

Address given by Winston Churchill (London, 28 November 1949)

Caption: On 28 November 1949, the former British Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, gives an address at Kingsway Hall in London in which he supports the idea of a European union and stresses the importance of the European Movement in this process.

Source: RHODES, James Robert (Ed.). Winston S. Churchill: His complete speeches 1897-1963. Volume VII: 1943-1949. New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1974. 7902 p. ISBN 0-87754-128-0.

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Speech by Winston Churchill (London, 28 November 1949)

Kingsway Hall, London

Monsieur Spaak, as Prime Minister of Belgium, made the first governmental declaration in support of The Hague Congress demand for a European Assembly, and has throughout, with the French Government, sustained the idea. As one of the Presidents of Honour of the European Movement he has led public opinion in favour of European Union. Now, as President of the European Assembly, he has become the guide and champion of the new Parliament of Europe. We salute him as a great Belgian and, at the same time, as a great European.

You, my Lord Archbishop, have referred to the progress made by the European Movement since you presided at our Albert Hall meeting in May 1947. That progress has indeed been remarkable. Exactly a year later, in May 1948, The Hague Congress demanded the creation of a European Assembly. Exactly a year after that, in May 1949, ten governments signed the Statute of Europe.

In Strasbourg last August delegates to the European Assembly, representing widely differing political tendencies, declared themselves convinced of the urgent necessity for creating a United Europe and the dire consequences of hesitation or delay. The recommendations sent by the Assembly to the Committee of Ministers were bold and challenging. But they cannot be said to have been unrealistic. Whilst people may disagree with a point here or there, these recommendations represent broadly the requirements of the situation which confronts us. The policy enunciated at Strasbourg offers to Europe the only possible means of preserving her peace and freedom and of maintaining and developing the living standards of her peoples.

We all recognize, of course, that the policy of European Union raises many serious and practical difficulties which will require solution. But the difficulties are not a reason for inaction. They are rather a justification for the redoubling of our efforts. As we advance we shall hear more and more about these difficulties, but we have no choice but to go on. The alternative is not to remain as we are. The alternative is to face the certainty of wholesale economic collapse as soon as American Aid ceases, accompanied by the spread of misery and Communism.

The French Foreign Minister, M. Schuman, declared in the French Parliament this week that 'Without Britain there can be no Europe.' This is entirely true. But our friends on the Continent need have no misgivings. Britain is an integral part of Europe, and we mean to play our part in the revival of her prosperity and greatness. But Britain cannot be thought of as a single State in isolation. She is the founder and centre of a world-wide Empire and Commonwealth. We shall never do anything to weaken the ties of blood, of sentiment and tradition and common interest which unite us with the other members of the British family of nations. But nobody is asking us to make such desertion. But Britain to enter a European Union from which the Empire and Commonwealth would be excluded would not only be impossible but would, in the eyes of Europe, enormously reduce the value of our participation. The Strasbourg recommendations urged the creation of an economic system which will embrace not only the European States, but all those other States and territories elsewhere which are associated with them.

The British Government have rightly stated that they cannot commit this country to entering any European Union without the agreement of the other members of the British Commonwealth. We all agree with that statement. But no time must be lost in discussing the question with the Dominions and seeking to convince them that their interests as well as ours lie in a United Europe. An opportunity for these consultations offers itself at the Conference of Commonwealth Foreign Ministers at Colombo early next year which Mr. Bevin is going to attend – we hope to be a help. We ask that the issue of European Union be placed upon the agenda of this conference. Then when the European Assembly next meets at Strasbourg, the representatives of Britain in the Committee of Ministers and in the Assembly will no longer be restrained as they are now by uncertainty about the opinions and wishes of their partners overseas.

At The Hague, and now this summer at Strasbourg, the importance of admitting the new German Federal Republic as an associate member of the Council of Europe appeared, and we rejoice that this step has now been decided in principle. Understanding and co-operation must be established between Germany and the

rest of free Europe. Therefore, although belated, we welcome the recent decision in favour of the partial abandonment of the provocative and, at the same time, ineffective policy of dismantling. Western Germany, overcrowded as she is, with millions of German refugees from the East, cannot hope to restore lasting prosperity except within the framework of a wider unity in which her peoples could find a peaceful outlet for their energies and abilities. Europe needs Germany, but Germany still more needs Europe.

At Zurich I said France has a special responsibility for taking Germany by the hand and leading her back into the European family. I congratulate the French Parliament upon its decision to approve the admission of Germany into the Council of Europe. At The Hague I said: 'For us the German problem is to restore the economic life of Germany and revive the ancient fame of the German race without thereby exposing their neighbours and ourselves to any reassertion of their military power of which we still bear the scars. United Europe provided the only solution to this two-sided problem. It is a solution which can be implemented without delay.'

The basic idea underlying the conception of European Union is the desire to preserve and develop the free way of life of the participating nations. This implies the acceptance of collective responsibility for the defence of liberty and the dignity of man. That was the purpose of the proposal put forward by the European Movement and adopted by the Assembly for the conclusion of a European Convention on Human Rights. We understand that the Government may require to consider carefully the details of such a convention but we ask them, without further delay, to make it clear that they accept the principle of joint responsibility for the maintenance of freedom and that they intend not merely to issue pious declarations but to set up judicial and executive machinery to make this a reality.

We trust that the Government will be in a position to announce the signing of this Convention on Human Rights and the setting-up of the machinery to implement it before the next session of the Assembly. Nothing could give to the Assembly more confidence in the Government's sincerity. Nothing could give greater inspiration to the European peoples than this step. The European Movement must campaign for the Convention on Human Rights as it campaigned so successfully for the creation of the Assembly.

We are at present forced by circumstances to confine our action to the democratic nations of Europe who are free. But let us never for a moment forget that behind the Iron Curtain there are peoples who share our culture and our traditions and who have no greater desire than to be united with us. All our plans for the new Europe must be based on the firm assumption that our fellow Europeans now living under totalitarian domination will, as soon as they are free, come and take places with us in the Council of Europe.

The European Assembly at Strasbourg, under Monsieur Spaak's leadership, has proved that it is capable of bold initiative. But the decisions rest with governments. The ability of the Assembly to persuade governments to act will depend upon the backing which exists for this idea among the broad masses of the people in every country. To create this body of public interest and public support is one of the main tasks of the European Movement. The union of Europe must be a union not only of governments but of peoples.

The European Movement, an international all-party organization, was the inspiration and motive force which brought the European Assembly into being. It must now build up a vast body of popular support behind the Assembly so that the Assembly's recommendations may be translated by the governments into action. Many of you here are no doubt already supporters of the European Movement. Those of you who are not will have an opportunity during the meeting to enrol tonight. I hope that you will join us and work with us in this historic campaign, the triumph of which will be decisive for the peace and well-being of Europe and the world for generations that are to come.