



**EUROPEAN COUNCIL
THE PRESIDENT**



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**President of the European Council
Herman Van Rompuy**

Speech at the opening of the Lithuanian Presidency of the Council

Laba diena, gerbiami ponai ir ponios, good day, gentlemen and ladies. Today is an important day for your country. Lithuania is taking up an important role: six months at the helm of Europe's Council of Ministers. Your government has prepared well, and now the moment has arrived.

It is a great pleasure, and it is fitting too, to address you in this beautiful and old University. It shows that Lithuania's past was European – with links of culture and trade across the entire continent. This University is not only a place of learning and history, but also of innovation and positive change. It sums up what all our countries need to do: cherish past treasures and embrace the future.

The musical performance we just heard captures Europe's spirit very well. A Union of now 28 countries, working ever more closely together. Finding a joint rhythm, turning individual energies into a shared experience, which, at its best, can beat expectations. Getting the balance right between unity and diversity, defining the common good, respecting each part, each person – it is just like our Union!

For Lithuania, the next six months hold important decisions, and I look forward to working with your President and your Government – continuing to steer Europe out of the crisis, towards jobs and economic growth. Making sure, for instance, that the common EU funding can reach people and projects across the Union on time, especially young unemployed. We must prove that Europe is a source of prosperity. That, besides the Europe of hearts and minds, there is a Europe of results.

P R E S S

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I know you will contribute to these efforts with resolve, in hundreds of meeting rooms both here and in Brussels. But you will also lead by sheer example.

Your courage and perseverance, which had already impressed many when you liberated yourself from Soviet rule, did so once again as you worked hard to overcome the recent financial crisis. Yours is a remarkable achievement, that can inspire others and that strengthens your voice.

Music, like here today, seems to be the beating heart of this country – and of your Baltic neighbours. I remember vividly the 'Singing Revolution', which helped Lithuania emerge as an independent country. Back then, you used the power and grace of music. And we, other Europeans, we watched and listened in awe. And here we are together today, Lithuania steering the Council!

We just heard your national anthem "Lietuva, tėvyne mūsų" – "Lithuania, our homeland". This also made me think of Europe. Europe – not as something far away in Brussels, no, Europe here, daily, in Vilnius, in Klaipėda, in Biržai – in all cities and villages of this country – and of all other member countries. Europe, as Vaclav Havel once said – as the "*homeland of our homelands*", *Europa - mūsų tėvynių tėvynė!* Europe as us all. Ačiū! Thank you.
