

Modesty would become Europe's new duo

By Jacques Delors

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Whatever differences exist between its member states, the prerequisite for a well-functioning European Union is that institutions work well together. In order to make progress towards the ends we seek, we need agreement on the means by which policy is made.

This is the purpose of the so-called community method, which at times has permitted the Union to advance in leaps and bounds. It allows the European Council (the heads of state and government) to concentrate on what is important: deciding on the strategic direction of policy.

The European parliament and the European Commission complete an "institutional triangle" that intervenes both upstream and downstream of the European Council. Upstream, the Commission focuses relentlessly on the European interest; it sends analyses and proposals to the Council of Ministers and accepts that some will be rejected. Meanwhile, the European parliament (whose power is increased by the [Lisbon treaty](#)) exercises its responsibility as co-legislator with the European Council and draws on its direct connection with European voters.

At stake is the European Union's influence – including, of course, the defence of its own interests in a globalised and multipolar world. That is why it is vital for the European machine to function well even as the 27 member states debate the EU's positions and direction.

We must be realistic, of course. A [diplomatic battle is raging](#) over the two imminent appointments, of permanent [president of the European Council](#) and of high representative for foreign affairs. For weeks the media have covered the story closely, generating both curiosity over the personalities in the frame and exaggerated expectations concerning the powers available to them.

Our appeal is for less "bargaining" and a little more sobriety in this process. That these posts are the subject of much debate is to be expected. Similar discussions are taking place over the positions available in the future European Commission and – further ahead – that of the next president of the European Central Bank, who will be appointed at the end of 2011.

The Union's permanent president will only be truly useful if he or she facilitates debate at the highest level about Europe's future. There can be no question of nominating a super-head of government who might contradict the Union's basic contract – namely, shared sovereignty in certain policies but not in all

prerogatives of states. He or she must be a convinced European, from a country that subscribes to all Union policies.

It would be a poor interpretation of the Lisbon treaty if the chosen person were to consider himself or herself as the president of the European Union. It would also be an invitation to conflict over competencies and a challenge to the sensitivities of heads of state and government. Furthermore, permanent tension would arise between two institutions and their administrations – the European Commission and the Council of Ministers. Instead, the European Council needs a chairman and a mediator, capable of creating consensus. He or she would have the support of the Commission, which – let us not forget – has the right to get involved.

As for the high representative for foreign affairs, he or she must weigh up geopolitical traditions and take into account divergences between member states. The high representative's term will be a success if he or she can strengthen the Union's cohesion in certain areas of foreign policy. I am thinking in particular of the [relationship with Russia, with its energy-supply dimension](#). Our economic interests must find expression in a common foreign-policy position. This would be a major step forward – one that would greatly help our neighbourhood policies in the east. To this end, the high representative can learn from the discreet and useful work carried out by the previous person to exercise such a role, Javier Solana.

To misuse words can be dangerous. Without a return to the healthy modus operandi outlined above, the Union will condemn itself to paralysis and become even more distant from its citizens. This is the message of the declaration signed by numerous public figures brought together by the think-tank Notre Europe.

The writer is founding president of Notre Europe and a former president of the European Commission. The Declaration of the Notre Europe Committee is online at www.notre-europe.eu