EU External Relations

“We have strategic partners, now we need a strategy” - Herman Van Rompuy

Watch the video message of President Van Rompuy in the run-up to the European Council

TRANSCRIPT

“During my first 6 months as the President of the European Council, I mainly focused on the pressing need for better coordination of our economic policies. We had to deal with an immediate crisis and we worked on the new European strategy for growth and jobs. We won the battle on the euro. Problems are not over but we are in a much better shape than before the summer.

I strongly believe that coordination is also the keyword in the field of Europe’s external relations. Europe is acting in a rapidly changing world. We are confronted with new and pressing challenges: global security, environment, migration… The economic crisis has shown us how dependent we are on external developments to preserve the quality of life of Europeans. These challenges need effective and coordinated response. Europe must act as a strong global actor on the international scene. And it must cooperate well with other global players. Our Member States have in the past often proven to be able to do this. But the world is changing every day. The Copenhagen summit on climate change was an eye-opener: power is shifting, new players are emerging, with new interests, features and worldviews. It’s not enough to have a common message, we also have to deliver it effectively. We are punching now below our weight of 500 million people and 22% of world GDP.

I want the European Council to play a major role here. It should define the Union's strategic objectives and interests. The Treaty of Lisbon offers us some tools. The new External Action Service will help us a lot. We will have, as a Union, our own embassies all over the world. I convened Thursday’s European Council to discuss our external relations and our strategic partnerships, which we have with the United States, Russia, our Asian partners and others, based on reciprocity. Until now, we had strategic partners, now we also need a strategy!
On Thursday, we will look how upcoming summits and international meetings with third countries can be as fruitful as possible. For instance the summit between the EU and China in October, or the G20 summit in November. The European Council has to provide clear messages or some kind of mandate for each Summit with third countries to the President of the EC and of the Commission. We will also discuss how we can make our external policy as effective and coherent as possible. We will define the internal arrangements that we need here.

I see Thursday’s meeting as the beginning of a process, with many actors involved. As the world changes rapidly, the European Council will continue to give guidance to make sure that the Union asserts its interests and values in the world. Foreign policy will be from now on on the agenda of almost every European Council. Thursday’s Council will be the first in a long row.”