



## **Towards a different Europe**

### **MARTIN SCHULZ Man with a goal**

Kras had an interview with Martin Schulz, president of the European Parliament since 2012.

Martin Schulz was born on 20 December 1955 and grew up in Hehlrath, Germany, close to the Dutch and Belgian border. At the age of 19 he started his political career as a member of the Social-Democrat Party. On his 31<sup>st</sup> birthday he became the youngest mayor of North Rhine-Westphalia. An office he held with great enthusiasm for 11 years. In 1994 he moved over to the European Parliament. He became the leader of the SPD delegation in the European Parliament in 2000 and some time later he was elected vice-president of the PES fraction. In 2004 he became the leader of the Socialist and Democrat fraction in the European Parliament.

#### **You are the candidate of the European Socialists (PES) for the chairmanship of the European Commission. How does that feel?**

This nomination makes me very proud. But what I am most proud of is that in these European elections the voters can decide who is going to lead Europe. It is a great honour to be supported by your friends in Europe and to have been assigned this important task. As a convinced European I want to help get the most out of the EU. And as a social democrat I strive for a social Europe.

#### **Other political parties have also appointed their candidates, like for example Guy Verhofstadt for the ALDE. Is this competition between the political parties a good thing for Europe?**

Absolutely. It is a great thing for Europe. Europeans want a choice in how their institutions are managed. They want a say, and we owe them an explanation about the different options available. My concrete plan is to make a European tour to meet our electorate. I will knock on their doors, listen to them and speak with them. If my fellow candidates do the same, we could incite or encourage people, and make sure they take a stand. And through television debates we can explain our vision and objectives to voters.

**Following the Lisbon Treaty the European Council, to nominate a new president of the Commission, must take into account the decision of the**

**European Parliament. Can we consider that to be a positive evolution towards the further democratization of Europe?**

Yes, indeed. And remember this is not just about 'taking account of' our electorate. This is only the first part of article 17. It also says that Parliament needs to elect a candidate, and that it can request the Council to propose a new candidate if Parliament does not agree. If most Europeans are going to vote for a left-wing MP, we will have a left-wing Commission President, the same obviously applies for the right. Therefore, it is important for voters to realize and acknowledge this. Because they have the power.

**What can we expect from you as Commission President? What will your priorities be?**

First of all I hope to get elected and that is where I am also relying on organisations like S-Plus to explain my programme to your followers and to convince them to support us. My first priority is to create jobs. We have to invest. To make sure that European innovations allow European companies to let their product be manufactured by European employees, which are then shipped from European ports. That is the Europe known to the older generations. And that is the Europe we have to get back. That is why we specifically focus on efficiently tackling youth unemployment. We have to make every endeavour to offer a future to the most and best educated generation we have ever had in Europe. Furthermore, I want to protect the citizens. It is frustrating to see that the European Commission has mainly listened to the market and the (large) banks in recent years and that citizens were left out in the cold. We saved the banks, but we risk losing an entire generation. I used to be mayor of a small city in Germany. So I know how important it is to provide essential support to citizens without further interference. I want the teacher, the garbage man or the bus driver to simply be able to do their job.

**Are you of the opinion that Europe is doing what it can do defend and protect the needs of senior citizens? Which actions will the Commission undertake to effectively deal with the ageing population?**

I am worried about the impact of a harsh savings policy conducted by many countries today. Just think about all the savings on pensions, healthcare and social security. This is really hitting the man in the street hard. This should not be the case. Under my presidency I want to invest in public services to turn this painful evolution around. Look, this generation believes in reasonableness. And they know that this has not always been the case in recent years, and that the savings are far from equally divided.

Retiring does not mean you are finished. My Commission will consider other aspects besides the economic usage of people. Senior citizens play an important role in our society and let's not forget, they played a fundamental role in today's Europe. Senior citizens can still teach me something, my door will be open.

**The PES campaign for the elections of 25 May was launched. What is the role S-Plus can play for this campaign?**

Tell everyone about the PES manifest, our values and about what we want to achieve together. This campaign is about mobilising our voters. In 2009 57% of all Europeans did not vote, including millions of our own electorate. If we can convince these people to vote, if we can make them believe in our vision of a social Europe, then we will be able to make a difference.

**According to the Dutch paper 'De Telegraaf' the S&D group will be the largest political family in the European Parliament with 221 seats. Do you believe that is realistic?**

I hope so. I believe that if I can convince people about my programme and you convince your friends and other activists their friends, that nothing is impossible. Let me put it this way: Europe is frustrated, Europe is ready for change. Now we have the chance to convince everyone that we can make it happen.

Steven Vanden Broucke

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## S-Plus and the European Senior Organisation



S-Plus is not only active in Flanders, but also plays a role in Europe. We have been member of the European Senior Organisation (ESO) for some years and since 2011 we are at the helm. A short interview with brand-new president Marcel Geivaerts.

Marcel has been politically active for half a century. Since 2004 he is the chairman of S-Plus Bonheiden and the chairman of the S-Plus Policy Workgroup. Only the European dimension is new.

### **You are following in the footsteps of Mark Elchardus as president. Does this imply a different style or do you have a similar approach?**

I do not plan to take a radically different course, but I will undoubtedly leave my own marks. It is still important that the interests of socialist senior citizens are represented at a European level to the best of ESO's ability. The possible and necessary contributions of active senior citizens to the well-being and welfare of Europe must be given attention, certainly now that the European elections are around the corner.

### **What are your most important priorities as a chairman?**

Our first task is to perpetuate and spread the basic ideas of the PES, especially now in this pre-electoral period. We have to mobilise to ensure that all affiliated organisations help us to support the social-democratic project for a fair and social Europe. And we have to increase the impact of ESO on the European senior policy. ESO is the result of PES initiative, but only represents 11 countries today. Therefore, it is important that we expand to increase our power. If you know that we are living longer and longer, ESO is the organisation to protect and defend the interests and needs of senior citizens. The more people you represent, the easier it is to have an impact.

### **Where do you think ESO will be in four years time?**

My first action was to expand the board from 3 to 5 members. A vice-chairman and a communications manager (PES) were added. ESO is committed to making the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats (S&D) the largest fraction in the new European parliament, and it will aim to defend it. We could turn the ageing population into an 'opportunity' instead of a 'problem'. Most people, certainly in Europe, stay young until the age of 75. That is what the European welfare state is accomplishing. It is a unique opportunity not granted to any other society in history, ever. And finally, if I could end this period in office with a doubling of ESO affiliations, I would be a very happy man.

Steven Vanden Broucke

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