

Financial crisis

Parliament prepares to lecture Barroso

By Pierre Lemoine in Strasbourg | Monday 26 September 2011

The president of the European Commission is probably going to be in the hot seat on the morning of 28 September in Strasbourg.

José Manuel Barroso will deliver his 'State of the Union' speech on that date, an event he initiated at the start of his second term of office, inspired by the annual event during which the president of the United States presents his programme for the coming year to the Congress in Washington.

Whatever he proposes, many members of the European Parliament, including in his own political family (EPP), are critical of Barroso's silence in the face of the financial turmoil that threatened the euro this summer and that continues to menace the euro and Europe, and especially his silence on the deep divisions between member states over Greece and the sovereign debt crisis.

At the beginning of September in Strasbourg, at a group meeting behind closed doors, EPP members made it clear to Barroso that he had not shown himself equal to his task as head of the EU executive, with statutory responsibility for defending Europe's general interest against the special interests of member states. Upon leaving the meeting, witnesses heard Barroso say he was "shocked" by comments made that evening. Internal criticism has not diminished since then, however. Quite the reverse.

Among his political opponents, French MEPs who have often run him down have considered tabling a motion of censure against Barroso. Sylvie Goulard, of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE), is quoted in a French news magazine, *Le Nouvel Observateur*, as saying: "No one will regret his resignation". However, while ALDE leaders, together with the top staff of the S&D and Greens groups, may regret the lack of leadership of the European Commission president, they do not approve of the idea of a motion of censure. The argument used each time is that "Europe does not need an institutional crisis on top of the financial crisis".

The speakers, who will respond to President Barroso, on 28 September, have not lost sight of the fact that the states also have a large share of responsibility in the EU's inertia. They are expected to "urge" the Commission to be "more active in resolving the crisis" and "to take measures capable of strengthening growth and employment" while "supporting the Community method".