Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Venizelos' intervention at the European Parliament Plenary on the need to approve a financial transaction tax (Strasbourg, 4 February 2014)

Tuesday, 04 February 2014

E. VENIZELOS: Mr. President, thank you very much. Ladies and gentlemen MEPs, you know better than I do that the introduction on a financial transaction tax has been discussed extensively on the level of the European Parliament and on the level of the Council. I want to make special mention of the contribution of the rapporteur, Anni Podimatas, to formulating the European Parliament's position.

We have not managed, on the level of the Council, to make the optimal choice. We have not seen the shaping of a common position that would lead to a regulation that might be implemented throughout the EU, in all the member states, throughout community territory. We settled for the second best in terms of a choice, in the form of enhanced cooperation. It is very significant that there are 11 EU member states – including Greece – that believe in this tax because they see it as a way of generating revenue that will be transferred from the financial sphere to the real economy, will finance enterprises, the effort to create new jobs and combat unemployment, and fund social cohesion measures.

This is an exchange, a reciprocation, that the financial sphere must pay, due in part to the major assistance provided by the member states, through the fiscal mechanisms, so that the financial sector could overcome the crisis.

From this point of view, the issue we are discussing now, of the tax on financial transactions, is very strongly linked to the previous discussion of the single resolution mechanism, of the banking union, of the single supervisory mechanism, of breaking the vicious cycle between financial and fiscal crisis – matters I referred to at length during the previous debate.

Unfortunately, we have additional institutional difficulties. The issue is, in any case, complicated – technically, financially and legally complicated. We now have the application of a member state – the UK – before the EU, putting forward the issue of voiding the Council decision that approved the enhanced cooperation process.

We want to move ahead quickly. We want to enable the 11 member states that make up the enhanced cooperation group to complete this institutional configuration using the institutional mechanisms of the EU, and thus with the European Commission's help. But we have to be pragmatists. There are difficulties. I don't know whether we will have time to conclude on a common position. But we will certainly pursue the setting down of directives that point in the direction in which we want to move.

We have a very thorough perception of the technical level: that multiple speeds are being created in the financial market, which is, par excellence, a global market. But by the same token, in the EU we need to agree at some point on whether we need mechanisms for drawing surplus from the financial sphere and transferring it to activities that constitute a priority for a Europe that has a political programme and can respond to the various forms of Euroscepticism.

This discussion is very timely, just a few months before the close of the European Parliament session and the carrying out of the next European elections. No one – and particularly no one in Europe’s younger generation – wants a Europe of austerity and unemployment. We have to be able to provide a vision, a hope, but we will also have to be able to finance this hope. We cannot provide a full response from own resources and the community budget mechanisms. We need new ideas, new mechanisms. So the debate we are carrying out now may seem technical or fragmentary, but it addresses the very heart of the European problem: the need for us to talk again about a Europe that is convincing to its citizens, and particularly to the young generation.

Thank you very much.