

Opening address by Richard Coudenhove-Kalergi (Gstaad, 8 September 1947)

Caption: On 8 September 1947, Count Richard Coudenhove-Kalergi addresses the inaugural Congress of the European Parliamentary Union (EPU) in Gstaad and calls on the Western nations to commit themselves fully to the path towards European federalism.

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Opening address at the European Parliament by Richard Coudenhove-Kalergi (Gstaad, 8 September 1947)

My friends,

Inspired by a common will you have come to this admirable country that by its experience and its main existence assure us that a Federated Europe is no dream, but a practical program.

You are welcome!

We have assembled here to unite Europe according to the will of its peoples, whose legitimate representatives you are.

This is no propaganda-meeting. Twenty-five years of propaganda were enough to convince the people of Europe of our cause. We have no time to lose: for the alternative to European Union is the third world war.

The question is no longer: "Shall Europe unite?" The question is now: "How can Europe be united before it is too late? There are but three answers to this question:

by agreement among governments;
by a bloody revolution;
by parliamentary majorities.

Since a quarter of a century, we are waiting for a Union of Europe accomplished by its governments. But only a single attempt was made — and failed. I am speaking of the initiative of the great French European, Aristide Briand.

When Briand invited in 1929 all European Ministers of Foreign Affairs to unite Europe, everybody agreed in principle, but disagreed in all measures to be taken, — because everybody was ready to enjoy the benefits of union, but nobody was willing to make the necessary sacrifices. These sacrifices consist in certain elements of national sovereignty. No European Federation is possible unless its Member States transfer some of their sovereign rights to a federal authority. Governments are not willing to make this sacrifice, because they consider themselves traditional guardians of this undisputed sovereignty, surrounded by a semi-religious prestige.

Of course, there are many members of European governments sharing our views on the necessity of union. But as soon as they act as executives of their states, they are obliged to respect this proud tradition of sovereignty that paralyses all their steps towards European Federation.

We have every reason to fear that the Conference of the SIXTEEN, as soon as it will leave its present stage of statistics and platonic recommendations, will meet with the same obstacles as Briand's initiative. To wait until the European governments take the initiative to limit their proper sovereign rights would mean to wait for the outbreak of World War III.

This organic incapacity of the governments to unite Europe involves a grave danger. The danger that one day peoples of Europe lose their patience and take the solution of the European question into their own hands. Such a revolution, even if it were to lead to European Union, threatens to destroy the foundations of our glorious civilisation. On account of these difficulties of governmental action and these dangers of revolutionary methods, the only chance left for European Union is a parliamentary initiative. This is the background of the decisive battle that we are starting here and today. We must be well aware of the fact, that it gives us a LAST chance to unite Europe without war and revolution, by peaceful and constitutional means.

Our program is clear:

First, we must mobilize, throughout Europe, parliamentary majorities in favour of federation and organize them, beyond all party-politics, to strong groups.

Second, we must coordinate these groups by means of the EUROPEAN PARLIAMENTARY UNION.

Then we must call, as soon as possible, a CONSTITUTIVE ASSEMBLY FOR EUROPE, elected by its Parliaments.

And, finally, we must have its charter accepted by our majority groups. There is nothing utopian in this program and nothing impossible. Its realization depends on you, my friends, and on you alone!

The first step to its execution has already been made. Up to date we have mobilized by our parliamentary poll, majorities throughout Europe's free Parliaments: relative majorities within the British Isles and Scandinavia — absolute majorities in France and Italy, Belgium and the Netherlands, Greece, Switzerland and Luxembourg. These parliamentary majorities are now being organized in different countries by various "Parliamentary Committees for European Federation", growing every day with new members from all political parties.

Our immediate task is to coordinate their activities and to draw up a common program of action. It is up to you, my friends, to accomplish this historical task. You are sure to succeed, if you consider one another as colleagues, as European Members of Parliament, called by destiny to set up the foundations of our great motherland of tomorrow — of Europe, and if we think MORE of the future of our children — of all the innocent little children of Europe — than of overaged pretensions of national sovereignty.

Looking back on the tragedies we have gone through, we are in danger of being transformed into columns of salt, like Loth's poor wife. But if we go boldly ahead, we shall be blessed by our children and by generations to come. And we shall see the glorious day, when all bells shall ring from Portugal to Greece and to Norway, greeting the birth of the United States of Europe.

Today's meeting is closely linked to this coming birthday of Europe: Let us therefore go ahead in a genuine European Christian and human spirit. Then we shall be able to repeat today the famous words of Goethe on the day of Valmy, when the young armies of the French Revolution threw back the forces of European reaction:

“Here and today opens a new chapter of history, and we can say that we have been present.”