

Speech by Giles Chichester MEP

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Debate on the outcome of the European Council

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Mr President, may I compliment the Prime Minister for his statement today and on his time as President-in-Office of the Council.

I am pleased that the European Council remains committed to action on climate change. I welcome also the commitment to addressing the remaining barriers to completing the single market, although I am concerned that the Lisbon Strategy emphasis seems to be moving away from the need for economic reform towards the so-called 'social model'.

I suspect the Lisbon meeting was a gathering that the British Prime Minister will not look back on with pride. He signed up to a Treaty on which he promised the British people a referendum. He has now reneged on that pledge. I believe the Treaty fails to address the fundamental issues of transparency and accountability – bringing Europe closer to the people – that the Laeken Declaration made a priority.

Mr Brown's behaviour in Lisbon was both extraordinary and maladroit. By signing the Treaty at all, he upset the majority of the British people; by snubbing the formal ceremony, he insulted his fellow heads of government. Even by his standards, this

was breathtaking political miscalculation.

The announcement that there is to be a reflection group on the future of Europe is not welcome. Why do we need yet another body when we have just had three years of self-imposed agonising over the Constitution? Mr Brown says there will be no more institutional debate. He said, and I quote, 'It is time to focus on the economy, on security, on the environment'. Yet Mr Sarkozy, in effect, says, 'au contraire – it will think big'.

As he said, and I quote, 'the job of the group is to define a new European dream.' I thought that is what Mr Giscard d'Estaing was supposed to have done. I feel a little confused. Perhaps the Prime Minister can help me?