you know, I am above all result-oriented. I will use the continuity of my mandate to ensure that the decisions agreed around this table deliver results, that we all live up to our individual and collective commitments.

Looking forward, it will not come as a surprise that my first priority will remain the economy. Our economy is our life-line. Without a strong economic base our social models and welfare states are at risk and we cannot play a role on the world stage.

We are already harvesting the first results of our work on stabilising the Eurozone, for instance in terms of lower interest rates. But more is needed. Together we must bring Europe back on the path to structural growth and jobs. Exploiting the full potential of our great market. Using the EU's central budget to foster competitiveness and employment. Investing in innovation, education and green technology, precisely when we reduce deficits.

We must provide a positive outlook for jobs and prosperity, in fairness and in justice. We must convince people across Europe that their sacrifices in these crisis years were not made in vain, that they are leading to results, that the Eurozone in the end comes out stronger: this has to be our biggest concern. It is our only way to win over the hearts and minds of the Europeans.

Such a crisis must not be allowed to ever happen again. Ensuring this must be our legacy. The word "Europe" has long been a sign of hope, embodying peace and prosperity. In the crisis, this equation has come under stress. It is my and our role, that Europe again becomes a symbol of hope. Of a better future for all.

Let us not forget that, for its unrivalled prosperity and stability, our continent retains its full force of attraction. Croatia will soon join the Union and Serbia has taken courageous decisions to acquire candidate status. The European vocation of the Western Balkans is something I hold dear. Without exaggerating the means at our disposal, we must act united whenever our interests and our values -- in particular democratic values -- are at stake, in the first place in our neighbourhood. This is where our credibility starts.

The events of the Arab Spring show that these aspirations are shared throughout the world. Europe's decisive action in Libya demonstrated how we can make a difference. On places of tension and turmoil, such as Syria or Iran, we stand united, taking even the lead. Here too, Europe must remain a symbol of hope.

It is a privilege to continue the work for Europe in this decisive moment. Some say this crisis undermines our Union. I see something else around this table: a sense of common responsibility, the political resolve to continue our road together.

I know you all share my deep conviction that the euro and the Union are irreversible projects. They support and embody the ideals of a peaceful, prosperous and democratic continent. It is our duty to continue this historical endeavour.