

## Speech by François Mitterrand to the European Parliament (24 May 1984)

**Caption:** In a speech to the European Assembly on 24 May 1984, François Mitterrand, President of the French Republic and President-in-Office of the European Council, proposes holding a conference in order to study plans for a European Union.

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## Speech by François Mitterrand to the European Parliament (24 May 1984)

Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, I am speaking to you as President of the European Council for the first half of 1984. Believe me when I say that I am conscious of the honour of addressing an Assembly that represents 270 million men and women who will soon be called upon to repeat, in their individual countries, that fundamental act of democracy, electing a Parliament.

But I am also speaking to you as a French European whose personal commitment has been in evidence at every stage of the emergence of Europe.

When, in May 1948, just three years after the war, the European idea took shape at the congress in the Hague, I was there and I believed in it.

*(Applause)*

When, in 1950, Robert Schuman launched the plan for the European Coal and Steel Community, I supported it and I believed in it. When, in 1956, the vast task of building the common market began, with the very active participation of the French Government of the time, I was there and I believed in it. And today, when we have to rid Europe of the Ten of its differences and lead it resolutely along the path to the future, I can still say that I am here and I believe in it.

*(Applause)*

Many of my generation have shared the same ordeals, experienced the same hopes and worked for the same cause. There are many younger ones who have, in their turn, conceived the ambition of bringing Europe into line with the dictates of history and, through her, serving the just interests of the peoples that make it up.

Everyone should realize this. Going beyond political divisions and national rivalry, they are the builders of a vast undertaking that will radically change the facts of politics or international geopolitics. They must continue to unite around this project and their public life will be justified by this alone. They will have reshaped the planet.

This meeting, here in Strasbourg, was something I wanted. It is no doubt usual for the President-in-Office of the European Council to report on its progress to Parliament. The Stuttgart Council made this a principle of our life together, which is a good thing. But I should like to add something else to this observance of the rites - faith in our action and the will to see it through.

Today, the Community has achieved the initial objectives it inherited from the war. In the beginning, it had to reconcile and bring together peoples whom force and bloodshed had divided and get them harnessed to a common task. That has been done. Now the choice is between letting other people on our continent and outside our continent decide on everyone's destiny, ours included, and combining all the talent and ability, the creative ability and the material, spiritual and cultural resources that have combined to make Europe a civilization, so, as Walt Whitman puts it in a line I very much like, it can at last become what it is.

Our choice is based on a simple idea. None of our peoples, however rich its past and however strong its desire to live, can in isolation have the necessary effect on the present and the future of mankind.

Together, we can,

*(Applause)*

but we are at a period of time when destiny is still hesitant. For all too long Europe has been held back by absurd arguments that make it lose sight of its objective. It had to wake up to the fact that there was no chance of any great design for Europe being anything more than a pipedream as long as it was bogged down in a morass of petty arguments.

*(Loud applause)*

To put an end to them, a method of work was fixed on in Stuttgart. Experience has shown it to be a good one. Then, in Athens, came the plan for reconciliation that was to come about in Brussels, in particular in agricultural, budgetary and industrial matters. All the points at issue, bar one, were settled.

A brief reminder of them will show that the way has been cleared and that we have begun to move forward again. Not that the remaining disagreement is negligible, far from it, but, contrary to what many people feared, it has not blocked the machinery of Europe. I shall return to this later.

Our first duty was to modernize the common agricultural policy, which has given the food and agriculture industries in our countries a capacity of international proportions. Then came the problem of surpluses, and dairy surpluses first and foremost, with a view to taking account of the real dairy outlets on the market, a vital corollary to guaranteed prices - 104 million tonnes produced for 85 million consumed. In Brussels, our farmers were invited to try to adapt and convert, a drive which the Community should back up, as it has done in the past, in line with the Treaty of Rome. And what goes for milk should go for all the other agricultural products too. Other important decisions have been taken on the monetary compensatory amounts (dismantling and methods of calculation, that is to say), on fruit and vegetables, on agricultural prices in the prescribed time limits and on the negotiation of cereal substitutes with the USA. And these decisions are now taking practical shape.

Without wishing to ignore the legitimate concern of the producers, I think that this is a victory by the Community over the Community. Now, 27 years after it was devised, the common agricultural policy returned to the bases from which it should not have strayed.

The Esprit programme was launched a few weeks earlier. It will cost 3 billion ECU in all, as much as or more than comparable efforts in the same field outside Europe. So the dynamic movement of cooperation on research and development of information technologies between European firms has been encouraged, in a way, with the help of the Community, in a different context. I am also thinking here of CERN, the Airbus, Ariane and JET.

And recently, the 12 biggest European companies laid down common standards for data processing. Taking this industrial initiative further, the Industry Ministers have laid the foundations for joint action by the Ten in the field of telecommunications. They will do the same, next month, for biotechnology, while the Economic and Finance Ministers are working to facilitate this cooperation through a series of financial, legal and tax provisions.

Let us continue with this outline. Everyone, as you know, was calling for tighter control of the Community budget and the Brussels Council reached agreement on this point too. But control over spending could not involve a cut in the resources that were vital to the development of the Community, which is why the Brussels Council came down in favour of raising the VAT ceiling from 1% to 1.4% on 1 January 1986, the date of enlargement to include Spain and Portugal - I make no secret of the fact that I should have liked to see more - and a further rise to 1.6% on 1 January 1988.

Everyone is aware of the problems of the present budget. But I do not think the Community will be forced to use extraordinary means or give in to unacceptable pressure. The Treaty demands that agricultural spending be financed and it has to be adhered to. That leaves the dispute modestly referred to as the correction of budgetary imbalance - which in fact means the current discussion about the British contribution.

After four years of difficult negotiations, which are forever being relaunched, and in the absence of any agreement at the time of this speech, my comments will be careful ones. The Presidency has spared no effort in trying to handle this problem, but its main aim - and this is where it is intransigent - has been to see that Community principles, in particular that of Community preference, are preserved and it therefore judged that agricultural levies and customs duties, which by their very nature belong to the Community and not to the

State that received them, could not be taken into account when compensation was calculated.

(Applause)

I should add that the Treaty of Rome, like any treaty, is a contract and that this contract implies refusal of the idea of fair returns.

(Prolonged applause)

It may be reasonable to reconcile, the naturally varying positions of the 10 partners when excessive imbalance occurs, because of the solidarity that binds us - provided we stay within the reasonable limits of a circumstantial regulation and do not try to revise the Treaty without saying so. This was the aim of the debate which has not and never will be concluded as long as there is a fear of Community law being held up to question.

However, the Community is alive and working as a simple account of the arrangements made over the past two months serves to show. It has, in particular - and I want to spend time on this point - passed the point of no return in the Spanish and Portuguese accession procedure.

There are questions about political necessity - which is something we all recognize, not just because of these two countries' courageous reconquest of democracy, but also because of the simple realization that they are Europeans, completely, and that to deny the fact would be to flout history past and present. Are we not going to increase the tension and reduce the cohesion of the present Community? Or will the conditions for economic integration conceivably be met over a long period?

Convenient attitudes may be adopted. Saying yes to enlargement, on a *a priori* basis, in order to please the applicant countries and without drawing any practical conclusions. Or saying no, come what may, and refusing to look at the question. Let us refuse such facile attitudes. Europe would certainly lose out if, as it grew, it merged with the free trade area to which those around it continue to aspire.

(Applause)

Let us remember the last enlargements and beware of leaving the most difficult discussions until later.

At all events, I think an answer to the enlargement question will be forthcoming before the end of September. I think it will be positive and I think it will be applied as from 1 January 1986.

This will mean a frank comparison of the economies, harmonization of the social and tax systems, mutual adherence to the rules of fair competition and a timetable for implementation. It will also mean the present Community making a prior effort to rationalize its functioning and preparing, in particular with integrated Mediterranean programmes, to handle the productions of the South as it did the productions of the North. The producers will of course understand that it is not possible both to call for market laws whereby they can produce unspecified quantities as they like and to protect themselves from these laws with price guarantees. At all events, I note that decisive progress has been made in two hitherto undiscussed sectors, agriculture and fisheries.

But going beyond these debates, the Brussels Council committed itself to taking other steps in other directions. Directives doing away with technical barriers to trade were thus approved, an instrument of common commercial policy was introduced, fishing quotas for 1984 were fixed in time and iron and steel quotas were extended for a further two years. The Eighth Directive on company law was approved, agreement was reached on the social aspects of the reorganization of the coal sector and on so-called demonstration research projects and the reform of the Regional Fund was approved after three years of arduous negotiations. Lastly, the field of initiatives has now been cleared of obsessive disputes and stretches wide before us.

In spite of customs dismantling, for example, there are still too many obstacles to free movement within the Community.

(Applause)

How many controls and formalities there are to try the patience of those who are subjected to them and baffle the understanding of public opinion!

In view of this House's interest in this matter, a transport policy involving greater flexibility at frontiers and more support for major infrastructure will be proposed at the June Council. What could be more in keeping with our principles than freedom to come and go, to do business and to trade?

In 1981, when I had just taken up my duties, I mentioned the European social area at the Luxembourg Council. How can a common market be created if, at the same time, the producers are working in wildly different conditions? Since the common market exists, it would be better for the workers' representatives to organize at that level, in the same way as firms and governments do.

(Applause)

This will be done, I hope, next month, when the Council of Foreign Ministers has produced the Community's medium-term action programme for submission to the European Council, as was agreed in Brussels. More specifically, this same Council of Ministers will have to pursue the efforts, as yet hardly begun, to rid our societies of the disease from which they are suffering - unemployment and, worse, unemployment among young people, by providing vocational training that is more in keeping with requirements. It will be presented with recommendations on the reorganization of working time and will select guidelines relating to the social implications of the new technologies in the light of observations made by the employers' and employees' representatives on the Standing Committee on Employment.

The voice of the European Trade Union Confederation will, of course, be heard.

The natural environment warrants equal attention. When it comes to protecting the environment, our national frontiers have even less *raison d'être*. Yet our ways of thinking and our national susceptibilities are in defiance of good sense.

The Rhine flows beside or through three of the countries of the Community and what harms the environment of one equally harms them all.

(Applause)

But this argument seems not to be heard and the river and its tributaries still carry death to animals and plant life and threaten the health of mankind.

Acid rain has profoundly changed the forests of Germany and it is now eating into the forests of the Vosges and moving northwards to Scandinavia. And, for other reasons, the Mediterranean forest is under threat too.

No country is free from this latter-day epidemic. Who will put an end to the scourge? A directive on industrial pollution was adopted in Brussels and it remains to speed up the finalization of strict provisions to control the transfer of toxic and dangerous wastes.

Similarly, the reduction of the lead content of petrol is at the centre of arduous negotiations. Now that the target has been clearly identified in this way, will we be wise enough to work towards it without delay? I would not swear to it.

So much for the near future, with its usual pattern of light and shade and its combination of progress and impasse.

But we must look further than the common market.

What is Europe for? This is a question we have to answer if we are not ultimately to lose our identity, our *raison d'être* and our reasons for action.

Is Europe, which has played a pre-eminent part in the formidable advance of modern science, so disconcerted by the development of modern technology that it is unable to emerge from the crisis and take up its place once more, to revive the forms and rediscover the values of its ancient civilization? Is Europe, which contains two-thirds of the free regimes of the world, unable to consolidate its institutions and act, with one movement, where action is called for, as a force for peace and equilibrium amongst the most powerful and as a force for justice and progress between North and South? No, I do not believe it is.

But it has yet to realize the full extent of the economic, cultural and political stakes of the coming century.

Let us take four examples.

The first is electronics. Europe spends more than Japan or the USA on research. But each country of Europe is jealous of its techniques and sees its defences crumble under American and Japanese pressure. The protectionist temptation will gain ground - or when it awakes, Europe will have lost the battle on which all others depend. Attempts at industrial alliance so far have failed. Is it not high time the States encouraged unity? Industry will not be modernized if it is content to amass plant. It also has to use financing from such sources as the European Investment Bank and the New Community Instrument.

My second example is the conquest of space. There, the choices came earlier than we anticipated and perhaps earlier than we hoped, first, because of our own success with launchers and satellites. But moving into the industrial phase means sharing the tasks and the investments. It will be easier to look at US offers on a projected civil space station from a position of strength. As I said in The Hague recently, should Europe not put priority on concentrating on itself? A space station is within its grasp. It has the relevant technical and financial means. And although it may be presumptuous to aim higher than present means allow, our industrial experience shows us that anything that can be achieved in 15 years' time must be started now.

*(Applause)*

Transport is the third example. Agreements were reached recently on increasing the Community road haulage quotas, on cooperation in the railway sector and on road safety. It would be as well to improve on them all right away. A vast railway equipment programme for high speed transport would, by reducing distances, bring Europeans closer together as a matter of course.

My fourth example is culture. Failing to unite would be condemning ourselves to being borne along on the tide of words and images from outside.

There is no shortage of projects and they are all within our grasp. What are they? Why not use a Franco-German satellite for a European television channel...

*(Applause)*

...for all producers in the member countries concerned? Why not have a common fund to support the programme industries that will have the difficult task of giving content to the countless networks? Why not have a coherent plan for teaching European languages...

*(Applause)*

...European universities, encouraged by exchanges of research workers and equivalence of diplomas? What about the European Cultural Foundation?

I was also proud to see the theatre of Europe, which Giorgio Strehler runs, set up right in the heart of Paris. Each of your countries takes a pride in its enviable successes, but none of them has a big enough market. Europe is there. It must put its mind to it and get organized!

However, there is one field in which Europe is present, if I may say so, instinctively, namely human rights. When it ratified Article 25 of the European Convention, my country was true to its tradition. But we are all concerned about the increasing ground being gained by terrorism and oppression almost everywhere in the world.

Your Parliament has constantly expressed its attachment to the principles on which freedom was founded and, only yesterday, it adopted a resolution on Andrei Sakharov, whom we are all thinking about.

*(Applause)*

Every day, alas, in every clime, men suffer and are persecuted for what they believe, for what they hold dear and for what they are.

The time has come to repeat a word under which we once rallied - resist. Yes, resist violence!

*(Applause)*

I know no other subject on which the people of Europe feel nearer to those who represent them. Yes, this Europe of ours is a Community of laws and we are proud of it. The finest illustration of this is the Court of Justice, where a European legal order is being forged from an unprecedented synthesis of different legal systems.

Another dimension is the different positions the Ten take up on world affairs.

No one but Europe has shown so much imagination and constancy in its trade with the Third World. The Suva conference early this month was an opportunity to orchestrate points of view in preparation for Lomé III. The final discussions should be taking place in Luxembourg on 28 and 29 June, so the drafting of the future Convention can be completed.

The importance of this is clear at a time when international aid is being cut back and the situation of the poor countries - and I am thinking especially of Africa here - is worsening under the combined effects of the climate, the recession, their debts, the anarchy of the markets, the burden of their interest rates and monetary disorder.

The European Councils have adopted suitable solutions to problems in the world - in the Middle East, Central America, southern Africa, Afghanistan, Cambodia and many others. They have helped preserve that fragile link which maintained a dialogue between the eastern and western parts of our continent from the Helsinki Conference to the Stockholm Conference. They have boosted cooperation between the Community and the seven friendly countries of EFTA. It was not for them to take account of the aspirations - so frequently expressed, particularly of late - towards security and a common defence.

Speaking for myself, I mention this, as I did in the Hague, merely to indicate how very difficult it will be to bring about and how very badly it is needed.

*(Applause from the right)*

It is clear that we are moving away from the time when Europe's sole destiny was to be shared out and divided up by others. The two words 'European independence' now sound different. This is a fact that our century, which is nearing its end, will, I am sure, remember.

*(Applause)*

The European elections are an occasion for taking stock and embarking on fresh initiatives. The life of the Community institutions is marked by many an imperfection. None of them is really intolerable, but together they create a constant and widespread constraint and we are constantly paying for it.

First we have the unanimity rule, which is used far more than the Treaties suggest and even more than is provided for by the Luxembourg compromise.

*(Prolonged applause)*

How can the complex and diversified unit that the Community has become be governed by the rules of the Diet of the old Kingdom of Poland, where every member could block the decisions? We all know where that led. It is time we returned to a more normal and more promising way of doing things. The French Government, which was behind this compromise, has already proposed that it be used only in specific cases. The more frequent practice of voting on important questions heralds a return to the Treaties. But the unanimity rule is not the only difficulty facing the Council of Ministers.

*(Applause)*

The way the work of everyday management is shared by the Commission, the Permanent Representatives and the Council of Ministers also fluctuates far too much. The latter body is losing part of the political responsibility the Treaties gave it and the European Council is becoming a permanent court of appeal, or even a local court, in the running of our everyday affairs. That is obviously not its role. Let us give the Commission back its authority.

*(Applause)*

Let us give the Council of Ministers back its means of implementing the policies of which the European Council lays down the guidelines. Let us give the European Council a permanent secretariat for political cooperation.

*(Applause)*

There are, I know, complaints about relations between the Council and your Parliament being inadequate. Let us do something about this by adhering to the commitments the Member States made in the solemn declaration of Stuttgart and presenting a reform of the consultation procedure. And lastly, let us reflect on the best way of ensuring greater continuity in the presidency of the Community.

*(Applause)*

Europe has always been a composite entity. It has developed in stages, using, as the need has arisen, those institutions which seemed the best at the time, even if it meant changing the way they related to each other. But we must keep our points of reference.

This is why it is vital to consolidate the main Treaty that binds the European countries together and constitutes their fundamental law - the Treaty of Rome. Yet the same movement is already carrying us beyond this Treaty to areas it does not cover. I am thinking here of education, health, justice, security and the campaign against terrorism. And what do we find? Some people have talked about a Europe of different speeds or variable geometry. Such a step, which reflects a real situation, is one we must take. Care will be taken to ensure that it complements, rather than competes with, the central structure, the Community. Whenever problems of this kind have arisen, Europe has created a new institution - the European Council - or adopted a new legal act reflecting an established practice - the European Monetary System and the political cooperation as defined in the Stuttgart declaration - or concluded a treaty ratified by the national parliaments - the Lomé Convention. And here is the House encouraging us to go further along this path by



proposing a draft treaty on European Union. Those of us who are interested will observe that the same old method is being used. A new situation calls for a new treaty...

*(Applause)*

...which must not, of course, be a substitute for existing treaties, but an extension of them to fields they do not currently cover. This is the case with the European political Community.

France, ladies and gentlemen, is available for such an enterprise.

*(Prolonged applause)*

I, on its behalf, state its willingness to examine and defend your project, the inspiration behind which it approves.

*(Applause)*

I therefore suggest that preparatory consultations, perhaps leading to a conference of the Member States concerned, be started up. The project on European Union and the solemn declaration of Stuttgart will be a basis for this.

*(Applause)*

Those, ladies and gentlemen, are the thoughts prompted by my experience as a European and my term of office as President of the European Council.

I am sure that one day this will all be done, for our young people have need of it and it is the price we have to pay for our independence and the independence of our own nations and of Europe. I have too much confidence in our history to believe we could ever allow ourselves to go into a decline - of which an intolerable demographic regression is the most disquieting sign.

*(Applause)*

But we must not leave it too late. So the exciting task for you and for us is to prevent the ineluctable, to make the improbable succeed, to achieve our hopes and to perpetuate, with its revived youth, a great civilization - our civilization.

*(Prolonged standing ovation)*