

José Manuel Durão Barroso

President of the European Commission

**A NEW TREATY, A NEW COMMISSION:
A REVISED FRAMEWORK FOR EU REGULATORY
AGENCIES**

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

**Meeting with Heads of Regulatory Agencies
Brussels, 17 February 2010**

Ms Geslain-Lanelle,
Dear Colleagues,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to thank you for your kind invitation today, and in particular Catherine Geslain-Lanelle as the coordinator of all Heads of Agencies.

Once again I am happy to be with you and to be able to underline the importance the Commission attaches to your work in support of European Union policies.

Nearly four years have passed since I participated for the first time in one of your meetings. A lot has happened since then - a new Treaty has entered into force, a new Commission has been put in place, and we've been challenged with a global financial crisis.

Last week I was in Strasbourg at the plenary session of the European Parliament when the new Commission was voted in, and I highlighted the political agenda of the new Commission.

The broad priorities are clear: making a successful exit from the crisis; boosting new sources of growth and social cohesion to renew our social market economy; continuing to lead on climate action and energy efficiency; advancing a people's Europe with freedom and security; and opening a new era for global Europe.

This is an ambitious programme and I trust that I can rely on each one of you to help turn it into a reality in your respective areas of expertise. Indeed, all the priorities

I have just mentioned are of direct concern to you; on each of these, one of you, with your agency, is actively contributing to shaping the European Union policy.

I believe that the Commission, and also the other institutions, recognise the significant role of agencies in EU governance today.

Agencies contribute to developing a highly-respected scientific and technical know-how

by pooling the expertise available at European and national level.

Agencies help collect, analyse and disseminate information, thus stimulating public debate at national, European and international level, giving better foundations to the decisions of policy makers.

Agencies contribute significantly to the implementation of the Union's policies, thus helping all the institutions, in particular the Commission, to concentrate on core policy-making tasks.

Agencies help to bring Europe, and more concretely European Union policies, closer to the citizens. Far away from Brussels, with some exceptions, they place European Union actors across all the Member States.

Political scientists have criticised the increase in the number of agencies. What is clear is the broad diversity that exists, the wide-ranging responsibilities, the different issues and competences that the agencies have. And the Commission recognised in its

2008 Communication that the establishment of agencies on a case-by-case basis has not always been accompanied by an overall vision of the place of agencies in the Union.

At the same time, the Commission has persistently reiterated the added value of agencies' work, and has not shied away from proposing new agencies when circumstances called for it.

Let's take for example our response to the economic and financial crisis.

The crisis has clearly demonstrated the weaknesses of the current regulatory framework and supervisory arrangements for financial institutions. In this context, the need for a fundamentally new structure for financial supervision in Europe has proved to be more than apparent.

The Commission proposed such a structure and it will be put in

place with the creation of three new regulatory agencies – the three supervisory authorities for banks, insurance and securities markets.

These authorities will have the challenging task of re-establishing the confidence of consumers and investors in financial markets, to provide greater protection against future bubbles and crises in the economy and to enhance market stability.

Let me give you another example of the Commission's confidence in the ability of agencies to deliver effective support.

We have already mapped out a very ambitious and far-reaching programme in the field of justice and home affairs for the mandate of the new Commission. This includes the key priority of a common approach to asylum and migration, in order to show to citizens our commitment to both freedom and security.

In this context the Commission came forward with a package of legislative proposals, including a proposal to establish a European Asylum Support Office. It will be given the responsibility for supporting and strengthening practical cooperation between Member States on asylum, and helping to improve implementation of the common asylum system.

These examples show how much we rely on agencies in the implementation of the Union's policies and the extent to which

agencies have become reputable features of the Union's institutional setting.

At the same time, we need to develop a global vision on the role of agencies in the European Union's governance. And such a global vision has to be not only a vision coming from the Commission, but also a common and shared vision with the other institutions.

We need to speak one common language when we talk about

agencies, about their mission and place in the Union's landscape.

And this idea is not new. The draft Inter-institutional Agreement that the Commission adopted in 2005, was meant to outline a common understanding among the institutions of certain governance aspects related to agencies.

Perhaps it was too early for such a step; perhaps our approach was too formal, and the idea did not move forward. But what is clear is that the issues which

were to be addressed by the agreement are there and need to be tackled.

That is why the Commission has proposed a different approach to achieve the same objective: the Commission invited the Council and the European Parliament to a joint inter-institutional debate with the aim of achieving a common approach vis-à-vis agencies.

I am happy to say that the Parliament and the Council responded well to this invitation. And today the three institutions

regularly discuss a number of governance-related aspects concerning regulatory agencies.

I know that this cooperation between the institutions started very well at the political level in March last year, and continued as a fruitful working group at technical level as well. So I can say with some confidence that this collaboration will lead to a significant improvement of the agency system.

Now that the new Commission is in place and the newly elected

Parliament has appointed its new political representatives to the working group, I hope that we can have another inter-institutional meeting on the political level shortly.

I will ask Vice-President Ševčovič to take the lead on that on behalf of the Commission.

I believe that both the EU institutions and agencies would benefit from a clearer picture of how we interact.

Agencies are independent of the Commission but they are part of the range of European Union actors, its legal system and policy tools. This is why it is crucial to synchronise all these elements when it comes to agencies' governance.

We all have an interest in identifying how we can make more effective and efficient the support that agencies provide to the European institutions and to our citizens.

In doing so, we need to strike a balance between the need for a global and coherent approach, and the need to respect agencies' specific characteristics - taking into account their different sizes, functions, maturity and ways of working.

We also need to find suitable instruments allowing the EU institutions to fulfil adequately their supervisory role, while avoiding unnecessary administrative burdens for agencies.

We need to ensure accountability and transparency, while at the same time striving to streamline existing procedures for the sake of efficiency.

These are the issues which the European Union institutions need to look at and give some answers to.

There are other important questions that we, in the Commission, are often confronted with and which the institutional work should also look at. How can we better assess the

need for the creation of a new agency? How can we improve coherence between agencies' activities and the Union's policy priorities? How can we optimise the synergies between agencies, institutions and Member States? How can we help agencies to better plan their work? How can we improve the dialogue between agencies and the institutions? How can we achieve and preserve the delicate balance between agencies' autonomy and the need for accountability? And how can we further improve efficiency and effectiveness?

These are challenging questions, but I am confident of the positive contribution that discussions with all institutions could bring.

The results of last year's independent evaluation of the agency system, which will soon be made public by the Commission, will also help to identify some of the weaknesses of the current system and will provide suggestions about possible improvements.

I am aware that you do not share all the conclusions. We will rely

on other relevant sources, including one of the most important sources for framing the inter-institutional debate, which is the experience gained so far by the institutions in their working relations with agencies. And of course, your feedback, as privileged actors on the agencies' side, is very important. We will not hesitate to ask for it.

This is a dynamic period of time for all of us, not only because of the events and changes I have mentioned so far, but because

we now have a new Treaty to implement and comply with.

The Lisbon Treaty provides the Union with a stable and lasting institutional framework, and will allow us to concentrate fully on addressing the challenges ahead.

The entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon puts an end to a long inward-looking process, and in some policy areas its impact will be very significant.

For example, in the area of freedom, security and justice, the

enhanced role of the European and national parliaments will have an impact on the definition of policies and actions.

The new Treaty strengthens all the European institutions and this will ultimately lead to a stronger Europe. Agencies are now explicitly mentioned in the Treaty and this represents a confirmation of the role that they play in the creation of a stronger and safer Europe.

I would like to conclude by stressing your role in

communicating policy priorities, as well as key messages related to the Union in general, to EU citizens.

You introduce and contribute to the visibility of our work and make the European Union more relevant for European citizens. Agencies are often the closest EU body for millions of European citizens, and project the EU image on the ground - beyond Brussels, Luxembourg and Strasbourg. We need to exploit all this potential and reinforce

your contribution to the European project, together.

Finally, I would like to thank you for the work you achieve, each of you, in your sector and in your agency, and the support you give to the Commission. I have visited some of you, a few, but there are many more who I still need to see. In visiting Member States I will try to do my best to find occasions to pay a visit to your premises and staff.

Thank you for your attention.