

Address given by Robbert Goebbels (Luxembourg, 17 February 1986)

Caption: On 17 February 1986, on the occasion of the signing of the Single European Act in Luxembourg, Robert Goebbels, Luxembourg's Junior Foreign Minister, highlights the progress as well as the weaknesses of the Treaty.

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Speech made by Mr Robert GOEBBELS, State Secretary for Foreign Affairs of Luxembourg, on the occasion of the signing of the Single European Act in Luxembourg on 17 February 1986

I should first like to thank you on behalf of the Luxembourg Government for having chosen to hold tonight's meeting in this city and in this building. We were very happy to agree to this, and we have been looking forward to it, so that we could see the final link put in the chain of events leading the Conference of Governments of the Member States from its inaugural meeting at the beginning of September through our ministerial meetings, and above all the European Council, to today's meeting here.

Those who have spoken before me have presented, described and commented on the Act submitted for signature. I do not therefore wish to repeat what has already been said by those more qualified to comment than the representative of a Government which has now — having completed its task as Presidency — reverted to the bottom of the list in our presidential rota.

What the three Presidents have in turn said should provide food for thought and inspiration for the future activities of the Community and its Member States.

The actual content of the Act probably deserves neither the praise nor the criticism which has been heaped on it.

The negotiations of recent months have compelled us to face up to grim reality. There is nothing finer in politics than a programme, and there is nothing finer in European politics than the draft of a new Treaty. The end result no longer has the attraction of an ideal. But the negotiations have nevertheless had the merit of obliging Governments, Community institutions and all those who — for one reason or another — have embarked together on the long and stony path towards European Union to face up squarely to the ideas involved and the problems of putting them into practice.

At the beginning of the exercise we were faced with a number of facts: the need to form a genuine internal market within a few years; the need also to establish some sort of framework for organizing co-operation between States and defining the role of the Community in the vitally important field of technology and research. A new approach is called for, based precisely on the newly defined objectives, on the decision-making procedure, with a more coherent and more intensive use of the means of decision and action afforded by our institutions, starting with the European Parliament, concerning which it is true to say that the potential inherent in the periodic mobilization of citizens for an election has been inadequately realized — and will continue to be so even after implementation of the Single European Act.

Finally — although there has been less discussion over this because fortunately it is a less controversial issue — laying down arrangements for co-operation on foreign policy in the form of a treaty is an important event.

From the discussions which preceded the convening of a governmental conference it emerged last Spring that — except in the institutional field — ideas about the content of reform were less divergent than ideas about the form it should take. Was it necessary to amend the Treaty, or could substantially similar results be achieved working within the framework of the existing Treaties?

If the Ten — along with Spain and Portugal — ultimately decided to opt for constitutional reform, it was for two reasons:

— the Treaties, particularly in the manner of their implementation, were being imperceptibly but inexorably eroded by a trend back towards classical forms of intergovernmental co-operation, accompanied by a weakening of the institutions and the abandonment of genuine Community procedures;

— what were termed the "new policies" were becoming increasingly likely to fall outside the Community

framework proper, thus leading to a kind of European integration which was very different from that originally conceived and from that which European Union was designed to achieve.

From the outset we considered that if this "modernization" was to be credible and firmly based it would have to take the form of a constitutional adaptation of the treaties rather than — as part of the long series of attempted reforms with which the history of the Community is already studded — the form of yet another programme or catalogue of good intentions.

It seems to me that we have now achieved this objective. Of course there will be endless discussion about whether substantially similar results might not have been achieved by the other method. But what is clear from the SINGLE ACT is that the objectives which have been restated or newly defined are to be achieved through argument and counter-argument in a Community framework. In affirming this we are underlining the need for Community cohesion. If we did not do this, or if the solemn promise which we are making in the ACT were not carried out, the seeds of dissent would flourish and ultimately destroy the unity and indivisibility of the Community.

This last fear should give cause for thought to those States among us who see themselves as the "smaller" States. As for the smallest — the baby of them all — it is fully aware of what is at stake.

Mr President,

A number of our Governments openly acknowledge that from the point of view of institutional reform the SINGLE ACT falls far short of what had been hoped for. The Luxembourg Government is of that number.

It has to be said that the SINGLE ACT does not make enough of the potentially considerable contribution which election of the European Parliament by direct universal suffrage could make to the consolidation and expansion of the democratic foundations of our Community. My Government — like some others — did not wait until these negotiations to voice more ambitious institutional requirements. However, I owe it to history to make clear today, in this place, that when we held the Presidency and approached each Government in turn, under cover of secrecy, very few of them came up with anything other than alternatives in the same mould. It therefore became clear fairly early on that disagreement over institutions might prove to be the sticking point in the negotiations. The facts have borne out this prognosis.

The Presidency was clearly aware of this risk at the time. As had been agreed, and made clear by the choice of procedure, the Presidency, with substantial backing from the Member States and the Commission, adopted, and has since stood firmly by, a "strategy of unity" as opposed to a "strategy of division".

Thus it was that the negotiations reached their climax at the European Council meeting here in this building. At that meeting we saw the Heads of State or Government and the Foreign Ministers commit themselves personally to an unprecedented exercise, to make a supreme effort to overcome the problems to which a solution seemed to be in sight.

The texts before us today thus bear the stamp of the European Council and represent a political commitment which is to be consolidated in terms of a treaty today, or in the very near future.

Looked at more closely, the SINGLE ACT is, however, not as lacking in new initiatives — even in the institutional field — as might appear at first sight. The role of the European Parliament will at least be changing and evolving in the direction which many wish to see it take.

All in all, the Community will — we hope — have some years to begin working towards the newly defined objectives and using the new methods described. What is certain is that this reform, which on a number of points represents imperfect compromises, marks the beginning of a trial period at the end of which it will be necessary to take stock of the situation and to refine or supplement what, in today's achievement, seems to

those assuming the responsibilities which we currently bear to be a valuable asset which can serve as the basis for further progress towards European Union.

I should like to thank the Presidency for having given me the opportunity to add my modest contribution, although I am very sorry that my friend Jacques POOS, to whom I wish a speedy recovery, was unable to speak instead of me as, I am sure you will agree he deserved to.