

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE EUROPEAN ELECTIONS

Before the European Union was created, war, destruction and violence were characteristics of a divided continent. Today our continent is reunited and we belong to the same community of values. The European Union is not merely a political and economic entity; it is also a community of shared values: The dignity of the human being, Human Rights, Peace, Freedom, Democracy, Justice, the Rule of Law, and the principles of solidarity and subsidiarity are at the centre of our actions. We are all different but all equal. United in diversity is our motto.

Since 1979 citizens can vote in a direct election and choose their representatives in the European Parliament. In these 30 years the European Parliament has progressively gained legislative powers and developed into a full-fledged democratic parliament. Today the European Parliament is stronger than ever before, not only fulfilling its duties in a responsible way but playing a crucial role in fulfilling the expectations of European citizens.

The European Parliament elections on June 2009 are a unique exercise of democracy: an electorate of 375 million voters, across 27 countries will elect a single Parliament representing nearly 500 million citizens of the European Union. They are taking place at a crucial moment. They represent a great opportunity to re-launch the European Union and to address the issues that are important to the citizens such as the economic crisis, climate change, globalization or immigration.

They provide an opportunity to show why the European Union is relevant and to demonstrate the practical importance of the European Parliament's work in all of our daily lives.

Parliament is responsible in areas ranging from regulation of financial markets to consumer protection or the limitation of carbon emissions. Practical examples of how the European Parliament uses its legislative powers to improve our everyday lives are the blacklist of unsafe airlines, the reduction of the cost of phoning and roaming charges in Europe, or the rules on the safe use of chemical products. Others include rules on the provision of services which prevent social dumping, stringent food safety standards or the financing of important infrastructure projects.

Today approximately 75 % of the European Union legislation is decided by the European Parliament together with the Council of Ministers which represents the Member State Governments. Once the Lisbon Treaty enters into force the legislative powers of the Parliament will be equal to those of the Council in virtually 100% of cases. This means that the European Parliament will have the same level of lawmaking power as the Council in areas when it used to be only consulted or not involved at all, such as legal immigration, penal judicial cooperation, and some aspects of trade policy, agriculture and fisheries. The new Treaty will give more transparency and democracy at European and national level but also for the first time it brings the local and regional dimension into the EU legal framework to help ensure that decisions are taken as close as possible to the citizen.

In the last Parliamentary term the European Union took the lead in tackling climate change. A decisive step in the protection of our environment was the approval of the climate change legislative package which aims to reduce our carbon emissions at least 20% by 2020. This work should continue in the next term for the next European Parliament. Diversification of energy sources is also a big priority for the coming years.

Today we are facing a severe economic and financial crisis. Citizens are concerned about their jobs, their mortgages and how to pay their monthly bills. These are real and tangible difficulties faced by European voters. No country can tackle the problem alone. In Europe, a European solution is needed.

The European Parliament has requested stricter regulation of the financial markets and more transparency of the banking system. It is making its contribution to restoring the trust of the citizen and to building a future based on a social market economy – markets at the service of people.

The European Union has tools with which we can meet the challenges of the future. Now is a very good moment to give the European project new direction, dynamism and vision. I hope that on **7 June Slovene** citizens will exercise their important democratic right, to go and vote, to make their choice. The European Union has an important role to play in all of our futures.

The forthcoming elections are an opportunity for voters to raise their concerns with candidates and vote for the kind of European Union they would like to see. If you care what decisions are taken in Brussels and Strasbourg, if you care who is taking them, then make your voice heard. **It is your choice!**