

Address given by Alcide De Gasperi (Strasbourg, 10 December 1951)

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If we only set up common systems of administration, without there being a higher political resolve driven forward by a central body in which the national wills of all the countries meet, become specific and nurture each other in a higher fusion, the danger is that this business of building Europe, compared with the vitality of individual nations, will seem cold and not animated by any ideals. To some it might even seem a superfluous, even oppressive yoke, just as the Holy Roman Empire seemed at certain moments in its decline. If that happened, generations to come, gripped by the more pressing impulse of their blood than of their land, would regard European integration as an instrument to chafe and oppress them. If that happened, there would be a real risk of revolution. That is why, even though we are clearly aware of the need to build Europe by stages, we believe that at no time should we act and build in such a way that the end to be achieved is anything other than clear, determined and guaranteed. I know very well that this European ideal has not yet struck deep enough roots in the hearts of ordinary people. Only a few politicians, thinkers and idealists are able to wrest themselves free of the daily concerns raised by the problems of rebuilding their countries in order to turn their endeavours towards preparing the ground for a common future. You are among them, gentlemen, through the mandates you have received, as Representatives, from your colleagues, who were elected, as you were, by the people.