

Address given by Carlo Azeglio Ciampi at the ceremony held to mark the awarding of the Charlemagne Prize to the euro (Aachen, 9 May 2002)

Caption: In 2002, the Charlemagne Prize of the City of Aachen is awarded to the euro. In his address, the President of the Italian Republic, Carlo Azeglio Ciampi, sees the single European currency and the European Central Bank as a step taken by a group of forward-looking states towards the pooling of national sovereignties.

Source: Laudatio del Presidente della Repubblica Carlo Azeglio Ciampi alla cerimonia di conferimento all'euro del premio internazionale "Carlo Magno". Aquisgrana, 9 maggio 2002. [EN LIGNE]. [Roma]: Presidenza della Repubblica, Mise-à-jour 16.02.2006[04.08.2005]. Disponible sur <http://www.quirinale.it/Discorsi/Discorso.asp?id=17531>.

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Laudatory address given by the President of the Republic Carlo Azeglio Ciampi at the ceremony held to mark the award of the international Charlemagne Prize to the euro (Aachen, 9 May 2002)

Lord Mayor,
Minister President,
Members of the 'Charlemagne Committee',
Your Majesty,
Your Royal Highness,
President of the European Central Bank,
Citizens of Aachen and of Europe,

I have been fortunate, in various positions of institutional responsibility, to live through the long history which has led to the birth of the euro: from the ups and downs of the European national currencies, periodically shaken by monetary upheavals caused by imbalances in the real economies or by inflationary pressures, and by various kinds of financial movements; to the efforts to redress the situation by means of cooperation and coordination between the central banks; to the first projects to create closer institutional and operational links; to the realisation that the efforts made were insufficient; to the growing awareness of the need for a radical institutional solution, which took shape with the creation of the single currency and the European System of Central Banks.

I lived through these ups and downs girded by a strong professional and political commitment and, moreover, with my thoughts dominated by the memory of the particularly dramatic events which left their mark on my generation in its early years.

A generation born in the period immediately after the First World War; a generation which was rocked by the Second World War whilst still in the prime of youth; a generation which witnessed, with its own flesh and blood, the senselessness of arming young people and setting them against one another, of destroying the legacy of thousands of years of shared culture, of wasting real and spiritual resources which, by extolling life and its values, could be a source of wellbeing for all the peoples of Europe and for the whole world.

With these thoughts in mind I prepared for this meeting.

So you will understand how delighted I am to be in this city, this symbol of Roman heritage which bears witness, with its vocation as a cultural hub and home to the Charlemagne Prize, to the ideals which form the basis for European integration.

Charlemagne was known as the *rex pater Europae*. He laid the foundations for the rebirth from which modern Europe sprang.

This year's Charlemagne Prize recognises in the euro that the European peoples have the capacity to turn their ideals and their values, reflecting a single civilisation to which all European nations have contributed, into common institutions.

At this historic moment, the European unification process appears in all its magnitude. The prospect of a divided Europe would be grim.

In the first half of the 20th century, totalitarianism and nationalism took European civilisation to the brink of annihilation.

Rising up against these horrors, and against the underlying ideologies, in the second half of the century we began to build a united Europe, based on freedom and democracy. And the European Union is the highest guarantee of democracy in Europe.

At the dawn of the 21st century, which is marked by the proliferation of democratic regimes throughout the

world and, on our continent, by gradual institutional consolidation and by the enlargement of the European Union, many people still feel uncertainty, and at times apprehension and disillusionment. The prevalence of quantitative paradigms regarding the affirmation of ideals and the growing uncertainty over the future give rise to insecurity. Anachronistic nationalistic longings persist.

Globally, hatred and conflicts between peoples are made dramatically more dangerous by terrorism and by the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. A globalisation which seems unstoppable, and is still poorly controlled, accentuates serious global social and environmental imbalances. We must be proactive in anticipating threats which may stem from various sources. We must act so that Europe may finally express a fully fledged international subjectivity, which is also in the interests of the global community.

From the beginning of the European adventure, the six signatory States of the Treaty of Rome applied the guiding principle of limiting national sovereignty in favour of common institutions exercising shared sovereign powers: a vanguard of States, open and non-exclusive, and always ready to make new advances.

This remains a key principle in moving forward with the unification process.

Today, it is clearly essential to establish institutions which are commensurate with the dimensions of the European Union, which allow us to face all our responsibilities towards European citizens, with a view to maintaining peace between peoples and achieving economic and civil progress for all.

The Union, an expression of the European spirit and of European civilisation, far from wiping out national identities and cultures, guarantees their survival and development in a global context. In a weak and divided Europe, no nation state, large or small, would be able to provide prosperity, security and liberty for its citizens. No nation state alone could see its own precious cultural, civil and religious heritage, which is an integral part of the European identity, flourish.

This is the logic of shared sovereignty and of the creation of a common European sovereignty. This is the principle which has guided us and still guides the process of European unification. Such a Europe is able to welcome new influxes of immigrant citizens, respecting their cultures of origin, but — and this is necessary in order to avoid acute tensions — observing the rules of the host country, in the spirit of the unifying elements of the Christian and humanist roots of European civilisation.

Steadily following the path which, from the Treaty of Rome in 1957 to the Treaty of Maastricht in 1992, has led to the creation of the euro, a course has been plotted and a working method has been identified which are still valid for the future.

The adoption of the euro and the creation of the European Central Bank were the necessary end point in the process of establishing monetary union. The pacts and the agreements made previously to ensure exchange rate stability between the currencies of the member countries of the Union proved inadequate.

Was it possible, we wondered at the time, to establish a single currency? Many people regarded it as an unachievable utopia. I, together with the other eleven central bank governors and three experts, was fortunate to experience the work of the group chaired by Jacques Delors. The Hanover European Council had given him the task, in June 1988, of studying and proposing the practical steps to be taken towards monetary union.

We were initially doubtful about the possibility of reaching agreement on a proposal for a European single currency. We completed our work after ten months. I remember the final meeting of the Delors Group in Basel, at the austere headquarters of the Bank for International Settlements. Aware of the problems which still had to be overcome, we agreed to stay together for an extended weekend. After three days of lively debate a text was finalised. We approved it unanimously. The meeting ended with applause and a toast, unusual for our sober working style.

I want to recall another meeting, the Brussels European Council on 2 May 1998. It was chaired, according to

the six-monthly rotation, by the British Prime Minister Tony Blair. He opened the meeting by saying that it was a historic day for Europe. This statement sounded all the more solemn because it was made by the Prime Minister of a State which had decided not to participate, for the time being, in the euro, but which understood its validity and logic.

The creation of the European Central Bank saw the establishment of a true federal organ. A big leap forward was made; a fine example of pooling of national sovereignty was given. This, I think, was the basis for the euro being awarded the Charlemagne Prize.

It is part of the logic of the process of building the united Europe that each advance calls for more to be made: either we advance or we jeopardise what has already been achieved. And what has been achieved, in the economic and political spheres, seems too important each time to be put at risk: it is so important to give governments and citizens the courage to make further steps forward towards ever greater unification, until we cross the line that separates an alliance between States and a true Union.

In this sense, the creation of the euro is not only an end point but also a starting point. From the beginning of the studies and debates that led to the creation of the euro it was clear that, for the new monetary system to function properly, strong coordination would be needed between the economic policies of the participating States. To that end, a first set of objectives was set, which all the States undertook to meet, whilst having freedom to decide on the necessary means to achieve them; I am referring to the Stability and Growth Pact, approved by the Dublin European Council in December 1996.

We now have to establish an even more binding common definition of the economic policies of the individual States, with better use of the existing institutions and implementation of new working procedures. This will also make the European system more competitive.

Other important advances in a federal sense have been achieved by the European Union: in the rules on competition, and in trade. They have brought a clear advantage to European citizens. This is all overseen by the Court of Justice, the real legal engine of European integration.

As soon as possible, without further delays, the uniform foreign and defence policy will be reinforced; it will be necessary to consolidate and extend, within the scope of a new Treaty, a single area of freedom, security and justice. Those who doubt that these new advances can be made forget that those already completed appeared equally utopian each time.

As previously happened with the Spaak Committee, prior to the Treaty of Rome, and with the work of the Delors Group prior to the Treaty of Maastricht, on this occasion too work has been started by the Convention chaired by Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, which has an unprecedentedly broad mandate and representative composition. Its conclusions will indicate the broad lines of the new Treaty, which will then be defined at a special Intergovernmental Conference and submitted to the Governments and Parliaments for approval.

The Convention is fuelled by the force and the coherence of the European political ideas. It has a specific task: to draw up a new draft which must address the strident voices of euroscepticism.

A stronger, simpler and more transparent Europe — the balance being ensured by organically organised institutions and greater use of qualified majority voting — will safeguard the interests of all the States, large and small, much more than contractual confrontation between States. Contractual confrontation will eventually corrode Europe and the approval of the citizens which it needs. Membership of the European Union even now defines the outlines of a European citizenship which involves European citizens in achieving common objectives in the context of shared values and rules.

The definition of the new Treaty — the Constitution or Basic Act — which is likely to be concluded by 2003 and in any case before the European elections in spring 2004, will reinforce the common civil and social identity of Europe, in an enlarged Europe, and will subsequently consolidate this sense of shared

belonging.

We are seeing emerge from this process a Federation of Nation States which represents an original and dynamic synthesis between a Union of States and a federal State, and defines an organic institutional system that is much more capable of safeguarding common interests than precarious intergovernmental mechanisms could.

The pooling of the key elements of national sovereignty is necessary because each individual country is now incapable of meeting the challenges it faces. What was the case for the currency in the Europe of the Fifteen is even more true in the enlarged Europe: the sharing of a single organic and efficient institutional system can be accompanied by the propulsive force of a more select, integrated area of a group of members of the Union which is open to subsequent participation by all.

Ladies and gentlemen, the world is increasingly aware of the need for a united Europe.

For all us Europeans, the need to act as a unit in the face of all the political crises outside the Union becomes more urgent with each passing day.

The imbalance between the political dimension and the economic dimension of the European Union has appeared and still appears obvious in the face of the instability which persists in the Balkans and the dramatic crises in the Middle East.

The traditional, vital alliance with the United States is a necessary and crucial guarantee of security for all. Europe and the United States have a common heritage of civilisation and a shared history, which is reflected in reciprocal solidarity and shared responsibility.

However, if this guarantee is to be made stronger, the European Union must take on a political dimension and influence commensurate with its economic importance and its heritage of civil values.

Only European peoples inspired by the desire to create a political union can assert their own interests and their own ideals in the world. Many Europeans are still disoriented, not because they do not believe in the European Union, but because they do not see the way ahead clearly enough.

They want certainties and a consistent and explicit project.

The continuation of the work of the founding fathers, the patient, tenacious revision of the institutional system which began more than fifty years ago, and the creation of a Union completed in its main pillars will safeguard European civilisation and peace.

For my generation, the time has certainly come to pass the torch of European integration on to the new generations.

To you young people I address my confident call:

- Instil new impetus into building our Europe: concrete progress and operational efficiency in its institutions; innovative and fertile enterprise in its economy.
- Pay careful attention to the needs of a changing society and apply your energies to correcting the imbalances which create unacceptable injustices and paralysing insecurities in the world.
- Above all, respond wholeheartedly and responsibly to what your conscience dictates.

The future of Europe is in your hands.