

Statement by Hans-Dietrich Genscher to the European Parliament (12 April 1983)

Caption: On 12 April 1983, Hans-Dietrich Genscher, West German Foreign Minister, gives his views in the European Parliament on the report by Belgian MEP Lambert Croux concerning the establishment of European Political Cooperation. He also emphasises the importance of the plan for a Solemn Declaration on the European Union.

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[...]

There is agreement on all but a very few aspects of the text of the declaration. The question is, then, what have we achieved so far? We have laid one of the foundation stones for the further, dynamic development of the Community within EPC towards European Union. The European Community and EPC, which have hitherto existed side by side, will now be bracketed together. This means not only the involvement of the European Council as the guiding body in both areas but also the determination of ways in which the European Parliament and the Commission can participate in EPC. The European Communities are to be strengthened and extended.

What the German-Italian draft had to say on a declaration on questions of economic integration has now become a full chapter of the declaration, setting out the most important aims for the European Communities in the next few years.

In the area of EPC too, we go beyond the London report by placing greater emphasis on the preparation and adoption of joint positions and a joint approach in foreign policy, including its economic and political aspects.

European cooperation is to be achieved through closer cultural cooperation and through the approximation of certain areas of Member States' legislation. To ensure that the process initiated by the declaration remains dynamic, the concluding clauses provide for the declaration to be generally reviewed after five years, one object being to see whether progress achieved should be made the subject of a treaty on European Union.

One Member State still has reservations about the prospect of a treaty following the review of progress made towards European Union after five years and the passage relating to the progressive development of a common policy in ever more areas of foreign policy, and there are still differences of opinion on two important aspects - the decision-making procedure and the chapter on the European Parliament.

As regards the decision-making procedure, the Member States agree in principle that the application of the procedures laid down in the Treaties for the taking of decisions is of crucial importance if the Community's ability to take action is to be improved. They are therefore in favour of seizing any opportunity of facilitating decision-making, with abstentions, for example. They do not, however, agree on any wording which goes further than this. Some Member States want an explicit reference to the Luxembourg conclusions of January 1966, while others reject this idea.

We are continuing the search for acceptable solutions. But, in my capacity as President of the Council and also as one of the people behind this initiative, I feel I must say this: it cannot be the task of this European Act, the object of which is, of course, to bring us closer to European Union, to get us to commit ourselves in writing to something which conflicts with the Treaties. That would be a step backwards. I now come to the chapter of particular interest to us all, the chapter on the European Parliament. The Member States agree on the following points:

The European Parliament has an important role to play in the development of European Union. The European Parliament will for the first time have the right to discuss any aspect of European Union, including European Political Cooperation. It is also confirmed for the first time that all questions put by the European Parliament must be answered by the Council and the members of the Commission even if they concern subjects not covered by the Treaties.

In addition, the Council, the Foreign Ministers meeting in European Political Cooperation and the Commission for the first time undertake to react to resolutions on subjects of major importance and general significance in which Parliament asks for their comments. The programmes the Council President announces at the beginning of his term of office and his stocktaking at the end of that period will be as firm fixtures as the information regularly given to the European Parliament on EPC subjects and the annual EPC progress

report.

The consultation of the European Parliament is to be extended to include important international agreements and accessions. The Luns Westerterp procedure for informing Parliament on current negotiations will also apply to all international agreements of any significance.

It should also be noted that the European Council will report to the European Parliament after each meeting and submit an annual written progress report on European Union. Greater account is to be taken of the contribution the European Parliament makes to a coordinated foreign policy of the Ten. The European Parliament is also named in the revision clause. It is to be asked for its opinion when the declaration is five years after its adoption.

The Ten are, then, agreed on many aspects of the provisions which concern the European Parliament. I should add, however, that one Member State has reservations about obtaining the opinion of the European Parliament's enlarged Bureau before the Commission is appointed and about the improvement and extension of the conciliation procedure.

As regards the European Parliament's debate and vote on the Commission's programme, we hope we can soon overcome the reservations expressed by three Member States. All in all, the provisions relating to the European Parliament confirm rights which have simply been acquired through practice and also grant some new or increased powers. The progress thus made will not, of course, come up to the European Parliament's expectations in every respect, but it does mean a real improvement in its status. On 19 November 1981 I said to the House that we had not postulated the desirable but tried to formulate the attainable.

The difficult negotiations on the final text underline the need for an approach that is as resolute as it is realistic. We will not get anywhere if we adopt the principle of 'all or nothing'. Our initiative is an important intermediate stage on the road to European Union, but it not the final stage. This is especially true of the relationship between the Council and the European Parliament. A great deal remains to be done if we are to have the interinstitutional agreements that are needed if relations are to assume more concrete shape and to be improved.

I must refer to the importance attached to the permanent dialogue with the European Parliament to which the German-Italian initiative has given rise. Minister Colombo and I described the basic ideas behind the initiative here even before we explained them to our national parliaments. We continued this dialogue on 14 October 1982, when we went into some detail. On 7 July and 15 December 1982 the Danish Presidency reported on the progress made, and in the speech I made on the German Presidency's programme on 11 January of this year I outlined the Presidency's objectives in this respect. The dialogue with the European Parliament has also begun, through the talks the enlarged Bureau and the Foreign Ministers have had and informal consultations with the President of the European Parliament. We shall continue this dialogue.

Our common goal, European Union, can be achieved only if we press ahead step by step with the political unification of Europe. This will require a policy with good staying power. I should not like to leave anyone in any doubt here: my friend Emilio Colombo and I have this staying power. We shall not cease to use our combined strength to achieve progress. The Solemn Declaration represents major progress. Neither you nor either of us think it goes far enough. We should nevertheless take the steps that can be taken now, even if they do not go as far as we would personally like, because any step on the road to European Union is a step on the road to success. What we achieve today will form the basis of further progress tomorrow.

The Foreign Ministers will be considering the few points still outstanding on 14 and 15 May. The Presidency still wants to see the Solemn Declaration adopted during the first six months of 1983.

I would again appeal to you, the Members of the European Parliament, who I believe have a central role to play in the work of European unification, to continue giving this initiative your support.

When we Foreign Ministers get together and wrestle over wording and agreements, I know that many of my

colleagues think as I do, but they also have problems in their own governments. You represent the European public, and I believe that at this decision-making stage we must together rally public support for this important work.

(Applause)