

Statement by Altiero Spinelli to the European Parliament (19 November 1981)

Caption: On 19 November 1981, the MEP Altiero Spinelli publicly reprimands Hans-Dietrich Genscher and Emilio Colombo, the German and Italian Foreign Ministers, for having committed European political cooperation to an Intergovernmental Conference.

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Madame President, once again, I should like to use one of the common working languages of the Community.

If I were religious, I would begin my speech with the words 'Gott helf mir! — God help me!', for I am certainly in need of some occult assistance to put across what I need to say in the paltry five minutes I am allotted by the Rules of Procedure. For my intention, Mr Genscher and Mr Colombo, is to urge you to rise above yourselves in order to fulfil the mission which you have been assigned.

We appreciate the fact that you, the German and Italian Ministers, have taken this initiative, for, in proposing this European Act, you have broken a taboo — that of looking beyond the Community's economic tasks — which has hampered the building of Europe for far too long. You have the merit of having said that the time is ripe for initiating moves to gradually create a European Union, a political union undertaken not only to strengthen common economic policies, — although this is, of course, part of it — but also to promote a common policy towards the outside world and a common security policy. This would entail the making of diplomatic and strategic moves in common to make a positive contribution to achieving world peace.

We thank you, therefore, for obliging our governments, our Community and our populations to consider that these new common policies call for common instruments for decision-taking and action. I am sorry to say, however, that your initiative reveals that you have scant faith and only very limited vision! Six or seven years ago, Mr Genscher, you persuaded your party to commit itself to a European constituent assembly. I have not forgotten this, but maybe you have. More recently, on 26 November 1980, when you began to talk about this relaunching of the European political union, you addressed the Bundestag as follows: 'I do not believe that the impulse to undertake the drafting of a European constitution can come from national governments. It can only emanate from the directly elected European Parliament.' When you said that, you knew that the idea of the Crocodile was gaining ground in this Parliament. I am the first to admit that Parliament is at fault for having dragged its feet over this affair, but it has finally shouldered its burden and in a short while it will have its nose to the grindstone. But you couldn't bear to wait, Mr Genscher. You wasted no time in shedding faith in this Parliament. You couldn't wait to give your diplomats the task of drawing up this Act. And they gave you just what you expected: the umpteenth variation on the inter-governmental collaboration theme, which you swallowed without protest.

(Applause from certain quarters)

You must have heard the proverb which says that even the most beautiful girl in the world can only give what she has got. Your diplomatic manoeuvres cannot offer any more. I admit that, for the time being, this intergovernmental cooperation is all that you have and that you must make use of it to tackle the most pressing international problems. But we want you to recognize that such an arrangement has no durability or substance to it. Do not come here and tell us that, in five years — at the outset you said three years, but already it has turned into five years — in the light of experience, the Council will, if necessary, propose a treaty to consolidate the Union. It would be much better if you said that we don't need any more experience, and that we know all we need to know, if we were only willing to admit it. You ought to say that you will do your utmost to maintain this halting and precarious cooperation to give Parliament the two, or two and a half years it needs to draft the basic legislation for the European Union and to submit it to the Member States for ratification. If you were to do this, the European Parliament, on behalf of the people of Europe who have elected it, would wholeheartedly applaud your initiative, and would feel prompted to speed up its work as a constituent body in order to help you as quickly as possible out of a position which, ultimately, is not yours to hold. In this way, you would have served Europe well.

I also have something to say to Mr Colombo — even though he is not here — since he regards himself as the heir to de Gasperi's European spirit; I should like to ask him to show something of the tenacity which de Gasperi had in order to make similar proposals to his colleagues.

I tell you, Minister, that Europe's future depends not on your inter-ministerial proposals but on this Parliament, the only institution with the right to speak out and to put forward suggestions on behalf of the people of Europe who have elected it!

I told you that I thought you lacked vision. I will admit that you have come to realize that our governments must learn to cooperate as quickly as possible in order to have a minimum number of common policies in all sorts of spheres, particularly — I may as well say it — to have a common security policy. You have also come to realize that it is no good just hailing it as a necessity, you must do as little as you can to achieve it. So, in your 'Act', you call for the setting-up of an army of councils, committees, and sub-committees as part of a preposterous secretariat whose structure and location will not be fixed. In other words, you want to create a leviathan of a bureaucracy, but manned only by inter-governmental agents. And when this monster of committees and boards has chewed everything over and disgorged it, you believe that each Member State is going to tot up the political experience acquired!

But gentlemen, haven't you ever heard how, during the first and second world wars, the Allies — finding themselves in an emergency which obliged them to have a common military policy on their warfronts, a common provisions policy and common control of their currencies — decided, through acts similar to yours, but without any formal legal procedures, without setting up institutions, and with little regard for the future, to appoint Messrs Foch, Eisenhower and Monnet to act as plenipotentiaries on their behalf? You should make the same suggestion in order to promote your initiative in the present situation as a provisional measure in the form of collaboration between governments.

(Applause)