

Conference on the establishment of a Council of Europe: statements by representatives of the signatory States (London, 5 May 1949)

Caption: On 5 May 1949, at the ceremony held to mark the signing of the Statute of the Council of Europe at St James's Palace in London, representatives from the governments of the ten founding States of the Council of Europe make statements in alphabetical order of the countries that they represent.

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Conference on the establishment of a Council of Europe (London, 3-5 May 1949)

[...]

Signature Ceremony at St. James's Palace at 4 p.m. on Thursday, 5th May

55. Statements by Members of the Conference

The Chairman (Mr. Bevin — United Kingdom) said that they were met together for the Ceremony of the Signature of the Statute of the Council of Europe and of the Agreement concerning the Establishment of a Preparatory Commission. All his colleagues, he was sure, would like to say a few words on that occasion, and he would call upon the representative of each Government in turn to proceed to the rostrum for that purpose and to sign the document at the conclusion of his remarks.

Vicomte Obert de Thieusies (Belgium), M. Gustav Rasmussen and Count Edward Peventlow (Denmark), M. Robert Schuman and M. Rene Massigli (France), Mr. Sean MacBride and Mr. J. W. Dulanty (Irish Republic), Signor Carlo Sforza and Signor Tommaso Gallarati Scotti (Italy), M. Joseph Bech and M. Andre Clasen (Luxembourg), M. Stikker and Jonkheer E. Michiels van Verduynen (Netherlands), M. Halvard M. Lange and M. P. Prebensen (Norway), M. Östen Unden and M. Gunnar Hägglöf (Sweden), and Mr. Ernest Bevin and Mr. Christopher Mayhew (United Kingdom), then in turn proceeded to the rostrum, the first named in each case making a short statement which appears at Annex to these Minutes.

[...]

Annex

Statements made at the Signature of the Statute of the Council of Europe, St. James's Palace, 4 p.m., 5th May, 1949

1. Statement of the Belgian Ambassador

(Translation)

I cannot help feeling the keenest regret that circumstances have prevented the Minister for Foreign Affairs — and Prime Minister — of my country being here for this occasion. For, as you know, he has made a great contribution to international, and particularly European, co-operation.

He would have been able to tell you much better than I can how happy Belgium is, at this solemn and historic moment, to be able to set its signature to the Constituent Act of the Council of Europe.

Belgium, more than any other country perhaps, has been, in the course of her long history, a witness, and very often the victim of Europe's — and indeed the world's — internal strife. She is therefore all the more anxious to collaborate in all good faith and with all her might in the establishment of the Council of Europe. Belgium is firmly convinced that we are seeing this day the laying of the foundations of an edifice, modest enough in its present form, but which, in the process of time, will become a solid and imposing structure capable of providing a haven of refuge for European civilisation and world peace. Belgium realises very well the absolute necessity of effecting a closer union among the European nations, a union made from understanding and goodwill, and such as will alone make it possible, in the future, to preserve peace and to safeguard the moral, spiritual and social values that have been hitherto the distinctive mark of European civilisation.

It is in this spirit and with these hopes that I come now to put my signature to this document in the name of Belgium. It is fitting that this ceremony should take place in London, which was in recent years the bulwark of European civilisation, as it is no less fitting that the seat of the future organisation should soon be transferred to the Continent — to a city which constitutes, indeed, a symbol of that unity which is the goal of our efforts.

2. Statement of the Danish Foreign Minister

The establishment of a Council of Europe embracing a Committee of Ministers and an Assembly reflecting the views of the Parliaments of the participating countries is a bold experiment, although some may think that it is not bold enough. However that may be, it must and shall succeed, already because recent developments have shown the necessity of a gradual breaking down of many of the barriers separating the countries of Europe, if our material and cultural level is to be preserved under the changed conditions of the world.

The new organisation will call for both imagination, for power to act and for moderation. I feel confident that the Council will prove equal to its task. The Statute for the Council of Europe is sufficiently firm in its structure to provide a solid foundation and its framework is at the same time flexible enough for co-operation to develop in the light of experience gained in the course of the Council's future work.

If full agreement has been reached on the text of the Treaty to be signed, it is to a very large extent due to the wise and considerate chairmanship of the British Foreign Secretary, Mr. Ernest Bevin, whose understanding and friendliness imparted a stamp of its own to our negotiations.

The spiritual strength of Western Europe is nourished by the belief in free democracy. Therefore there is reason to stress that the new Council of Europe will not only be an instrument which can weld European countries more closely together, but it will also constitute a safeguard for the democratic ideals which are our common heritage.

This attempt to unify democratic Europe in the service of peace and peaceful aims will, I trust, prove to be the starting point of an even closer co-operation between the countries which now subscribe to it.

To me, it is an honour to sign this document on behalf of the Kingdom of Denmark, confident as I am of the great possibilities it embodies. I am particularly glad to do so on this day of rejoicing in my country, 5th May, the anniversary of Denmark's liberation.

3. Statement by the French Minister for Foreign Affairs

(Translation)

There have been — and still are — learned disputes as to the geographical bounds of Europe. But Europe cannot possibly wait for definition, for the end of that controversy; she does, in fact, define her own bounds by the will of her peoples.

At grips with the needs of her material and moral recovery, yearning for peace and security, Europe is being built on reality, on a foundation of cultural affinities and by the placing in common of her resources.

Marshall Aid has had a decisive effect in stimulating the economic organisation of the European countries. And their common defence has been the subject of recent treaties, a safeguard of the freedom and the independence of the participating nations.

To-day we are laying the foundations of a spiritual and political co-operation from which there will arise the European spirit, the promise of a broad and lasting supranational union.

It is not the aim of this union to weaken national ties, nor will that be its consequence. The distinctive and original contribution which the several member countries will make to their common purpose will, on the contrary, furnish the essential material of the discussions of our European association and will make it possible to reconcile those dynamic qualities that are necessary with the requirements of a prudent realism.

We have no intention of belying our own past nor of impairing the strength of our individual aspirations;

what we will do is to co-ordinate them with the scope of a momentous common task.

There is no better way of serving one's country than to secure, in peace and understanding, the friendly aid of other countries, uniting for the common weal; the benefits derived will endure by virtue of the very fact that they are common to all. Countries, like individuals, are created to understand and help one another. The gracious welcome which we have received from their Majesties the King and Queen, and which we shall always gratefully remember, is a testimony that these sentiments are shared by the whole British Commonwealth as well as the United Kingdom Government.

The seat of our organisation is going to be on French soil. France is grateful for this, your choice, and deems it a mark of honour and esteem. She has always been proud of her pioneer tradition. Our exponents of revolution conveyed beyond our frontiers the new message of freedom, which became the common property of mankind to-day. In their zeal they did not always contrive to keep within the bounds of pacific methods. We will not be subject to any such temptation. Example and persuasion will be the only means that we shall employ in an undertaking which will be wholly pacific and constructive. We shall be a threat to no one by associating for mutual assistance, but we are at the same time serving Europe as a whole by creating the nucleus of a new Europe, regenerated by common trials and conscious of its permanent civilising mission.

4. Statement by the Minister of External Affairs of Ireland

On behalf of Ireland I welcome wholeheartedly this first step towards the achievement of a greater degree of unity in Europe.

While, in this century, what we choose to call civilisation has made tremendous progress on the material plane, the moral principles which form the basis of our Christian civilisation have tended to be neglected and forgotten. As a result the very foundations upon which human society depends for its survival, have never been weaker. The experience of two wars and their aftermaths, have taught us this clearly. This situation is largely due to our failure to realise that material and scientific progress, unless accompanied by a strengthening of the ethical basis which binds human society, merely brings humanity to the brink of self-destruction.

In this Statute we have sought to provide a framework wherein the development of a European conscience will ensure that in the future material progress will be utilised for the betterment of humanity and not for purposes of destruction, rivalry, or domination. The people of the world want peace and social and economic security. There is a solemn responsibility cast upon us, the representatives of this part of the world, to ensure the fulfilment of this desire. In so far as the Council of Europe contributes towards that end, we have taken an important preliminary step.

But what we are providing here is merely the practical framework; what will count is the sincerity of our attachment to the fundamental rights and principles which form the ethical foundation of the structure of human society, and our willingness to give effect to them. These include the fundamental rights and dignity of the human person, the preservation of the democratic way of life, the pursuit of social and economic progress, and the fundamental right of nations to determine their own form of government without outside interference.

On the extent to which we make these concepts living realities, will depend the success of the work we have just completed. We must not be content merely to provide a frame-work. It is our immediate and obvious duty in democratic Europe to give new hope and confidence to lovers of freedom throughout the world.

May the Almighty give us the wisdom and courage to lead our people into a new era of co-operation based upon Peace, Justice, and Charity.

5. Statement by the Italian Minister for Foreign Affairs

Few international treaties have been signed under happier auspices than this Act. For many months we have

been, in Berlin, under the nightmare of a threat of war and just to-day we learn that this threat is disappearing.

Let us give credit for this also to a reborn desire for peaceful understanding on the part of Moscow. But let us not forget that the signing of the Atlantic Pact and the conclusion of our work towards European Union have had, beyond doubt, a fundamental influence on what we desire with all our hearts: a constant will of peace.

But we must not indulge in pride: we have simply fulfilled the most elementary duty towards our peoples and towards peace; let us draw this conclusion: that only in union we will find strength.

If this instrument which we are signing to-day had been drafted by those theatrical dictators who brought Europe to the edge of catastrophe, hymns of praise would have reached the sky.

We, Democratic Governments, are far more modest — and perhaps sometimes we are wrong in being so; but we are not wrong when we rely on facts and on the future.

We firmly desire that the Union, to which we have decided to give the rather plain name of "Council of Europe," will soon show the world that it serves peace and the organisation of our old Continent. We shall succeed, if we are able to create a Europe in which national boundaries are not written in ink, but in pencil. We shall succeed if we always remember that history is the graveyard of those nations who did not dare to look forward to the future. Indeed, history should teach us to-day that our supreme duty is to organise Europe and to suppress its watertight compartments, so as to raise the general well-being to the same decent standard everywhere. The only way to be intelligently selfish is to be generous. It is for our sake that every one of us will, if need be, even accept sacrifices.

We are free and solid nations. The more we will organise ourselves, the more we shall be prosperous; the more we shall be prosperous, the more we will understand that our supreme necessity is one and only one: PEACE.

6. Statement by the Luxembourg Foreign Minister

(Translation)

In establishing this Council of Europe we are planning the first stakes, as it were, on the road leading to European unity.

The great idea of a United Europe — but recently still considered as Utopian — to-day emerges from the realm of aspiration into the phase of practical realisation.

The road we have to travel is long and beset with difficulties.

The task that we are undertaking with so much prudence — perhaps too much prudence in the mistaken views of some who do not share the burdens of governmental responsibilities — will require great patience and much good will and mutual understanding. It can only be achieved at the cost of sacrifices mutually consented in the common cause, and on condition that it is supported by the *active* faith of our peoples.

It will be the task and the high responsibility of the Consultative Assembly to create and to maintain this European state of mind.

Strasbourg, that ancient city of European civilisation, will henceforth provide a platform from which I confidently trust we shall hear only words of goodwill and solidarity and which will give the desired widespread resonance to all those ideas which are the foundation of our common civilisation.

Europe *wants* to unite.

The agonising experience of two world wars has created more favourable conditions than ever before for the bringing together of the democratic peoples.

Europe *must* unite, if she is to survive and to maintain in the post-war world the glorious place which has been hers throughout the history of humanity.

My little country has too often in the past suffered from the conflicts which have ravaged our old Continent for me not to welcome with all my heart this first step towards the realisation of a closer European union.

In putting my country's signature to the Statute of the Council of Europe, I proclaim my faith in Europe's future with the conviction that I am acting as a good European.

7. Statement by the Foreign Minister of the Netherlands

Interest in European Unity is not a new, nor is it a delicate, growth in the Netherlands. Our geographical situation and the whole of our past predispose us in its favour. But particularly since the end of the war there has been a great quickening among us for this unity — a great awakening of public opinion that became reflected in Parliament and in Government endeavours. Just over a year ago, at the end of April 1948, to quote, the Lower Chamber of the States General adopted with regard to the future European co-operation a resolution agreeing that within the framework of the United Nations the Netherlands would take an energetic part in any movement furthering a community of democratic States in federal association.

No one will be surprised therefore if I say that the Netherlands will welcome the document we are signing to-day as representing a big step forward towards the realisation of a widespread wish.

Among the enthusiasts for European Unity there will be those who find our progress too cautious, but they must and will understand that this is only a first and important step on the road we have taken, and that our chances of success are the better for our steady advance, step by step. We start upon this road irrevocably. We cannot risk failure. Our progress, henceforth, must be in the one direction of ever greater unity.

In the confidence that with God's help we shall succeed, I am proud now to sign the Statute of the Council of Europe on behalf of the Netherlands.

8. Statement by the Norwegian Foreign Minister

In signing the Statute of the Council of Europe on behalf of the Norwegian Government I want to pay tribute to the Five Powers of the Brussels Pact for taking the initiative in working out a basis for this new organisation of European co-operation, which we are about to create. Our thanks are due also to the many distinguished citizens of various European nations, who through the channel of the European Movement have articulated the desire of the peoples of Europe for closer unity and co-operation. Without their work of education it would hardly have been possible for us to take this vital first step on the road to closer political unity in our old Continent.

Throughout the ages Europe has been beset with wars and quarrels. Twice in our generation inter-European conflicts have put the greater part of the world on fire. By establishing the Council of Europe we formally recognise, what we have all known since the last world war at least, that the nations of Europe cannot any longer afford to live in disagreement and conflict with each other. Modern civilisation, with its new means of communication and the new technological basis of our entire economic life, is rapidly rendering obsolete our present system of national sovereignties. If Europe is to survive and to reap the benefit of modern technique of production, we have to get together and to find means of developing solidarity between our nations in all fields of human endeavour.

By creating, as we are now about to do, an organ for continuous consultation between responsible Ministers and between representatives of our national parliaments, we are taking the first, and vital step to establish on

a permanent basis that co-operation between our nations, which has already found expression in many ways, most significantly hitherto, through the Organisation of European Economic Cooperation.

What we are about to set up is not a federation, it is not a union of States. Such a union must, come one day, but I believe we do well to realise that we still have a long way to travel before we reach that goal. And even at the risk of appearing timid to many of the enthusiastic propagandists of the European Movement, I believe the best course for us to take is to proceed carefully step by step, making sure, as we proceed, that we make a real practical success of any organ that we create. International organisations after all are only instruments. They can do no more than their constituent parties are willing to undertake in common. There would be real danger in creating the illusion that we have as yet reached beyond that stage.

It may also be useful to point out the danger there is of this new organisation duplicating the work of older institutions, to which all or most of us belong. I am thinking particularly of the United Nations and its regional Economic Committee for Europe. I am thinking also of the Paris Organisation of European Economic Co-operation. It will be one of the first tasks of the Committee of Ministers to define and delimit as clearly as possible the fields of activity of the European Council with a view to avoiding duplication and forwarding co-ordination with other international organisations.

May I, in conclusion, underline that some of the countries, which are now about to become members of the Council of Europe, have behind them long years of practical co-operation in many spheres of life, a co-operation by which they have greatly benefited. Such is the case of the northern countries. This new organisation of ours in no way precludes, on the contrary it will encourage, the further development of such co-operation between closely related nations of Europe.

The Statute, which we are signing to-day, is only the framework, the basis on which a living organisation can be built. The most important part of the task is still ahead of us. It depends on our will to mutual understanding and tolerance whether we are going to make of this organisation a living reality. It depends not only on those here present. We need indeed the enthusiastic and discriminating support of the peoples of all the member nations.

9. Statement by the Swedish Foreign Minister

When confronted with the proposal of establishing a new inter-European organisation, the Swedish Government had to answer this question: was there a need of such a union of states outside the already existing Paris organisation for economic co-operation and outside the Economic Commission for Europe of the United Nations? In Sweden as well as in many other countries it was, however, keenly felt that nothing should be neglected that could contribute to a strengthening of the collaboration between kindred European peoples.

When we analyze the statute that has just been drafted we find that the Council of Europe *may* have great and important tasks which are not covered by other already existing organisations. This Council of Europe is meant to be a union of European democracies accepting the principles of the rule of law, of human rights and of fundamental freedoms. It will have as its programme the furthering of economic and social progress amongst the member States.

To a great extent international collaboration in the economic field can take place between States with totally different political systems and with different opinions as to the value of the human rights of the individual. There are, however, problems of great importance for the economic and social progress that present a special interest for States with the same conception as to what constitutes democracy.

For instance numerous problems present themselves when we endeavour to strike a proper balance between private and collective ownership, between freedom of the individual and a planned economy, and between the influence that the political state on the one hand and the economic organisation on the other should wield in society.

Questions such as these vitally concern the conditions for social and economic progress. Our countries, who all have political democracy as the working system of their political life, have begun to wrestle with the difficulties that arise when applying the ideas of democracy in the various economic spheres in such way as proves suitable. Our peoples all hold the opinion that human rights and fundamental freedoms must not be sacrificed on the altar of the all-powerful-state. It might well be that several of these problems that beset our society could with profit be taken up here for joint discussion and investigation. We could thereby work together for their solution in a democratic spirit.

Over a year ago the British Foreign Secretary put forward the idea of closer relationship between like-minded European peoples with a view to furthering cultural co-operation, material as well as spiritual. We are all deeply grateful to him for his energetic promotion of this idea which has now taken shape in the statute we have before us. I wish to extend our thanks also to the French Government who have substantially contributed to the result we witness to-day; that the idea of a Council of Europe has entered the realm of reality.

In signing the statute of the Council of Europe the Swedish Government wish to express their ardent hope that the new organisation will make effective contributions to the realisation of its programme.

10. Statement by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs of the United Kingdom

Like the rest of my colleagues I want to express my feeling that this is a truly historic occasion.

This Statute which we are signing to-day is the result of many months of friendly negotiations between ten of the principal countries of Western Europe.

It took shape in Paris during the discussions at the end of last year under the chairmanship of that distinguished French statesman, M. Herriot, and it has been continued in London by the diplomatic representatives of the ten countries; now it has been put into final shape in this Treaty.

This agreement lays the foundations of something new and hopeful in European life.

We are witnessing to-day the establishment of a common democratic institution on this ancient continent of Europe.

No one can tell what will be the future of this experiment which we are undertaking, but we are all fixing our hopes upon it in the belief that the institutions which we are setting up will serve the purpose of achieving greater unity among our peoples and of realising the ideals which we hold in common.

I have said that this is an historic occasion and it really is.

But to M. Schuman, my French colleague, I would like to say that the really vital and symbolic moment in this business will come when the Council of Europe first meets on the historic soil of Alsace-Lorraine in a few months' time.

This will be the moment when the city of Strasbourg, which throughout its long history has suffered as a bone of contention between the warring nations of Europe, will be converted into the centre of a new effort at conciliation and unity.

Allow me to express to all my colleagues, including M. Spaak, who I am so sorry is not with us to-day, who have taken part in these successful negotiations the thanks of His Majesty's Government for the co-operation and understanding which all have shown in furthering our common enterprise.

I am really glad that it has fallen to my lot to sign this Treaty on behalf of Great Britain.