

Address given by Konrad Adenauer on continuing European integration (Brussels, 25 September 1956)

Caption: On 25 September 1956, having been invited to speak at the Grandes Conférences Catholiques in Brussels, the German Chancellor, Konrad Adenauer, delivers an address in which he offers his vision of the role of Europe in the world and expresses some reservations with regard to the establishment of new supranational institutions in Europe.

Source: PA AA, [s.l.]. B10 Abteilung II, Politische Abteilung. Bd. 918, Brüsseler Integrationskonferenz.

Copyright: (c) Copyright-Hinweis:

Die Originale der Dokumente, deren Abschriften bzw. Faksimiles hier veröffentlicht sind, befinden sich im Politischen Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes, und nur der Text dieser Originaldokumente kann maßgeblich sein. Jegliche Nach- und/oder Abdrucke bzw. Vervielfältigungen oder sonstige Verwertungen der in dieser Internet-Seite enthaltenen Archivmaterialien des Auswärtigen Amtes bedürfen der schriftlichen Genehmigung des Politischen Archivs des Auswärtigen Amtes, D-11013 Berlin, Mail: 117-r@diplo.de.

URL:

http://www.cvce.eu/obj/address_given_by_konrad_adenauer_on_continuing_europe_an_integration_brussels_25_september_1956-en-ea27a4e3-4883-4d38-8dbc-5e3949b1145d.html



Last updated: 05/11/2015

Speech by Konrad Adenauer on the possibilities of European Unification (Brussels, 25 September 1956)

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

May I first of all express my warm thanks for the invitation to address this distinguished gathering. I am particularly grateful for the opportunity to speak on “Europe”. In recent years there have been various lectures given to you on European integration policy, i.a. by Messrs. Bidault, Pleven, Schuman, van Zeeland and Pella. It is thus inevitable that I shall have to reiterate many an idea that has been presented to you before. For this I would ask your forgiveness. But the “European need” – I use this expression intentionally – has been increasing steadily since those speeches were made without Europeans having roused themselves to anything more than a series of conferences. It is only in a few individual cases that they have hesitantly and laboriously decided on joint action. I do not wish primarily to speak on common economic interests but on the political responsibility which is ours because of the Christian heritage shared by all European peoples, and on the imperative need of creating a common European policy of the European nations. This seems particularly necessary to me because there are signs of a completely new political grouping in the world which demands that we investigate its consequences for the nations of Europe. As new political developments are making their appearance in the world the question of the future of the European countries and of Europe cannot any longer be considered primarily from the point of view of the past, but we must see it with an eye to the future, taking account of these new political developments. We must, moreover, act accordingly, and the time for action has come. Otherwise Europe will retire from the stage of world events, a stage on which, beginning with the Greeks and Romans, Europe has for a few thousand years played a dominant role devoted largely to serving the culture and the progress of the human race.

Epoch of Inter-European Wars Ended

The Suez Canal problem has not yet been settled and therefore I cannot include it in my observations. However, developments with regard to this question certainly demonstrate for all who have eyes to see the true situation of Europe and the measure of its economic and political influence in the world today. Immediately after the war the main aim of the policy of European integration was to prevent future wars among the European peoples. It was with this objective in mind that the Council of Europe was established and the European Coal and Steel Community proposed by France.

In my opinion the first stage of European integration has reached its goal: wars among the peoples of Europe are definitely a thing of the past. The period of inter-European wars is closed because, on the one hand, a sense of belonging together and of having common interests has become ingrained in the European peoples and because, on the other hand, the weapons of war have become so highly developed.

After the Council of Europe and the European Coal and Steel Community were set up, the idea of a European defence community arose. It failed to be realized in part because of exaggerated perfectionism in drafting the treaties but also because the need for military and political integration of the European peoples for purposes of defence had still not been generally recognized. Then followed the establishment of Western European Union, which included Great Britain. I am not at all sure that this organization will be adequate in the face of the political developments of our present-day world.

Beginnings of a New Political Era

I see the beginning of a new political era in the following factors at work in the world today:

1. Thanks to lack of unity in the West, Soviet Russia is becoming more and more consolidated as a world Power founded on the principles of Communism and dictatorship. Throughout history, Russia has shown a tendency to expand, that is, to be a threat to her neighbours; a Communist Russia is bound to have this tendency in even greater measure than the Russia of the Czars.

2. In the course of the last few decades, the political and economic power of the free world has become more and more concentrated in the United States. I acknowledge in gratitude and admiration that the United States has been fully aware of the responsibility which the possession of economic and political power entails. But in the long run the European countries cannot fully develop their entire strength for their own benefit and that of mankind if they continue to find their salvation and their security exclusively under the patronage of the United States.

This cannot and must not become a permanent condition, since in time it would cause the energies of Europe to wither, and also because the United States is surely not inclined to assume the permanent care of Europe to an extent which it would be presumptuous on our part to expect of the Americans. The vital necessities of European countries need not always be identical with the vital necessities of the United States and vice versa; from this situation could ensue diverging political convictions which, in turn, could lead to independent political action. The more our epoch emerges from the effects of World War II and this war becomes past history, the more the European peoples should recall to mind their own strength and responsibility, if only – I repeat – because it would be unreasonable to expect the policy of the United States to be guided mainly by European interests.

3. Another factor pointing to a new political era in the world is the enormous contrast between the political and economic power of two countries of the world on the one hand and that of all the rest of the world on the other.

You are well aware that these two countries, the United States of America and the Soviet Union, have developed into political and economic World Powers which eclipse all European nations. I do not know whether it is still justified to call any European nation a “great Power” as could rightfully be done at the beginning of the century. In any case, when there is political interplay between a large Power and a small Power, or one large Power and several small ones, it automatically follows that the large Power makes certain claims to leadership and the small ones feel more or less dependent.

That is deplorable in various respects; inevitably the feeling of dependence on the part of the small Powers will in due course sap their energy. Technological progress, the development of nuclear weapons and the position of monopoly thereby gained by the two World Powers are bound to make the situation intolerable for the small Powers in the long run.

4. Another factor of great moment for world politics is the appearance, since 1945, of non-white peoples upon the scene of world events. To illustrate the significance of this new political and economic factor, suffice it to mention only the two largest of these nations, Red China and India. They have, it is true, followed very different courses of development. Perhaps I may also refer to Egypt’s attitude in the Suez question – Egypt, which regards herself as the leading Arab Power – an attitude which has caused an extremely awkward situation for Europe. The outcome of this situation is as yet entirely unpredictable.

World-wide Aspects of Integration

Now let me speak of European integration in particular. I hope you will understand that I cannot go into detail here but can only discuss principles. In the first place, it seems to me imperative that we Europeans should clearly recognize realities: since the last war there have been these political changes and developments which I have just summarized. They compel us to look at European integration primarily in a world-wide context rather than from a purely European point of view. Once we do this, many hurdles that have loomed large for nationalistic reasons will begin to appear as small as they actually are. There is no alternative; faced by global developments, we must relentlessly throw overboard many objections rooted in nationalist concepts and traditions and above all we must act. Others act, too.

Unless we act, events that we Europeans will be unable to influence will overtake us. I believe we Europeans feel far too safe. Europe’s political and economic leadership in the world, which was still unchallenged at the beginning of the century, has long since ceased to exist. Will the dominant cultural

influence of Europe be maintained? I think not, unless we defend it and adjust ourselves to new conditions; history has shown that civilisations are all too perishable.

There is another thing we will have to learn from the experience of the last decade. European integration should not be hampered by the undue perfectionism that seems to characterize our times. European integration should not be rigid but as flexible as we can possibly make it. It should not be a straitjacket for the peoples of Europe but should be their common mainstay, a common support for the healthy, individual development of each of them. The institutions I have in mind need not all be supranational in character; let us choose forms of integration which will not discourage any nation from joining. On the other hand, the functions and the efficacy of such a federation should not be subject to the will or the alleged interests of any single one of its members. I am convinced that it will be possible to find a middle course between these two extremes.

Scope of European Federation

Let me touch on two more questions in this context: which peoples ought to be included, and what would be a practice practicable demarcation of the functional scope of such a federation? In my opinion the member States of a European federation should not be numerically limited. Europe's destiny is the destiny of every European nation. The functional scope should be as broad as possible.

However, in the first steps of planning it may be well to exercise some restraint with regard to both the number of members and to functional scope, since otherwise a deadlock might be caused at the very beginning by excessive complication at the preparatory stages. But once the start has been made, we ought not to be afraid of growth and expansion.

This job demands courage and far-sightedness both in the political and in the economic field. The political advantages will soon become apparent, the economic ones will perhaps take a little longer. But when the initial difficulties have been surmounted the economies of all the member-States will have greatly benefited; only thus will they be able to compete with existing or evolving major industrial areas of the world.

I believe that a European federation of this nature would not harm or infringe upon the work of NATO, whose framework is larger than that of a European federation, both geographically and functionally. Wherever their work would touch or overlap, it should be easy to achieve adjustments. The purpose of NATO is to protect certain interests of the Atlantic community and not common European interests.

I would like to say something concerning the participation of Great Britain. By joining WEU in 1954, Great Britain revealed her conviction that some of her own essential interests run parallel to those of continental nations. Since then, particularly in the light of the Suez crisis, developments have proved this conviction to be correct. The attitude of Great Britain is of immense importance for Europe's future. I hope with all my heart that her policy will continue in the direction, she has been pursuing in recent years.

I am deeply convinced that it is not Utopian to believe in the possibility of the early establishment of a European federation. We already have so many separate regulations which can be combined and there are so many fields ripe for common solutions that I do believe a viable institution can set up in the near future.

Integration of Individual Unification Measures

The various unification measures and individual regulations plainly cry out for final integration. I have already mentioned in this connection the Council of Europe, the European Coal and Steel Community and Western European Union. I would draw your attention also to the many and varied agreements in the field of communications and transport and to the liberalization of trade which has paved the way for the common market. The EURATOM question will likewise require to be settled in the near future. But above all I should like to draw attention to the spirit of cooperation which has reigned in the Brussels Conferences and the chairmanship of Premier Spaak and at the Venice Conference. This spirit is in my opinion the best and most essential leaven for European cooperation and integration. Today I am speaking at the "Grandes

Conférences Catholiques”. I feel that in this work of political European Integration, Catholic Europeans should keep before their minds the fact that States comprising a total of 1000 million inhabitants are being governed and directed according to deliberately atheistic principles, for they regard the freedom of the individual which is deeply rooted in the spirit of Christianity, as of no consequence in comparison with the omnipotence of the State. This atheistic domination over 1000 million people constitutes an extremely great danger to Christian thought and Christian sentiments. That we should unite against this danger is a precept not only of self-preservation but of conscience.

I shall now draw to a close. I have tried to outline to you my conception of the requirements and possibilities of European unification. I have tried to describe to you not only the seriousness of the situation but also its hopeful side. It is up to all of us to draw the necessary conclusions. The power of reasoning by itself does not alone suffice. “The greatest thoughts spring from the heart”, is a famous saying. And we, too, must let the great thought of a united Europe spring from our hearts if it is to materialize. Not as though the unity of Europe were a matter of the emotions, of sentiment, but rather in the sense that a firm heart, dedicated to a great task, can give us the strength to carry out in the face of all difficulties what our reason has recognized as right. If we find this strength, then we shall do justice to all the necessities I have mentioned. We shall then complete the great work of unification which each of our nations needs, which Europe needs and which the whole world needs.