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Beyond the sugar cubes, deeper engagement between Europe's citizenry and its political institutions is the Union's best hope for continued peace, prosperity and progress.

Matthew Rushworth is the winner in the essay competition launched within the initiative "Now & Interacting with the European parliament". He is 29 years old and is currently studying law at City Law School in London. He will be a participant in a public event in France, due to take place in April 2009 and organized by the project's partnering media Yvelines Radio. Here is his essay:

EP 2009 Vote: Beyond the Sugar Cubes

The last European elections were the largest simultaneous transnational elections ever held. On June the 13th a new media spotlight promises to convey the Union to its citizenry as never before.

Political parties campaign at national level for the first time. With a new reforming Treaty a prospect, MEPs must improve citizens' understanding of what they do. Parliament's co-legislating power is set to be extended, it may decide the Commission President; on the threshold of a greatly augmented role, gone are the days when a democratic deficit can justify voter's apathy.

A thought experiment: imagine Europe's history in the year 2100. How stable was the Union? What happened to its laws, markets, languages and cultures?

And to its people?

If the great experiment succeeds, it will have created an economic and political force capable of offering the world leadership. But today Europe's citizens face unprecedented challenges: financial crisis, recession, climate change, terrorism; the choices of June between different ideas for Europe's future are crucial to that future.

The Parliament today participates intensely in producing legislation, shares budgetary responsibilities and exercises democratic supervision over all EU institutions. A democratic voice, it wields considerable moral authority. Already it is a force to be reckoned with and it is a force over which voters have a precious chance to exert their influence this June. The elections have the potential to galvanise the Union, to elicit considered choices from a demos 500 million strong in 27 states.

Our priority will be to harmonize: "sladit: "to sweeten."

The Czech Presidency has faced a tough start: ever-widening financial crisis; interrupted energy supplies, conflict. Beyond the sugar cubes, deeper engagement between Europe's citizenry and

Matthew Rushworth - the winner in the essay competition

its political institutions is the Union's best hope for continued peace, prosperity and progress.