

Address given by Sicco Mansholt at the Agriculture Conference of the EEC Member States (Stresa, 3–12 July 1958)

Caption: Sicco Mansholt, Vice-President of the Commission of the EEC in charge of agriculture, thanks the delegations of the six Member States of the European Economic Community meeting in Stresa from 3 to 12 July 1958 to discuss the common agricultural policy.

Source: Communauté européenne (sous la dir.). Recueil des documents de la Conférence agricole des Etats membres de la Communauté économique européenne à Stresa du 3 au 12 juillet 1958. Luxembourg: Service des publications des Communautés européennes, 1958. 250 p. p. 231-236.

Copyright: (c) Translation CVCE.EU by UNI.LU

All rights of reproduction, of public communication, of adaptation, of distribution or of dissemination via Internet, internal network or any other means are strictly reserved in all countries.

Consult the legal notice and the terms and conditions of use regarding this site.

URL:

http://www.cvce.eu/obj/address_given_by_sicco_mansholt_at_the_agriculture_conference_of_the_eec_member_states_stresa_3_12_july_1958-en-d0f7f3a5-f392-4872-a8ea-637eed3802e5.html



Last updated: 06/07/2016

Address given by Sicco Mansholt at the Agriculture Conference of the EEC Member States (Stresa, 3–12 July 1958)

Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentleman,

It is my pleasant duty to extend warm thanks to Mr Ferrari-Aggradi, the Italian Minister for Agriculture, for his words which bear witness not only to an in-depth knowledge of the issues under discussion but also to a strong desire to resolve the problems that we have to face.

Mr Ferrari-Aggradi, to whom I should like to express my grateful thanks, has been dealing with agricultural matters only for a short time, as Minister for Agriculture, but I think that I speak for everyone when I say that he is a man with a broad wealth of experience, who knows that agriculture raises not only economic, social and technical problems but also sociological, political and, of course, psychological problems. I believe that we should never lose sight of this in our work, since we have struck a chord here that has resonated throughout the debates held during this Conference and your words, Minister, have further amplified the resonance of that chord.

First of all, I should like to address a few words of gratitude to all those who have made my job as Chairman of this Conference easier, both to the delegates and to all the participants in the proceedings of the Conference; I have often attended agricultural conferences, but I have only rarely experienced an atmosphere like this, and it has been a real pleasure for me to chair these debates.

So, the Stresa Conference is nearing its end, and I do not think that it is any exaggeration to say that it has taken on particular significance.

For those who are still not able to distinguish the deep roots of agricultural policy problems, because they have not had sufficient contact with such problems, it is perhaps difficult to understand why this Conference is so important and how it is different from the many agricultural conferences that have preceded it.

Have no fear, I do not intend to reiterate in detail all the facts set out in the reports or to recapitulate everything contained in the resolution. I would rather outline a few key points that have formed the basis of our deliberations over the course of these few days in Stresa, and I should like to begin by making an observation that has emerged very clearly from this Conference, namely that agriculture no longer wishes to remain in isolation; agriculture realises that it is, and it wishes to be, an integral part of our overall national economies.

The composition of the delegations, the mass of documentation that they have brought, and, above all, the way in which the discussions have been conducted within the committees prove that it has been with this in mind that we have met together, and this is ultimately what may be seen in the resolution that we adopted this morning.

During this Conference, we have been able to see that it has become necessary to place problems of agricultural policy in a broader context and that it is not possible to try to resolve those problems in the agricultural sector alone. Rather, the general economic and social development of our national economies will have to be guided by the concern to confer on agriculture its rightful place.

On the other hand, this means, as has become very clear in the course of this Conference, that our Community's agricultural policy must endeavour to reinforce its foundations.

The issues dealt with in the committees, and in Committees II and III in particular, essentially fall into this line of thinking. Committee I has been able to review the current situation and determine the current agricultural structure of western Europe.

First of all, we notice a great diversity, but we can also see that, in many respects, agricultural production is outmoded and far from capable of fulfilling the task that it will have to face in the future and that many

technical, economic and social improvements are needed.

Then there are the problems of soil, water, energy, transport markets and processing, and I believe that one of the greatest achievements of this Conference will have been to highlight, in the still brief reports dealing with these huge problems, the link that exists between these various elements.

I also find it particularly reassuring that this Conference has given rise to an open discussion on theoretical questions, on the aim of our agricultural policy, that is to say on the need to gear the structure of our agriculture to healthy production on family farms.

This issue has been widely debated over this Conference, and I look forward to the day when everyone everywhere will recognise that, technically, economically and, of course, also politically, healthy production, family-based production is truly the necessary foundation for agriculture in western Europe. I believe that this is essential, since there will be no structural policy or market policy for our Commission or for our Community if we lose sight of this starting point, which is also, ultimately, our long-term aim.

I also believe that it is very important that, during this Conference, it has been made clear that an overall structural improvement in the agricultural sector cannot and should not be separated from what I shall call the problem of industrial structure, since we must be careful not to regard agriculture as an element that must adapt only to and follow what is happening elsewhere. I believe that if agriculture achieves what is expected of it, it may in turn expect its needs to be taken into account in the development of industrial structure in western Europe. I therefore see an interaction, in the sense that economic and social development in western Europe will have to contribute to the development of healthy agricultural production.

It is also very true that the Conference has highlighted the limits of the possibilities created by our policy.

On the one hand, we are demanding that all those who work in agriculture — and this has been clearly expressed in this forum — enjoy a standard of living comparable with that achieved in other sectors of the economy, and we are therefore seeking the social integration of the rural population. We wish for agriculture to be accepted unreservedly as part of society. It is good that the standard of living has not been the sole issue, since we are also calling for spiritual and cultural integration. Much has to be done, therefore, to develop the rural regions of western Europe before we may claim that results have been achieved there, too. I know that this is not directly a task for our Community, but we have to provide the requisite opportunity, and it will be for the organisations, the cultural institutions, to seize the opportunities created.

On the other hand, we cannot use every possible means. We are limited in our action. In some respects, we still have our hands tied: when, for example, we talk about raising the standard of living, we cannot achieve that automatically by increasing production, however attractive that may be individually, on a global scale.

We know that there are precise limits and that the problem of the balance between supply, on the one hand, and demand, on the other, has become very real to us, perhaps pressingly real.

Much will depend on the policy that we adopt, and we shall have to act with a great deal of caution and presence of mind in order to ensure that our objective is actually attained. The practical realisation of the proposition that I have set out may have serious consequences, whilst our relations with third countries are also of great importance to us.

When we talk about the relationship to be established between supply and demand, we must take account of our position in relation to third countries and, in this regard, I am extremely happy to note that, from the very beginning of this Conference, the negative tone that we have heard so often in the past has not been evident. In this area, too, there is, instead, a firm resolve to combine harmoniously the requisite reform of agriculture and the rural populations in Europe, on the one hand, and the efforts to establish a closer link with our partners, on the other. We need to show great wisdom in finding the happy medium. Our relations with third countries may be very important for the judicious development of our agricultural sector, and I

believe that we have already been able to establish that it is impossible to move agriculture towards a healthy position without sustained and extended trade with neighbouring countries and the rest of the world. Accordingly, I think that I may say — and this is another of the leitmotifs of our conference — that it is particularly important that organisations and experts both from the processing industry and from the business world have been invited to our discussions with a view to marketing our produce within our common borders as well as with regard to external markets. I therefore consider it important for agricultural development that we make clear that there cannot and must not be any antagonism between agriculture, on the one hand, and trade and industry, on the other.

I should like to add a few thoughts on our attitude to the Overseas Territories. I think that it has become very evident here that we have clearly understood the need to develop these territories, to which we are closely linked, and that their development will undoubtedly influence the way in which we think and act.

In fact, these few key points that have emerged from our debates have not crystallised solely in the course of this session. I think that I may say that we all came to Stresa with our own ideas, that we put them forward clearly and that our exchange of views has proven extremely rewarding. I will also claim that this meeting and this work in common have been fruitful for everyone. When I refer to work in common, I do not have in mind simply the delegations and all those who have spared no effort in the committees, however important their work, since I wish simply to acknowledge that we would not have achieved results if each one of us had not ensured the success of this Conference.

In my capacity as Chairman, it is, therefore, my duty to express my gratitude to all those who have contributed to our work. Firstly, of course, the Italian Government. I am sure that Mr Ferrari-Aggradi will be so kind as to pass on our thanks to his government, and I should like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude to the town of Stresa and, in particular, to its Mayor, Mr Cattaneo, who have welcomed us in a spirit of friendly hospitality on the shores of Lake Maggiore.

I should then like to thank the journalists who have demonstrated so much patience in waiting so long and also because, at the same time, they have done their utmost to give this Conference the widest possible coverage, in the Member States and even beyond. I think that I may say that the journalists present at this session have done an excellent job, as we have been able to see from the press reactions in the various countries.

I also wish to express my gratitude to what I shall call the hard-working machinery, which is invisible to us, which cannot be seen in this conference hall, but which has carried out all the technical and administrative work that we know is vital. Without wishing to name individuals, I am thinking in particular of the organising staff which have done everything to make this meeting in this forum possible, the Secretariat-General and the Administration as a whole, and first and foremost I should like to extend particular thanks to the interpretation service and the translation service. On the one hand, it seems pitiful that, whilst we speak about a united Europe, we sometimes have so much difficulty in understanding one another. However, I think that I may say that, thanks to these interpreters, who have to understand perfectly the meaning of our words and grasp clearly what the other party wishes to know, we have been able to exchange our ideas. Translation cannot be regarded as a very simple job. It requires a great deal of sound specialist knowledge. Many of you will, perhaps, not have noticed all the work done over the last few days, or rather, the last few nights. I really do believe that we have asked too much. But it is clear that, when a certain spirit prevails, it is possible to achieve a great deal in a short time if there is teamwork and good cooperation. I should therefore like to include all those who have contributed to this task: technicians, secretaries, ushers, and all those who have made our work possible. Thank you very much.

I should like to add, Ladies and Gentlemen, that it is important, in my opinion, that we realise what is really at stake at this juncture, and I believe that this could not have been better expressed than by the atmosphere that has been a feature of this session. At the beginning of this speech, when I spoke about a feeling that I had experienced, my remarks related to the atmosphere in which the discussions have been held, an atmosphere that is new to agricultural conferences. During this session, we have been driven by the desire to find common solutions to problems, without merely raising objections, although that does not mean that

objections were passed over in silence; quite the opposite. I think that it is good to set out the problems and their difficulties in all openness, but it is the way in which this is done that makes all the difference. When problems are raised in order to bring about an equitable solution, that is right. When they are raised, as it were, in order to wring concessions from negotiating partners, the principle is wrong. Why has this been then? I believe that one of the reasons is the deep conviction held by each of us that we can no longer resolve our problems by ourselves, in isolation in our own countries. I believe that we all now share this conviction, and it is now up to us to spread far and wide the idea that the very course of events is now forcing us to come together. The time has now come for us to develop a system that nothing can obstruct. Those who are uncertain sometimes fail to recognise the backdrop to this historic development which will help to determine our future task.

Secondly, I would say that the positive atmosphere in which this Conference has taken place may also be ascribed to the fact that we understand the need to establish a Community and the need to grow with it and through it, a need that means that we would each bear our own burdens but that we would bear the unavoidable burdens together and that, together, we would take responsibility for them. This spirit of cooperation is necessary if we wish to achieve our aim. Since our future is at stake, it must be hoped, in particular for the institutions of the Community and for the participating governments, that we can shake off the strictly national mindset. It will be impossible for us to act if we merely seek to impose sacrifices on one another. A different approach will be needed. We must be able, all together, to share all the burdens of the various parts of the Community. When I say the responsibilities of each of us, I do not mean only governments; all the interested parties have to play their part. That is why it is reassuring to see so many representatives of the economic sectors concerned here. I should like to conclude by saying that we have to pursue our common task along the lines that have been sketched here in Stresa. When he opened the Conference, Mr Hallstein rightly stressed that the links that we establish here must be strengthened and multiplied, and we must be quick to do this. The Stresa Conference is not the end, it is merely the beginning. Therefore, our task cannot be accomplished in the isolation of a researcher's office, it must be anchored in practical application, and our aim may be achieved only if we face the harsh reality. We have to cooperate with governments to endeavour together to resolve the problems, with farmers' organisations, with professional associations, with representatives of trade and industry, and we must not forget that it is also necessary to work with the scientific groups interested in these questions.

When, in finishing, I ask what the future holds for us, we must be careful not to fall for an illusion, and we must avoid believing that a better future awaits us without any effort on our part. Far from it; I think that we are firmly convinced that we shall have to work very hard and that we shall even have to fight. But we know that this is a huge task, that it promises a new and better future for many people who are currently driven to despair, and that it is a reform that will take many years, a reform not only of agriculture, but also of our entire Western world, where we must assume our responsibility as a solid but lively element.