



## **EUROPEAN UNION: 'More Focus – More Voters?'**

**Democratic Legitimacy of EU institutions, institutional balance,  
assessment of Lisbon Treaty impact**

**Role of the European Parliament in decision making processes, strengthening cooperation  
with national decision making bodies, enhancing voter turnouts in the EP elections**

11 April 2014

The Netherlands is convinced that the time of an 'ever closer union' in every possible policy area is over. Thinking about the future of EU and how to enhance its governance is important especially before the EU Parliament elections and the following formation of the new Commission (2014-2018).

In May 2014 citizens of the EU Member States will again have the opportunity to cast their vote in the EP elections. The interest of the Slovak citizens to vote in the EP elections is very weak what results in low voter turnouts. It is, therefore, important not only to start looking for methods to enhance participation of Slovak citizens in these elections, but also to understand the reasons behind it. The reluctant attitude that Slovak citizens have towards creation of this law-making body at the European level may well be the result of the lack of understanding of how the EU institutions function but also growing distrust that is rising in many states of Europe. Such developments need to be tackled and used to ignite the in-depth discussion on the future for Europe. It has to be decided now how shall it function better, where shall it focus and how the democratic legitimacy of the EU shall be enhanced. Because only by making constructive decisions the trust between the EU and its citizens may be restored.

In the Netherlands, such questions have already been raised for some time and especially the issue of subsidiarity and proportionality is at stake when EU legislation is under scrutiny. In 2013 the Dutch Government conducted an analysis of EU legislation (in force and anticipated) and summarised the results in the "Subsidiarity Review" that contains recommendations that should be followed whenever EU legislation is drafted or adopted. Additionally, it includes a list of points for action concerning particular pieces of EU legislation that the Netherlands would like to treat differently (54 points).

This does not, however, mean that the Netherlands takes a purely negative stance towards all EU legislation. The Netherlands sees all the benefits that the Member States acquired thanks to the EU and supports the basic ideas behind the integration in many ways. Nevertheless, the Netherlands believes that we shall not sit back at the times when Eurosceptic and Europhobic tendencies are growing, but we shall help the EU to find its better focus and balance in line with the quote of Barroso: 'The EU needs to be big on big things and smaller on smaller things' and thereby helping it restoring the trust of the EU citizens.

However, these matters are causing debates also in the Slovak Government, think tanks and NGOs. Soon we will have in our hands the study on the democratic legitimacy prepared by the Slovak Foreign Policy Association (SFPA) that touches upon similar problematic issues as the ones raised by the Dutch Government.

Timing is important. Therefore, we shall make use of the upcoming EP elections and of the presentation of the SFPA study to start the debate on these issues and create a Netherlands-Slovakia platform where the solutions can be discussed and from which we can draw inspiration during the Netherlands-Slovakia EU presidency in 2016.





Kingdom of the Netherlands



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### 'More Focus – More Voters?'

Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands | European Parliament Information Office in Slovakia |  
Slovak Foreign Policy Association | Ministry of Foreign Affairs and European Affairs of the Slovak Rep.

11 April 2014

9:00 **Registration**

9:30 **Opening**

Richard van Rijssen, Ambassador of the Kingdom of the Netherlands

Robert Hajšel, Head of the EP Information Office in Slovakia

9:45 **First Panel Discussion: Better Focus - Finding a new balance (moderated by Radovan Geist, EurActiv.sk)**

Maroš Šefčovič, Vice-President of the European Commission and Commissioner for Inter-Institutional Relations and Administration

Eduard Kukan, European Parliament (EPP)

Adriaan Schout, Coordinator Europe at Clingendael

Vladimír Bilčík, Slovak Foreign Policy Association

Miroslav Ivan, DG European Affairs, Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic

11:15 **Coffee/Tea Break**

11:30 **Second Panel Discussion: How to get higher turnout in EP elections? (moderated by Vladimír Bilčík, SFPA)**

Anna Záborská, European Parliament (EPP)

Monika Flašíková Beňová, European Parliament (S&D)

Marietje Schaake, European Parliament (ALDE) – video message

Juraj Droba, NOVA

Robert Hajšel, Head of the EP Information Office in Slovakia

13:00 **Concluding Remarks**

Richard van Rijssen, Ambassador of the Kingdom of the Netherlands

13:20 **Reception**



MINISTRY OF FOREIGN  
AND EUROPEAN AFFAIRS  
OF THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC

