



## **A European primary for an elected Commission**

As Europeans and progressives, we consider that the economic crisis and the attacks against the euro have cruelly exposed the total lack of leadership of the Union's institutions. The European Commission has forsaken its duty at the peak of the crisis, to the extent that the European central bank, however minimal its mandate, was left to run the show.

The necessary debates about the economic governance of the Euro zone only happen under external pressure without reaching any form of agreement. The only objective each national government seems to have set for itself is to commit as little as possible no one emerges as a driving force behind a common European project. The European spirit that still infused the Convention has dissipated into the slow agony of the constitutional reform.

Determined to keep the European democratic promise, we're left to witness the temptation of retreating on national issues. Europe is increasingly becoming a scapegoat for all unpopular and unaccounted for national policies. In this closed-in arena which no government can get out of, compromises are negotiated between States with conflicting interests. Europeans citizens are never effectively asked to express their voice or define general orientations for the Union. All debates are confined to narrow and isolated national environments.

Still, we must make the best of the current Treaties and find ways to revive the Union, to foster the establishment of a common economic power and to consolidate our democratic principles.

In order to achieve this, we must first significantly reinforce the democratic legitimacy of the European executive. This is why we want the Commission to stem from universal suffrage, on the basis of a clear political agenda. Building a truly European democracy will require a genuine European debate between competing programmes. We are still a long way from there: even though the socialist and social-democrat parties in Europe had come up with a common programmatic platform before the last European elections, it was virtually ignored by all national campaigns.

Candidates from all political families for the presidency of the European Commission must therefore lead their own lists in the European elections. European Socialists, for their part, have already made that choice in December 2009 at the PES Prague Congress. If they win, their candidate will be mandated to implement the program which he/she has presented to voters and which will ultimately become the guidelines for the Commission's policy.

But we now want to go one step further. We demand that open European primaries be organized to choose the PES candidate for the presidency of the European Commission. Ideas need to be embodied and voters have the right to decide on the person they want to run governments. National democracies do work this way; and there is no reason why a true European democracy should be any different. On the contrary, because each member state has its own political traditions, because each socialist or social-democratic party has its own culture, it is essential that our common candidate be clearly identified.

The stakes are very high. Democracy is not something one decrees. It can only exist when citizens use their right to choose. In a European Union that is often –and not always wrongly– seen as far from people's concerns and run through backdoor compromises, how can one imagine that citizens would show any interest in elections if they do not see what is really at stake? European elections must regain clarity and visibility. Primaries are a proven clarity, visibility and efficiency producing-process.

The role of the PES, which could so cease to be a club of national parties, is to foster the European democratic debate in a truly transnational manner. The organization of open European primaries would enable the PES to actually promote, run and manage this debate and to make it accessible to both the media and citizens. Once the PES candidate is chosen at the end of such a process, he will have acquired the necessary legitimacy and the electoral campaign will transcend national borders to focus on European matters.

Such an innovation, which does not require any changes in current Treaties, would deeply transform the balance of institutions. The President of the Commission would no longer get his authority and programmatic roadmap from the Heads of States and governments, but directly from voters. He would benefit from the support of the European Parliament to implement the project which got him elected. A comprehensive European economic policy could be applied, in order to fight the crisis in a unified manner and build a more socially-responsible Europe.

**Democracy is the best tool we have to make a true political Europe a reality. This is why we call upon all progressives to demand open European primaries, so that citizens can directly choose the PES candidate for President of the European Commission.**