

Address given by Emilio Colombo (Florence, 28 January 1981)

Caption: On 3 February 1981, Agence Europe publishes the full text of the address given on 28 January 1981 in Florence by Emilio Colombo, Italian Foreign Minister, in favour of strengthening European Political Cooperation.

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Address given by Emilio Colombo (Florence, 28 January 1981)

It gives me great pleasure to be able to speak to you today. I know that you are all bound by your commitment, prompted by your awareness of the need to give expression to aims and joint policies that will facilitate your work as local authority officials.

Europe is not trying to strangle local authorities. On the contrary, it is trying to lend them support and bring them together.

Europe must work towards resolving the specific problems that come up from day to day. However, to do this, these problems must be raised to the level of a Community debate so that joint solutions to them may be found. Building a European awareness means making sure that the integration process makes its way in to all sectors of human activity.

In December 1972 in Paris, the nine EEC countries decided to site all relations between the Member Countries within the context of the European Union. The Community's relations were not merely economic in nature and were more than relations between countries within the Common market. The Community also meant a Europe of culture, a Europe of research and a political Europe.

We must give fresh impetus to the ideals that are behind our plans to build a new Europe. We must forge ahead realistically, taking due account of our past experience, which has shown that the deadlines and work programmes which bind our governments in commitments can impose limits unless there is a clear determination - as was the case during the first ten years of the Community - to bring about the right conditions for the integration process.

Europe is not a mechanical process, nor is it on an automatic time switch. The plans we have made for Europe could not be brought to fruition unless there was a real political will to make them a success and a joint effort to strive for common goals and solutions to our political, economic, social and cultural problems.

In the 1960s, it was repeatedly said that in order to keep the customs union, we would have to go beyond the reaches of the customs union as such. Today, in order to preserve what economic union we have achieved, we must go further, very much further, beyond what has now come to be the Community's heritage.

But like nature, Europe can not move in leaps and bounds. It has to forge ahead gradually and this is one of the Community's rules, dictated by the need to find a meeting point mid-way between demands that are sometimes contradictory.

The fact that the Community has to move ahead slowly should not be confused with stagnation or with a never-ending and wearisome grasping for balance over small issues, which often tend to be procedural in nature and devoid of any real substance. The changing international scene itself and the fact that it works on a multipolar basis should prompt in us the need to take the path of a united Europe. If we do not take up this challenge, we could find ourselves gradually left on the sidelines, almost without knowing if, taken in by pure European rhetoric or a misleading illusion caused by the fact that the wheels of bureaucracy move all too slowly. The Community must set to rethinking its overall policy and then inject new impetus into the process of unifying our continent.

If this vital task before us is not taken care of as quickly as possible, we may find ourselves challenging the positive things we have done, so far - and we have come a long way. The symptoms of such a turn of events are not lacking. They come of a confused feeling of malaise which has spread not only to the governments but to the general, public too, which no longer feels sufficiently motivated by the ideals of European integration.

Despite such difficulties, I do not think we should look to the future pessimistically. The achievements of the past should serve as a guide and encouragement to us in all we do. What we have to do is look around us realistically. We must be aware of the fact that our determination to build should emerge greatly

strengthened from these very difficulties.

We must create a renewed feeling of morale and confirm the pact which enabled us to create and expand the Community of the sixties. The Community had six members then: in the 1980s, it will have twelve members.

This Community of Twelve will encompass many wide gaps in economic and social development from region to region. The differences will be even greater than they were in a Community of Nine.

We could never accept a Europe of two or three speeds. This would mean going against the very essence of the Community.

If we are to bridge these differences it will not be enough simply to transfer money from one country to another and the task of putting the economy back into order should not be left to the laws of the market alone.

The Community as a whole must equip itself with new productive structures, making the most of today's possibilities of introducing new technology and developing still further the research that is behind such technology. A worrying fact in the present situation in Europe is the slow decline that is now creeping in to efforts at technological innovation and thus reducing Europe's competitive position with other economies.

Europe industry must be brought up to the technological standards of the industries of other industrial democracies such as the United States and Japan. This means that Europe countries must plan together and governments must coordinate their policies. It also means that the Community must provide the financial assistance needed to modernise industry and develop research.

We must create a Community based on technological innovation and research. We must prove, thereby, that Europe does more than just impose discipline on those sectors facing difficulties. On the contrary, the Community must offer the means of improving competitiveness and boosting employment and this to a greater extent than any of the EEC countries could do alone.

An all-out effort will have to be made to bring about change. It must be planned and programmed at Community level. An effort will be needed even to give Europe's most competitive products an edge on the international market again as even they have fallen victim to the competition of the recently industrialised countries.

Seen in this perspective, Europe has more to do than merely solve, the problems caused by a budget too heavily tipped towards agriculture and improve the distribution of spending.

I do not want to underestimate these problems. They are important in the widest sense since they provide some proof that not enough progress has been made as yet along the path to integration.

The events that led up to the constructive solution obtained in Brussels last May, when the Italians were chairing the EEC Council, show how necessary it is for the Community to develop in such a way that all its members have a clear idea of their role and future. Each member's requirements and prospects must be given due consideration through a consistent and balanced development of EEC activity.

It seems to me vital, here, to emphasise how important it is to strengthen the concept of unity that underlies all our efforts to build Europe and sets it in an ideal and not just practical context.

We must reaffirm our commitment to European Union and extend cooperation and unity among our members to sectors that have so far not been covered by the Community's activities.

We must develop a European cultural policy, among other things, by promoting standardisation of our laws on schooling, the heritage of civilisation which is common to us all. This would enable us not only to

develop a greater awareness of Europe but also to contribute, by giving European culture a greater presence in the world, to stability, peace and justice among our peoples. However, this does not mean that we have to play down the individual national cultures that have emerged and asserted themselves in Europe over the centuries. These cultures represent, precisely because of the differences that single them out, the best that our continent has to offer.

The question of cultural Europe is one aspect of our continent's political role in the world and the chief feature of this role is to show more openness to other peoples.

On the strictly political level, Europe has its own image in the rest of the world. I am thinking in particular of political cooperation in Europe, the relations which the Community has established through the Lomé Convention, agreements with the Mediterranean countries and the latest developments in relations between the Community and several Asian and Latin American countries.

This is a unique fabric of relations in the world both for the geographical area it covers and for the strength of the deep ties that bind us. Nevertheless, it is an image that we have not been entirely successful in making the most of to the best advantage of our continent. Other countries tend rather to lack confidence or consideration for the European Community because it has been unable to bring to fruition its own integration.

Looking to political cooperation in Europe, we have undoubtedly made genuine progress from the qualitative point of view in recent years. This is already a lot if one thinks of where it all started. And we must remember that day by day, through its unity, cooperation and consultation on points of foreign policy, its joint work on the international scene, the full weight of the European Community is basically much more than just the sum total of its Member States.

It is precisely because of this that it is vital not to confine ourselves just to managing what we have already achieved.

We must set ourselves more tasks for forging ahead. This progress is only natural and comes of the fact that our Community will soon have twelve Member States. Of course, enlargement will pose administrative problems when it comes to strengthening political cooperation.

We must ensure that our foreign policy views increasingly reflect joint stands taken in the political cooperation discussions and that our joint work both diplomatically and in international relations encompasses an ever wider range of issues.

In this context, the elements of foreign policy that are vital to a joint security policy must be carefully singled out.

Europe's defence cannot take account of the fact that Europe is one entity in an overall system of world balances. Those who think that such a question can be restricted to (the continent of Europe are following an abstract theory and one that is impossible to consider under present circumstances. This is why Europe's security is a matter that is dealt with in the Atlantic Alliance. It is an alliance that is defensive in its means, its forces and their readiness and an alliance that has close ties with the United States of America.

This does not mean, however, that Europe should not work towards achieving stability and economic and political growth, which themselves help to strengthen defence capability. It can also make an organised and effective contribution to its own security. Seen in this light, a common security policy in Europe seems to be fully justified. Through political cooperation in Europe, such a policy would give Europe more weight with the other CSCE participant countries, if they are seriously determined to strengthen mutual confidence and promote disarmament.

The permanent commitment to detente, which is indivisible in Europe's eyes, implies taking a stand that is not merely based on resigning ourselves to the fact that military arsenals are growing all the time.

Europe is committed to promoting balances of forces at ever lower levels, the ultimate aim being general and total disarmament controlled internationally. This would bring down arms spending - which is normally around 500 billion dollars a year - at a time when half the world does not have the means necessary for its survival.

We should ask ourselves whether the Community in its present form offers the right political and institutional framework for the changes and developments that must logically come in our plans to build a bigger and more satisfying Europe.

If Europe is to be capable of dealing with the problems that will inevitably arise when the new members join the Community and its regions are more varied than in the past and if it is to be able to meet its commitment to diversify its policies, then it must have an effective and well-balanced institutional structure, more deeply-rooted in the democratic choice of its peoples.

We should not be afraid to change the treaties if it proves necessary and make sure that our institutions run in a way fitting to our plans for Europe. More than anything, we must make more of the link between Community decisions and the wishes of European citizens as expressed through the Parliament.

It seems to me very necessary that better ties be established between national parliaments and the European Parliament. Among other things, these ties could take the form of a specific commitment by governments and national parliaments with regard to the nature of resolutions passed by the European Parliament. Such resolutions are passed by a qualified majority and at least three political groups, which means that they are acceptable to the different national systems.

Europe is now at a decisive turning point, on which its future profile and very means of survival as a Community committed to political unification and economic integration depends.

At this stage of its development, our Community should renew the motivations and ideals which, though in a different political and economic context, were at the roots of its creation. These motivations and ideals are born of the European peoples' awareness that they are united culturally and historically, even though their traits and national traditions vary. They are born, too, of the need to build the sort of foundations on which Europe, by strengthening within, can play a role that befits its political, economic and social potential in the world.

Economic integration is a vital but not sufficient condition for achieving political union. It must go hand in hand with a political and institutional blueprint which will allow the Community to expand its policies gradually, shifting them from national to European hands. But in order to give this process fresh impetus, Europe must single out those interests that are common to all its members and it is on these that a system of integration, acceptable to all, can be built.

Italy is firmly committed to the challenge I have described.