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Estonia's EU Presidency welcomed

EFA President Josep-Maria Terricabras on Estonia's EU Presidency

President of the EFA Group in the European Parliament, and Greens/EFA Vice President **Josep-Maria Terricabras** has welcomed the start of Estonia's six-month Presidency of the EU Council during a special debate at the European Parliament in Strasbourg.

During the debate, Estonia's Prime Minister Jüri Ratas set out the priorities for the Estonian Presidency which will include a focus on a digital Europe as well as creating an open and innovative European economy.

The start of the Estonian Presidency was also an opportunity to reflect on the role of small, successful, independent nations in building the European Union.

Estonia, which regained its independence in 1991, joined the European Union in 2004. Estonia has a highly developed IT sector and is one of the world's most digitally advanced nations. Independence within the European Union has enabled Estonia to achieve economic growth and raise living standards for its people.

Josep-Maria Terricabras, who spoke on behalf of the Greens/EFA Group in the European Parliament, praised the programme of the Estonian Presidency but said that he would have liked to have seen more of a focus on the defence of human rights, both within the EU and outside.

He also described Estonia as 'a small country and a friend of my country, Catalonia'.

Speaking in the debate, **Josep-Maria Terricabras** said:

"Estonia has chosen four main objectives for the next six months. The logical order of these four objectives seems clear. The inclusive and sustainable Europe that Estonia wants to promote, as the fourth objective, will be closer if the first three objectives are achieved.

"They consist in the promotion of an open and innovative economy, and, as required by that, security in daily life as well as significant advances in the modern digital world and the exchange of information. These three goals may certainly facilitate a more inclusive and sustainable Europe.

"The programme adds in its introduction that, in pursuing those objectives, Prime Minister, you will respect human rights and fundamental freedoms. So far, so good. However, I would have liked to see an entire chapter in the programme devoted specifically to the defence of human rights, not just as a consequence to be drawn from other objectives but as a specific objective in itself.

"Estonia, which is a small country and is a friend of my country, Catalonia, must be guided not only by the logic of inclusion and sustainability but also by the explicit defence of human rights. Indeed, the human-rights deficit is not found only in third countries, which we constantly criticise: unfortunately it also occurs in many countries within the Union.

"I am confident and convinced that, in the months to come, Estonia will go in the direction of denouncing any breach of fundamental rights in the European Union. Having said this, I must also say that my Group is pleased with the announcement of this project. We can only wish the best to Estonia and to Europe under this new Presidency."

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Josep Maria Terricabras

EFA President and first Vice President of the Greens/EFA Group

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