

Maroš ŠEFČOVIČ

Vice-President of the European Commission

Responsible for Interinstitutional Relations and Administration

**"A partnership for progress on a fair
but ambitious financial framework"**

Check Against Delivery
Seul le texte prononcé fait foi
Es gilt das gesprochene Wort

**High-Level Conference on the Multiannual Financial
Framework,**

Brussels, 21 October 2011

Honourable Members, distinguished guests,

First, I would like to thank all of you for participating in this conference on the European Union's next multiannual financial framework. Thank you for your ideas, for sharing your positions on the range of issues we have addressed, for drawing our attention to particular needs and concerns. The level of engagement in the discussion bears witness to the importance of this issue and the degree of interest that it has generated at all levels across Europe.

My thanks go to the Polish presidency of the Council and the European Parliament for their close cooperation with the Commission in the organisation of this conference, and in particular to the representatives of the national parliaments for their readiness to respond to the invitation to work with us. On behalf of the Commission, I wish to reiterate our firm desire to widen the discussion of the next multiannual financial framework as much as possible. This means the full participation of citizens and their representatives at both national and European level, and the involvement of all of the European Union's institutions.

Yesterday, President Barroso, in his opening remarks, underlined the fact that the decisions we take in the coming months about the size of the budget and the way it is allocated will shape our Union for many years to come. We are all painfully aware of the economic and financial conditions in which the Commission's proposals are being discussed. All the more reason for us to understand each other's positions and roles and to be completely aware of the implications of the decisions that will be taken between now and the end of 2012.

As the member of the Commission responsible for interinstitutional relations and relations with national parliaments, I wish to emphasise how important it is for us to continue the exchange of views between us. This is not something new, but it is something that needs to be intensified, given the importance of the subject matter and the complexity of the decision-making procedures. The entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty underlines the importance of a consensual approach on the EU budget. After all, the adoption of the financial framework requires unanimity in the Council after obtaining the consent of the European Parliament. A decision on the system of own resources will also require approval by the Member States in accordance with their respective constitutional requirements. The road ahead will not be trouble free.

In the past few months, I have had the opportunity to discuss the next multiannual financial framework with ministers from the Member States in the General Affairs Council. I am struck by the range of opinion expressed and the particular concerns of Member States, not only on the horizontal issues, but also on the implications for the various sectoral policies and programmes. While it is a daunting prospect to see how all of the pieces of the puzzle will fit together, I am convinced that we have established a cooperative way of working that will produce an outcome that is beneficial to all of us.

I have also visited a number of national parliaments to discuss a range of issues, not least the next EU financial framework. I am very grateful for the insights that these contacts have given on how much work is going on in Member States' parliaments to analyse the Commission's proposals, and I hope to deepen these contacts in the coming months. Lord Roper has given us a flavour of the expertise that is available in the national parliaments – let us all benefit from that.

At the European level, I am grateful to the Committee of the Regions and the European Economic and Social Committee for their full engagement in the discussion on the next financial framework. It is through these institutions that the

full range of opinion from civil society and the EU's regions can be voiced in the discussion.

The European Parliament has a particularly important role to play in the process and has demonstrated its willingness and determination to fulfil its responsibilities. Even before the Commission tabled its proposals for the next multiannual financial framework, we already had the benefit of working closely with the European Parliament's special committee on the policy challenges and budgetary resources for a sustainable European Union after 2013. Now the other parliamentary committees will be closely involved in the examination of the Commission's proposals and we look forward to further constructive engagement with them.

In conclusion, while I realise that our task is not easy, I believe that we are on the right track to reach an agreement on the next financial framework by the end of 2012 that is fair and balanced and retains the ambition and focus of the Commission's proposals. Times are tough but as the Commission set out in the roadmap to stability and growth, targeted investment at EU level is key to making the most of the single market and getting Europe growing.

What I retain from this conference is the willingness to cooperate and work together, despite the difficulties and competing interests. We need to form a 'partnership for progress' in which growth-enhancing investment at national and EU level is used to drive our economies forward. We owe it to ourselves and to the EU's citizens to continue this process and to arrive at a future EU budget that is up to the job.

Thank you for your attention.