

Statement by Emilio Colombo to the European Parliament (14 October 1982)

Caption: On 14 October 1979, the Italian Foreign Minister Emilio Colombo argues the case for the draft European Act, which the Governments of Italy and the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) proposed the year before.

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Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, it is now a year since my colleague Mr Genscher and I presented the Italo-German draft European Act to this Chamber. Today, in the face of a growing need for solidarity and a difficult international situation, the motives which inspired this initiative remain valid.

All the aspects of the construction of Europe must be brought within a united framework, and, in particular, a new breath of life must be given to the European Community, which remains the cornerstone of this construction.

The Italo-German initiative is not exclusive in nature — in other words, it is open to contributions from all those who share our basic motives, our concerns and our desire for renewal. The draft Act prepared by Parliament, which we regard very highly, is aimed at the same goal as our own initiative — that of giving new life to the process of integration.

The drawing up of a new draft Treaty for submission to the national parliaments, currently being undertaken by your Committee on Institutional Affairs, is evidence of the democratic character of the European construction and an original expression of the strong commitment which we all feel and which our Community is developing in a manner increasingly consistent with the profound aspirations of our citizens.

History has taught us that European Union cannot be attained by moving too fast or trying to force the pace. We must take realistic action which will gradually influence all aspects of our civilian life. We must strive on the one hand to implement the Community Treaties fully and, on the other, to introduce new policies not provided for by the Treaties, but which are vital if we are to give Europe an identity and a genuine *raison d'être*.

The proposals on which the negotiations to launch the European Act are based are aimed at:

- consolidating and strengthening economic integration through a full application of the Treaties;
- gradually establishing a common foreign policy, including matters relating to security;
- extending European cooperation to the sectors of culture and the harmonization of national laws;
- bringing the various aspects of European Union within a more uniform institutional framework;
- recognizing the essential role of the European Parliament and extending its powers;
- finally, formally sanctioning these objectives in a treaty.

The aims we expressed a year ago when presenting the Italo-German initiative have been quickly fulfilled. Alongside the complex business of day-to-day discussions, we have provoked a debate and raised the fundamental issues surrounding the process of European integration.

The work we have so far accomplished has produced agreement between the Ten on some of the goals which should be pursued if we are to achieve a revival. Differences about others remain, however, and there are doubts as to how these goals can be achieved in practice.

Priority here must be given to political and parliamentary action.

I wonder if the major currents of European democracy, which are variously represented in our countries and in this Parliament, cannot and should not work together if our continent is to realize its true potential. For if that potential remains unfulfilled, Europe will slowly but surely find itself excluded from the world stage.

The renewed common political resolve of the Ten must be directed essentially towards solving the main

problems of economic and monetary integration.

In December Parliament will discuss the Commission's report on the economic situation of the Community in 1982 and the prospects for 1983. At a time of great tension such as this, the guidelines and proposals emerging from the European Parliament will be of particular interest to the governments and the Community institutions.

With a view to this coming debate, I should like to make a number of general reflections.

If it is to avoid decline, the European Community cannot continue to operate as it does at present. It must show itself to be creative and above all courageous in tackling the new situations which are threatening the very cohesion of the Common Market.

In a true Community, the solidarity between members must be total. If this is to be achieved it is first essential that the Member States, in the management of their respective economic policies in both the short and medium term, take account of the effects which these policies will inevitably have on their partners and give careful thought to the advantages of a balanced distribution of roles, operating in a fully synchronized manner and giving due weight to the structural characteristics of the individual economies.

Firm and specific goals must be defined. As far as monetary policy is concerned, the Member States must strive in the short term to stabilize interest rates by reaching agreement on the techniques and aims of the control of their respective money supplies. In the medium term they must take steps to ensure that the economies most exposed to the dangers arising from high rates of inflation, and whose first priority must be to reduce their own public deficits, are not undermined by the actions of those economies whose greater structural soundness, lower levels of public deficit, greater ability to contain labour costs and smaller degree of index-linking made it easier to achieve the conditions for revival.

In addition to harmonizing their economic policies, the Member States must also develop common policies.

At macro-economic level, this must include the transition to the second stage of the European Monetary System, which will involve the pooling of a growing volume of the Member States' currency resources. As far as sectoral policies are concerned, however, we must devote our attention to the implementation of common policies in the field of industry, scientific research and technological innovation.

In the industrial field we must advance from a Community of trade to a Community of production, by achieving convergence between national policies and instruments in order to enable the Community's industries to operate as far as possible under uniform conditions.

In the agricultural sector we must correct the distortions which have widened the gap between the Community's two agricultures — the Mediterranean and the continental.

If common policies are to be achieved, the necessary financial resources must be made available to the Community. This is not an easy task, particularly at a time when the Member States are preparing budgetary policies on the basis of severely restrictive criteria. However, it is not impossible provided that all the governments recognize that national interests not only coincide with common ones but can also be better and more effectively safeguarded — even in the sphere of expenditure — through the correct implementation of common policies.

The Mandate of 30 May 1980 offered us an opportunity for a revival of this kind. It should also allow us to define a new strategy for evolving common measures capable of reviving the internal growth of the European economy as a whole, and at the same time restoring the Community's international competitiveness and its role in stimulating the search for solutions to the problems of the developing countries.

To attain these goals we must, as I have said, move gradually towards structural changes in the Community

economy; but there must also be a tightly controlled increase in own resources in anticipation of the enlargement of the European Community to include Spain and Portugal. Here again, however, on this question of enlargement, it is vital that we should strive in a new and bolder climate to reach decisions which will dispel the doubts and uncertainties which continue to weigh heavily not only on the Community but also on these two democratic European countries.

As far as European Political Cooperation is concerned, we must in the first place increase regular prior consultation on all aspects of international policy, without distinction. In this way we shall be able to increase the stock of our joint positions so as to move increasingly towards the definition of a European foreign policy.

I stress the fact that I am using here a formula which is not always accepted by everyone: a foreign policy for the European Community.

(Applause)

Direct action to give Europe a voice, presence and influence in the world must clearly involve an accommodation of differences and a relaxation of tensions in the West. It was in response to this need that I put forward a proposal in February of this year at Georgetown University for a *Euro-American Act of Friendship for the strengthening of democracy and cooperation*, covering the political aspects of East-West relations, action in favour of the Third World and the coordination of the economic policies of the Western countries.

Consultation between the two sides of the Atlantic must be less fragmentary than at present and here again this depends on the attainment of a greater degree of integration in Europe.

It is true that we are seeking an interlocutor on the other side, but we for our part must supply the interlocutor over here if we are to be listened to.

(Applause)

The strategy of the West must not be the outcome of unilaterally adopted positions but should be defined within the framework of a system of permanent contacts, with a continual evaluation of the issues which from time to time arise.

I believe that in recent months, which have been fraught with tension at international level and complications in relations within the West, the initiative taken by Mr Genscher and myself has begun to bear fruit. At the beginning of October there were very interesting consultations in Canada between the nations of the Atlantic Alliance on a new, freer and more effective formula for the Alliance, which has already been tested within the Community framework (the so-called Gymnich formula). And in New York on 30 September 1982 an initial meeting took place between the political head of the US State Department and the Ministers of the Ten meeting in political cooperation, as represented by the 'Troika' of the present Danish Presidency, the previous Belgium one and the forthcoming German one.

The European Act provides for wider cooperation between the Ten on matters concerning security, culture and the approximation of national laws. On these proposals a broad consensus is developing on certain aspects; on others agreement is more limited.

Europe must strive not only to achieve stability and political and economic growth which, on their own account, serve to strengthen its identity, but it must also strive to make a coordinated and effective contribution to its own security. In this sense, it seems completely right and proper that there should be a security policy in Europe which, through European political cooperation, will have a specific role to play particularly in the dialogue with the other countries participating in the CSCE, provided that these are prepared to embark on a policy of mutual respect and disarmament. Furthermore, we must develop a European cultural policy with a view to raising the level of consciousness, particularly amongst young

people, with respect to Europe's spiritual heritage.

This point — with regard to European culture — is an aspect of Europe's political role in the world, a role that is characterized by widespread cooperation with all other peoples. I would add that this is a subject to which we must pay the utmost attention, especially if one considers that our European culture is shared by many countries outside Community Europe, 'on the other side', in another Europe, with different systems, but with which we must maintain continuous relations — particularly in respect of the most authentic aspects of that culture.

(Applause)

In the legal field the main problem which presents itself is that of the approximation of internal laws, an objective whose importance and implications for public opinion and the fight against terrorism and international crime I do not need to impress upon you.

Success in achieving the goals of a global European revival will clearly hinge on the Community's decision-making ability. With this in mind, we insist on the need to reduce — even with respect to political cooperation — the intergovernmental character of the decision-making process and to align more closely the concepts of integration and intergovernmental cooperation so that coherent and global action can be taken with a view to achieving European union.

The proposal contained in the European Act that there be a 'single' ministerial Council to deal with — albeit with separate procedures in embryonic form — Community affairs, questions connected with European political cooperation and every other aspect of European union is a concept accepted by all governments. Indeed, it is a positive idea.

As regards the European Council, agreement is beginning to emerge that it should have responsibility for general political initiatives and for laying down the major goals and guidelines of general policy.

The problem of unanimity is of great importance as regards the effectiveness of the decision-making process. There are major differences amongst the Ten on the question of how to apply the principle of majority voting which, in fact, has been applied since 1966 on the basis of the 'Luxembourg compromise'.

These differences were reflected in the formulas advanced during consideration of the draft European Act.

As my colleague, Mr Genscher, said in this very Assembly, we want the Council of Ministers to adopt majority decision-making as provided for in the Treaties, as the rule and the appeal to 'vital interests' as the exception.

I am convinced that the more easily that this goal is reached by overcoming present obstacles will mean that the decisions adopted by the Council will reflect more clearly the needs, aims and mandate of a democratically elected parliament, like the European Parliament, hence the measures proposed by Italy and Germany for strengthening Parliament's role. As yet there has been no detailed discussion of these proposals at ministerial level.

I should like now, on this matter, to list certain aims to which the European Act should be directed: increased participation by this Parliament in the decision-making process; precise information for Parliament; an increase in Parliament's supervisory functions; a vote of confidence or ratification on the appointment of the new Commission; contact with national parliaments.

Amongst the Ten there is general agreement on the need to increase Parliament's role, to improve inter-institutional relations (particularly with the Council) and to make certain procedures more effective and satisfactory. Beyond this agreement in principle, national positions differ ranging from those committed towards a significant move in the direction of European Union (such as the Italo-German proposal) to those that only agree to certain procedural improvements and, finally, even those that are opposed to giving

Parliament more responsibilities than are accorded to it by the Treaties.

This fundamental diversity of outlook naturally has an effect upon national attitudes towards individual specific points in the Italo-German proposal.

At this stage, I should like to point out that during the discussion between the governments on the European Act we integrated the initial proposals in the light of the important resolutions adopted by Parliament in 1981 and 1982 on improving relations between the institutions.

In particular, we consider that the process of consulting Parliament should also be extended to non-Community matters.

Furthermore, we have proposed, as I said, that when the new Commission is being appointed there should be a debate in this House on a vote of confidence in the appointment. To those who point out to us that the appointment of the Commission is restricted by the Treaty to the governments alone, our reply is that, over and above formal considerations, there is a fundamental political obligation to respect the democratic base enshrined within the institutional balance of the Community, namely this Assembly.

Our aim, which is incorporated in the decisions of the European Summit in Paris in 1974, is to confer on the European Parliament the power of political sanction with respect to the Council. This is an aim that falls within the scope of the democratic debate between the executive and the legislature, a prerequisite of which is the exercise by this Parliament of real power in the joint decision-making process.

(Applause)

Europe of the Ten as it stands in its present form, characterized by economic integration which is marked by gaps and contradictions and political cooperation that has increased in recent years but nevertheless lacks the incisiveness that could be achieved if real common commitment were forthcoming, is limited, often to the point of ineffectiveness, in its action.

We cannot foster illusions about the future role of Europe. We must be aware of the fact that if we let slip the chance of revival, then we run the risk of isolation. The blow of isolation may be softened by misleading illusions of the Community's sluggish bureaucracy or by rhetoric about the European ideal; however, we could not escape the serious responsibility that history would attribute to us for failing to take political action for the construction of Europe.

Today, in a world racked by economic and social tensions, the inadequacies and gaps of the common market are felt more than ever. Our Community's activity is paralysed and too often identified with the difficulties of the Community budget and with the crisis in certain productive sectors.

We do not, of course, underestimate these last points, but we are highly critical of the dangers arising from the growing disaffection of public opinion towards European integration.

We must also be honest and open with ourselves and others that a European Community which is unable to understand the changes which are happening around us and to draw up effective and convincing solutions not only runs the risk of losing its impetus, but also, and especially, of developing into a body unrelated to the real interests, needs and aspirations of the people of Europe.

The same proposals that have been put forward by others as well as ourselves for a change in the European institutional framework are useless unless placed in a wider context where the fundamental needs and requirements of European citizens can be taken into consideration through the application of common policies; this is of uppermost importance at the present moment when tensions are growing dangerously in productive sectors where the rate of unemployment in all European countries is still rising and the spectre of recession threatens us all.

Indeed, this Parliament has stressed the importance of the final goal of the European Act, namely the Treaty on European Union. European Union means a major step forward. It means the reaffirmation and vindication of a particular independent way of life in keeping with the humanist heritage that remains untarnished by war and the tension of recent years thereby confirming its value in full.

It is not an accident that struggles for freedom are taking place practically on the threshold of the Ten; and the tensions by which Poland is racked show how difficult it is — I would say impossible — to impose upon European citizens and society systems that threaten man's intrinsic values and dignity and fail to conform to the democratic and pluralistic principles on which our thoughts and actions as Europeans are based, in a word the civilization to which we belong and which we ourselves have helped to form.

(Applause)

During this part-session, this Parliament has acknowledged public opinion in a positive way with regard to the inadmissible attacks on the freedom of trade union association in Poland. These events have strengthened us in our conviction that we should act to ensure that Europe consolidates its strength and, through its traditions and sense of awareness, serves as a point of reference in support of dialogue, progress and peace.

Our mission and our responsibilities as politicians towards Europe are great, as is the task which we are charged to carry out.

If, on the one hand, European unification, which implies a radical revision of human relations, is the answer to the tumultuous demands of our time then, on the other hand, a profound change away from the politics of pre-war Europe is called for in international relations. The very fact of combining people who, although belonging to the same culture, have deeply rooted historical customs and traditions that have developed independently alongside each other, amounts to a singular and unique phenomenon in the international community.

This union of European peoples neither weakens nor destroys individual national societies, but brings them together to their mutual benefit.

Progress towards European Union cannot be made by following the piecemeal formulas and plans that we know have already been tried in years gone by; what is called for, above all, is a revival that fuses ideas and culture as an integral part of a strategy designed to provide a stimulus so that the gaps that exist can be narrowed.

The spirit in which we have undertaken the initiatives for this solemn political declaration is aimed at demonstrating to the public at large and the political forces of the Ten the need for revival.

There is no shortage of ideas for this revival: what is missing is a firm political commitment to progress towards integration. I would add that this political determination is lacking not only on the part of the governments but also among those political forces which guide and interpret the governments and have lost a sense of reality.

(Applause)

Those who support the European Act see it not so much as a programme on what should be done, but more as a way of mobilizing all the Community's vital forces with a view to defining and implementing specific common objectives which, once achieved, will make it possible to progress towards European Union.

Seen from this point of view, the Italo-German initiative is not, as has been said, timid and weak. It is an initiative based on realism, a sense of proportion and on the understanding of what is possible in the present circumstances. For this reason, we believe that it represents a basis for hope, provided that it is put to proper use, and we are ever grateful to those who, together with us, will help to bring it about, perhaps by

introducing improvements and making it more positive. This is why we count on the irresistible impetus which the European Parliament can impart to this project.

(Loud, prolonged applause)