



**EUROPEAN COUNCIL  
THE PRESIDENT**



Vilnius, 26 February 2013  
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**Intervention by President of the European Council  
Herman Van Rompuy  
in panel debate on the Future of Europe**

Your country is about to take up an essential role in the life of our Union. From July, Lithuania will be at the helm of the Council of Ministers for six months. The moment is key with important decisions ahead: to steer Europe out of the crisis, focus on growth and jobs, and reflect on how to shape the Europe of tomorrow. Mrs. President, I look forward to working with your government on these issues.

The rotating Presidency makes visible to everyone that all countries participate at the highest level in Europe's political life. Our Union is not something far away in 'Brussels': it concerns everybody. Whichever country we are from, we are all citizens of Europe too. Europe is us.

When I visit the Baltic region I always have in mind the "human chain" of August 1989, or Baltijos Kelias, as you call it, the Baltic Way. Few moments in Europe's history have shown the world such peaceful love of freedom and deep solidarity.

In the first 15 years after Soviet rule ended, Lithuania made every effort to prepare for entry into the European Union. Your joining was always self-evident, your European belonging beyond doubt. But time is flying. Next year it will already be ten years since you joined.

In these years, you have changed, and Europe has changed. In particular, the financial crisis which began in 2008 has shaken the governments, economies, societies of many of our countries.

**P R E S S**

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In overcoming the difficulties, your country has deeply impressed many across the continent for your resilience and courage. It was far from easy, and celebrating recovery without acknowledging the sacrifices would be only half the story. You were perhaps made stronger by having lived through darker times in recent memory... The crisis not only forced countries to reform individually, no, it also forced us as a Union, to strengthen our common institutions, to work better together.

Improving our single market. Enforcing stricter fiscal discipline. Supervising our banking sector. And strengthening the governance of our single currency. I know your country is actively considering to join the euro, and I am glad about that. The euro area has gone through a very difficult moment, but the very worst is behind us. We are now focusing on the road ahead, in the full conviction that Europe is about dealing with change together.

Being in the Union is not about disappearing into a larger whole; on the contrary, our Union functions as a haven for all our nations, as a shelter against the forces of a wider world; a place of opportunities and freedoms unrivalled in the world, but also a place of security for all.

I look forward to discussing ways to make this Europe, OUR Europe, stronger!

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