



**EUROPEAN COUNCIL
THE PRESIDENT**



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**Video message by the President of the European Council
Herman Van Rompuy
ahead his address to the
66th United Nations General Assembly**

On the first EU address to UNGA

For the very first time, a permanent President of the European Council can participate in the General Assembly. Before me, there were the rotating presidencies speaking on behalf of their nation, and now I can speak on behalf of the Union as a whole, not representing a member state. And that is something totally new. It is due to a resolution voted a few months ago in the General Assembly, allowing us this new status. So it is in some way an international recognition for the European Union.

On the Arab Spring

We saw a democratic revival. We saw that people are longing for justice, for human rights, for democracy. They were liberated from their dictators. Now is the long road to elections and to fully-fledged democracy. And that will take some time. Political parties have to be established, they need to have all the opportunities they can have to go to the people, to publish their programmes, to convince people and so on. You have to start with some kind of revolution, and they did it. And now they have to take the road to democracy. And that's the most important thing. But they showed that they are longing for that kind of freedom. During decades it was repressed by dictatorship. So saying that those people are not ready for democracy... Yes they are! They are ready. They took themselves the opportunity. I'm fully confident. Of course this will be a long way, with ups and downs, with setbacks and successes. But finally, they will succeed.

P R E S S

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How the debt crisis impacts EU integration

The sovereign debt crisis affects the EU integration and affects the future of the Eurozone. But it will not put the EU and the Eurozone in danger. And that's why we are working so hard at the level of the Member states, certainly those with weak economies, and at the level of the EU itself we work so hard to overcome the crisis. Tough measures are being taken in Greece, in Spain, in Italy, in Portugal, in Ireland and also in other countries, as some kind of preventive measures. That's the first part. And the second part: with set up rescue mechanisms, we set up surveillance mechanisms, fiscal surveillance and macro-economic surveillance, in order to strengthen our economic governance at the level of the eurozone and at the level of the Union. We are working very hard. Of course it's not an easy job, because we have to agree with 17. 17 governments, 17 parliaments, and we have to implement all what we decided. It takes some time, and markets are impatient. But here also, at the end, we will overcome. And all the work done by our predecessors will not be destroyed. The EU is a strong union, and we will keep it strong.

On the difference between the European Council and the UN

We are taking decisions, important decisions for the future of our citizens, with 27. Looking for a consensus with 27 heads of state and government is a difficult job. But we achieved it in the past and we will achieve it in the future also. The UN is a totally different body. But they are also obliged to find a consensus, or a majority, among all the member states, more than 180. But here we are involved in Europe in the daily business of life of the Europeans so it is really something different. We are not dealing only with the international agenda, affecting live indirectly, The European Council is involved in the daily life of people.

Impressions after the opening speeches at the UNGA

The main messages I heard this morning are messages of hope. And it is surprising, because we are in a period of crisis: economic crisis, financial crisis, probably also food crisis, but there is hope. Because last year, something important happened in a part of the world very close to us, in Northern Africa and the Arab world. Peoples of the Arab world are looking for democracy, for freedom, for justice. In some countries they achieved it, in other countries they are involved in reform processes. So this is really something astonishing. The world is more and more moving in the direction of democracy. And we are the fatherland, or the motherland of democracy. So the EU is very glad with that kind of evolution. And where we can, we help, as we did in Libya. We did it via our Member States, via the EU as the EU, even militarily. We helped to bring Kadhafi down, and give full support to the democratic forces in Libya. So all this was a message of hope delivered by my predecessors (=speakers before me) here in the General Assembly. Of course we know what the problems are and tomorrow I will also speak about the worries we have on climate change, on world trade, economic worries of people and of countries. But let's also stress the elements of hope.

Watch the videos [here](#)