Martin Bursík, *President-in-Office of the Council*

Mr President, it is a pleasure to be here and share with you some thoughts on the important year ahead. Firstly, let me congratulate the Temporary Committee on Climate Change for all the work it has accomplished since its creation in April 2007: hearings, conferences, reports, resolutions, exchanges with third parties. Its tireless efforts have greatly contributed towards shaping the EU position on climate change.

The latest resolution, '2050: The future begins today – Recommendations for the EU's future integrated policy on climate change', which was adopted by the Temporary Committee on Climate Change on 2 December 2008, and which you will adopt at this part-session, will again provide a very useful basis when discussing the options for a post-2012 climate agreement and for further deepening the EU's climate policies.

As you know, the work during the Presidency will focus on the international negotiation process. By the way, I am leaving Strasbourg today and flying to Delhi to have discussions with the Indian Government and Indian representatives. Two weeks later we have an EU-Africa meeting in Nairobi, Kenya, and we have already made contact with the US Administration, which I will mention later.

By adopting the climate and environment legislative package at the end of 2008, the EU is sending a very strong political signal to all our partners in the world. With the adoption of this package in a few months' time, the EU will demonstrate that its commitment, as well as its leadership, in the global fight against climate change is as strong as ever. Indeed, the EU will be the first region in the world to commit unilaterally to a reduction of its greenhouse gas emissions by 20% by 2020.

As you know, the climate and energy package will, as of 2013, enable the reform of the EU-ETS (Emissions Trading Scheme), set limits for the emissions outside the Emissions Trading Scheme, stimulate CO_2 capture and storage technology, as well as boost the deployment of renewables.

As far as the ETS is concerned, a single EU cap with a linear downwards trajectory will be set, auctioning will be gradually introduced as the method of allocating allowances and monitoring reporting, and verification will be strengthened. But, of course, the EU has repeatedly said that it will not settle for 20% – we want to go for 30% – and, therefore, we hope for an ambitious global and comprehensive agreement in Copenhagen.

The Copenhagen Conference is now only 10 months away. The December 2008 Poznań Climate Conference agreed on a work programme for 2009, with clearly identified steps towards Copenhagen. The decision in Poznań on the operationalisation of the Adaptation Fund represents an important step forward in the negotiations on the financing building block – one of the key elements of any comprehensive global agreement.

The ministerial round table in Poznań also confirmed the shared willingness of both the developed and the developing countries to find an effective globally agreed response to dangerous climate change for the post-2012 period. This encompasses further mitigation efforts, adaptation actions and finance and technology means to make that response operational.

Poznań has also sent the message that the current financial crisis is not to be seen as an obstacle to further action on climate change, but, instead, as yet another opportunity for profoundly transforming our economic system and moving firmly towards a low-carbon economy.

The Czech Presidency intends to build on such important achievements and to pursue efforts at international level towards a successful agreement in Copenhagen in December 2009.

On 2 March 2009 the Environment Council, and later the ECOFIN Council and the spring European Council, will be the first opportunities for further developing the EU position in this respect, on the basis of the Commission communication towards a comprehensive climate change agreement in Copenhagen, which we received a week ago, and on the basis of your input.

In addition to the shared vision for long-term action for mitigation technology and adaptation, the identification of appropriate means for financing effective and long-term climate policies will be key in future EU deliberations. In this context, I can only reiterate the Climate Change Committee's call on the Commission and the Member States 'to adopt, at bilateral level in the negotiations towards a post-2012 agreement, a mediating role between the positions of developed countries, in order to ensure by means of a balance of interest the success of the climate negotiations involving all major greenhouse gas emitters'.

The EU will also continue to engage in active outreach with key negotiating partners and main emerging economies, but also with a new US Administration. I have spoken on the phone to Carol Browner, the President's assistant for energy and climate change. I have made a preliminary proposal to her for a high-level meeting with US representatives and the EU Commission – Commissioner Dimas – the Czech Presidency and the upcoming Swedish Presidency (i.e. the Troika) in early March, probably 2 or 6 March.

I said that the EU would like to work as closely as possible with the United States on the evolution and linkage of carbon markets. We gather that Congressman Waxman has indicated that he will try to get the legislation from his committee on the cap-and-trade system to be implemented at the end of May. This is quite an encouraging response from the United States as a reaction to the activities of the European Union.

We also count on the European Parliament to ensure that the EU voice is more widely heard, and we appreciate very much the outreach efforts that you have made in the past. I can only encourage you to continue along this path and wish you all good luck for the year ahead.