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OPENING SESSION OF THE
40th ACADEMIC YEAR
OF THE COLLEGE OF EUROPE

ADDRESS BY Mr JACQUES DELORS

President of the Commission of the European Communities

Bruges, 17 October 1989

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Your Excellencies
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am speaking to you today at the invitation of your Rector, Professor Lukaszewski, as the College of Europe celebrates its fortieth birthday. European integration has had its up and downs over those forty years, its high seasons of hope and progress and its long winters of despondency and stagnation. But here, in Bruges, faith in the European ideal has never wavered.

Your Rector affirmed this, ten years ago, in an exacting, pluralist conception of Europe. He wrote:

"Shaping European awareness, fostering attachment to Europe as a community of civilization and destiny, is totally in keeping with the great university tradition of the West".

It is a happy coincidence that this year your College has chosen to pay tribute to Denis de Rougemont, an all too little-known figure, whose lifework and writings are a precious legacy.

I would like to speak in more personal terms of Denis de Rougemont, I never had the good fortune to work with him, but I would like to tell you why I think so much of him, why I draw on his intellectual and political contribution.

First of all, as a militant European, I, like many others, am carrying on the work he began in his time. He was an ardent federalist. For him federalism was a many-splendoured thing; he saw it as a method, an approach to reality, a view of society. I often find myself invoking federalism as a method, with the addition of the principle of subsidiarity. I see it as a way of reconciling what for many appears to be irreconcilable: the emergence of a United Europe and loyalty to one's homeland; the need for a European power capable of tackling the problems of our age and the absolute necessity to preserve our roots in the shape of our nations and regions; and decentralization of responsibilities, so that we never entrust to a bigger unit anything that is best done by a smaller one. This is precisely what subsidiarity is about.

As a personalist, a disciple of Emmanuel Mounier, whose influence will, I am convinced, revive as Europeans become aware of the quandaries of frenzied individualism, just as, for some years now, they have been rejecting collectivism and, in its attenuated form, the benevolent State.

I am pleased therefore to pay tribute today to a man who, throughout his life, kept on tilling the fields of hope. It is significant that, at the 1948 Congress in The Hague, Denis de Rougemont was asked to help draft and then read the Message to Europeans:

"Europe's mission", he declared, "is to unite her peoples in accordance with their genius of diversity and with the conditions of modern community life, and to open the way towards organized freedom for which the world is seeking..."

Human dignity is Europe's finest achievement, freedom her true strength. Both are at stake in our struggle. The union of our continent is now needed not only for the salvation of the liberties we have won, but also for the extension of their benefits to all mankind.

Upon this union depend Europe's destiny and the world's peace."

Were he with us here today, I would want to discuss two points with him which have a bearing on our common future.

Denis de Rougemont believed in what I would call working from the bottom up, rebuilding from below, from small entities rooted naturally in a solidarity of interests and a convergence of feeling. That is of course essential, but it is not enough. Others, and I am one of them, must at the same time work from the top down, viewing the paths of integration from above. Otherwise the small streams of solidarity will never converge to form a wide river.

And de Rougemont abhorred power. Let me quote him again:

"My philosophy comes down to this: power is the authority one would wield over others; freedom is the authority one can wield over oneself".

Although I would not deny the philosophical value of this statement, I would beg to disagree with it from a political standpoint.

Politically speaking, power is not necessarily the obverse of freedom. Neither the European Community - nor the peoples and nations that form it - will truly exist unless it is in a position to defend its values, to act on them for the benefit of all, to be generous. Let us be powerful enough to command respect and to uphold the values of freedom and solidarity. In a world like ours, there is no other way.

I would link power with the necessity I have so often invoked to promote the revitalization of European integration. Today I would like to get power working for the ideal. Where would necessity take us had we no vision of what we want to achieve? And, conversely, what impact can an ideal have without the resolve and the means to act? The time has come, I feel, to reconcile necessity and the ideal.

We can do so by drawing on our own experiences, on our national heritages, and on the strength of our institutions. Let me underline the importance of this at a time when people can appreciate the limits of any action implemented with national resources alone. Our present concerns - be it the social dimension or the new frontier represented by economic and monetary union - offer a golden opportunity for the joint exercise of sovereignty, while respecting diversity and hence the principles of pluralism and subsidiarity.

There is a need for urgency, for history does not wait. As upheavals shake the world, and the other 'Europe' in particular, our reinvigorated Community must work for increased cohesion and set objectives commensurate with the challenges thrown down by history.

I. EUROPE, NECESSITY AND THE IDEAL

History is only interested in the far-sighted and those who think big, like Europe's founding fathers. They are still with us today in the inspiration they provided and legacy they left.

By "thinking big" I mean taking account of worldwide geopolitical and economic trends, the movement of ideas and the development of the fundamental values which inspire our contemporaries. The founding fathers wanted to see an end to interecne strife in Europe. But they also sensed that Europe was losing its place as the economic and political centre of the world. Their intuition was confirmed before our very eyes, to the point in the 1970s when we had to choose between survival and decline. I shocked many people at that time by constantly arguing this point. Gradually, though, the need for a quantum leap became apparent and created a climate in which a single European market by 1992 could be accepted as an objective. The same dynamism led to revision of the Treaty of Rome - the Single Act - and to what is known as the Delors package, in other words the financial reforms necessary to pay for our ambitious plans. Necessity woke Europe from its slumbers.

By "far-sighted" I mean being simultaneously capable of drawing on our historical heritage and looking to the future. Futurology has a part to play but so has a code of ethics for the individual, society and the human adventure. Nothing is achieved without enthusiasm, to quote workers doomed to see their firm disappear.

This, frankly, is what we most lack today. I can say, with both feet on the ground, that the theory of the bogeyman-nation has no place in the life of our Community if it wants to be a Community worthy of the name. The inevitable conflicts of interest between us must be transcended by a family feeling, a sense of shared values.

These include the enhancement of personality through mutual knowledge and exchange. The younger generation is very conscious of this new horizon. It rejects isolation, it wants to experience other ideas, to explore new territory.

The College of Bruges is the living laboratory where this new Europe is being formed.

The time has come, my friends, to revive the ideal.

NECESSITY AS A DRIVING FORCE

To get there, however, we must take the path of necessity. At a time when the Community is being courted by some, threatened by others; at a time when there are those who, with scant regard for the mortar which already binds us, advocate a headlong dash in the name of a greater Europe, or offer us as an ultimate reference nothing more than the laws of the market; to these we must say that our Community is the fruit not only of history and necessity, but also of political will.

Let us consider necessity for a moment. Since the turn-around of 1984-87 our achievements are there for all to see. The threat of a decline is receding. In five years we have gone from insufficient economic expansion of the order of 1.5% a year, to dynamic growth of 3.5%, from a net annual wastage of 600 000 jobs to the creation of 1 300 000 jobs a year, from almost no additional investment to an increase of some 6-7%. Businessmen and manufacturers are more aware of this than politicians, many of whom still underestimate the way in which the gradual achievement of the single European market and common policies have supported national efforts to adapt to the new world economic order. Yet all we need to do to see how far we have come is look beyond our frontiers: Europe is once again a force to be reckoned with and is arousing interest everywhere: in America, in Asia, in Africa, in the North and in the South.

Then there is political will. I know that the term has sometimes been abused, as a sort of incantation, but it is precisely political will that led first six, then nine, ten, twelve countries to decide to unite their destiny, with their eyes wide open. The contract binding them is clear, involving both rights and obligations.

Last of all, history. The Twelve cannot control history but they are now in a position to influence it once again. They did not want Europe to be cut in two at Yalta and made a hostage in the Cold War. They did not, nor do they, close the door to other European countries willing to accept the terms of the contract in full.

RECONCILIATION OF THE NECESSITY AND THE IDEAL

The present upheavals in Eastern Europe are changing the nature of our problems. It is not merely a matter of when and how all the countries of Europe will benefit from the stimulus and the advantages of a single market. Our times are dominated by a new mercantilism and our young people expect something better of us. Are we going to turn away?

Make no mistake about it. Behind triumphant nationalism and excessive individualism, ethics are making a come-back in the wake of scientific progress. How far, for example, are we prepared to allow genetic manipulation to go? We need a code of ethics for man, we need to promote our concept of the individual and his integrity. Nature, whether pillaged or neglected, strikes back with disturbances and upheavals. So we also need a code of ethics governing the relationship between man and nature. With millions of young people knocking in vain on the door of adult society, not least to find their place in the world of work, with millions of pensioners - still in the prime of life - cut off from any real role in society, we must ask ourselves what kind of society are we building. A society in which the door is always closed?

Europe has always been the continent of doubt and questioning, seeking a humanism appropriate to its time, the cradle of ideas which ultimately encircle the globe.

The time has come to return to ideals, to let them penetrate our lives. Let us continue to consider, in everything we do in the field of politics, economics and social and cultural life, what will enable every man, every woman, to achieve their full potential in an awareness not only of their rights but also of their obligations to others and to society as a whole. We must sustain our efforts to create a humane society in which the individual can blossom through contact and cooperation with others.

Of course any reference to humanism is bound to unleash a debate among Europeans. People will hold conflicting views but a synthesis will emerge to the benefit of democracy and Europe itself. For the Community is a concept charged with significance.

"Where there is no big vision, the people perish" as Jean Monnet said, making this saying of President Roosevelt's his own.

II. THE COMMUNITY, A CONCEPT CHARGED WITH SIGNIFICANCE

In this respect we are engaged in a unique adventure. We are creating a model, admittedly by reference to inherited principles, but in circumstances so extraordinary that the end result will be unique, without historical precedent.

We owe much to the strength of our institutions because our Community is a Community based on the rule of law. And the condition for success is the joint, transparent exercise of sovereignty.

THE STRENGTH OF A COMMUNITY BASED ON THE RULE OF LAW

Let us consider the strength of our institutions for a moment, beginning with legitimacy. Without legitimacy - as earlier attempts to unite nations have shown - no progress, no permanence is possible.

In the Community the progress of history is there for all to see. We have the Treaty duly ratified by all national parliaments, an expression of national will. The Court of Justice plays a vital role in dealing with differences of interpretation. The European Council - now institutionalized - allows Heads of State and Government to monitor progress, to pinpoint delays and failures to honour the contract that unites and binds us, to provide impetus and to make good any deficiencies. A new development is that the Commission now presents a balance sheet at each meeting of what has been accomplished and what remains to be done. The Commission takes the European Council's pronouncements very seriously and does not hesitate to remind the Twelve of undertakings given. In this way the Community is demonstrating more and more clearly that it has little in common with organizations that produce worthy resolutions that are rarely if ever acted upon.

To take a topical issue, the Commission takes a serious view of the European Council's reaffirmation of its determination to abolish internal frontiers - physical, technical and fiscal - and to create a vast area in which the people of Europe can do business, make contact and work together. The same is true of its twice-expressed determination to move towards economic and monetary union and, indeed, to flesh out the Community's social dimension. That too is legitimacy.

But effectiveness is another measure of the strength of our institutions. We must never underestimate the inspired approach of the authors of the Treaty of Rome. What demands it makes on us!

First of all on the Commission, which is responsible for seeing to it that the ground rules are observed, for ensuring that commitments are honoured, for implementing Council decisions when the Council see fit to allow it to do so. From this point of view we are wide of the mark, more precisely of the targets set by the Single Act. But it is above all in exercising its right of initiative that the Commission should shoulder its responsibilities. And everyone gives it credit for having defined goals and proposed ways and means of revitalizing European integration.

The Commission intends to retain this dynamic approach, assuming it can come up with new ideas and options. Let us be quite clear here. The Commission must never get drunk on its own powers. It must be strict in applying the principle of subsidiarity. It must be aware of the conditions for a dynamic compromise between the Twelve and to that end endeavour to understand each nation and its people. It must draw conclusions from this and be tireless in the pursuit of consensus. It must have the courage to say no when there is a danger of the letter and the spirit of the Treaty being ignored. And most important of all, it must have the courage to take a back seat whenever this can serve the European cause.

The strength of the law is illustrated in turn by the European Parliament. I know that there is a debate on the democratic deficit and I have no doubt whatsoever that, before too long, the powers of the Strasbourg assembly will be strengthened further. But we cannot ignore the influence that today's Parliament has had on European integration. Let me just ask you this: do you think that it would have been possible to convene the Intergovernmental Conference that produced the Single Act had Parliament not thrown its weight behind the idea on the basis of the draft European Union Treaty which it had adopted at the initiative of that great European, Altiero Spinelli?

Many envy us our Community based on the rule of law and this explains its growing influence. What a model our institutions, which allow every country irrespective of its size to have its say and make its contribution, offer the nations of Eastern Europe. They, and many other nations besides, admire the practical, forward-looking application of pluralist democracy within our borders.

In the circumstances how can anyone expect us to accept absorption into a larger, looser structure along intergovernmental lines? We would be abandoning a bird in the hand for two in the bush. It would be a tragic mistake for Europe.

Despite the success of our Community based on the rule of law, disputes about sovereignty continue. We need to face the issues squarely.

THE JOINT EXERCISE OF SOVEREIGNTY

A dogmatic approach will get us nowhere. It will merely complicate the difficult discussions that lie ahead and make it even harder to remove the remaining obstacles on the road to the single European market and 1992. The facts speak for themselves. Each nation needs to consider how much room for manoeuvre it genuinely has in today's world. The growing interdependence of our economies, the internationalization of the financial world, the present or growing influence of the main protagonists on the world stage - all point to a dual conclusion.

Firstly, nations should unite if they feel close to each other in terms of geography, history, values and - dare I say? - necessity.

Secondly - and ideally at the same time - cooperation should develop at world level to deal with such matters as international trade, the monetary system, under-development, the environment and drugs.

The two are complementary rather than concurrent. Because the ability to survive internationally, to influence events, presupposes more than the trappings of power. It presupposes a capacity for generosity which is essential to any great undertaking.

Europe has little clout as yet, although, as I have said, our economic performance is impressing our partners and reassuring our own people. It is quite clear that the fault lies in the deliberately-fostered fiction of full national sovereignty and hence of the absolute effectiveness of national policies.

We are all familiar with the expression "speaking with a single voice". This is a reality rather than a formula. It is a reality that strengthens our institutions, a reality reflected in the results achieved when we do agree to the joint exercise of sovereignty. The consequences of the opposite approach prove the point. Think of the shortcomings of our common commercial policy - enshrined though it is in the Treaty - often explained by countries acting alone or failing to identify their own interests correctly. Think of our inability to make a constructive contribution to the problems of indebtedness and under-development, when joint action could move mountains of egoism and hegemony.

May I remind you of what Sir Geoffrey Howe said on 19 July last:

"The sovereign nations of the European Community, sharing their sovereignty freely (...), are building for themselves a key role in the power politics of the coming century."

This brings me back to our institutions. You will all remember the decision-making debate which paralysed the Community in the 1960s and led ultimately to the pseudo-compromise reached in Luxembourg. Since the Single Act and increased recourse to majority voting, there is a new dynamic. Sometimes the Council takes a vote, sometimes it considers it wiser not to force countries into a minority position and adopts a decision without a vote. Thanks to this progress on the institutional front, the Community is advancing rapidly towards the single European market and strengthening its rules and common policies. To the advantage of some? No, to the advantage of all: in a sort of positive-sum game.

To put it another way, the old "inequality-unanimity-immobility" triangle has been replaced by a new "equality-majority-dynamism" triangle, the key to success.

We will need to draw conclusions from this experiment when the time comes to make further improvements to our institutional apparatus.

And that time is not far off. By its very nature economic and monetary union is the interface between economic integration and political integration. It is the political crowning of economic convergence. It is a perfect illustration of the joint exercise of sovereignty because a single market for capital and financial services in a world dominated by matters financial calls for a monetary policy which is sufficiently coordinated and sufficient tight to allow us to make the most of it. Without such a policy we would be prey to international speculation and the instability of dominant currencies.

Monetary union will be acceptable and feasible only if there is parallel progress towards increased convergence of our economies so that policies are more consistent and harnessed to agreed objectives. There is consensus on economic expansion against a background of stability, on qualitative growth to generate new jobs. In a democratic society objectives can only be defined by political authorities which have democratic legitimacy. We therefore need to combine an independent monetary authority - the guarantor of stability - with the subsidiarity which is vital if each nation is to pursue its own policies in areas which are a matter for it alone, and control by our elected representatives in the shape of the European Parliament, our governments and our national parliaments.

Let me remind you before I go any further that the decision on economic and monetary union has been taken. The report of the committee which I had the honour of chairing was recognized as an essential basis for discussion by the European Council. What we need now is an institutional framework compatible with the principles discussed above and adapted to the new tasks entrusted to the Community.

Subsidiarity is central to future discussions. The principle is clear but we need to define how it will apply in this particular case. The committee's report is quite specific. A new monetary institution would formulate a common policy valid inside and outside the union. Its federal structure would guarantee that each central bank had a hand in the formulation of decisions and implemented joint guidelines nationally with substantial margins for manoeuvre. The Council would concentrate on the convergence of objectives and the tools of economic policy but each nation would retain the resources necessary to finance its own policies on security at home and abroad, justice, education, health, social security, regional planning and so on. Approximately 95% of public funds would be available for this because the Community budget would be confined to financing common policies ranging from agriculture to cooperation on research and technology, aid to developing or crisis-hit regions and others still on the drawing-board such as the environment and in due course the infrastructure essential to the smooth operation of the market. Together these policies would account for no more than 5% of public funds Community-wide.

Where does this rather cursory explanation leave those who argue that economic and monetary union will lead to excessive centralization and dirigisme? The fact of the matter is that realistic application of the principle of subsidiarity leaves them without a leg to stand on. The debate - and a debate there must be - should concentrate rather on what economic and monetary union will bring, what it will add in economic and social terms to the expected benefits of the single European market. And at a time when political leaders seem to be vacillating between further development of the Community and its absorption into a larger configuration, economic and monetary union is a necessary step which will strengthen European integration and guarantee political dynamism.

WHOLEHEARTED ACCEPTANCE OF PLURALISM

Acceptance of subsidiarity implies respect for pluralism and, by implication, diversity.

This is evident not only in the discussions on economic and monetary union, but also in what we call the Community's social dimension.

The facts are clear. Our twelve countries have differing traditions in the area of industrial relations. Major disparities persist in terms of living standards, although our common policies are designed to reduce these gradually. There can be no question, therefore, of artificially forcing standards upwards, or, conversely, of provoking the export of social problems. Last but not least, our governments have differing, and in some cases opposing points of view.

There are enormous problems to be overcome, then, if we are to make progress on the social dimension. But it is equally important whether our concern is regional development, town and country planning, or the need for common standards.

The social dimension permeates all our discussions and everything we do: our efforts to restore competitiveness and cooperate on macroeconomic policy to reduce unemployment and provide all young Europeans with a working future; common policies designed to promote the development of less-prosperous regions and the regeneration of regions hit by industrial change; employment policy and the concentration of efforts on helping young people to gain a foothold in the labour market and combating long-term unemployment; and the development of rural regions threatened by the decline in the number of farms, desertification and demographic imbalances.

