

Address by François Mitterrand on the Democratic Reforms in Eastern Europe (Strasbourg, 22 November 1989)

Caption: On 22 November 1989, François Mitterrand, French President and President-in-Office of the Council of Ministers of the European Communities, reaffirms before the Members of the European Parliament the determination of the Heads of State or Government of the Twelve to support the Movement for Democratic Reforms in Eastern Europe.

Source: Official Journal of the European Communities (OJEC). Debates of the European Parliament. 22.11.1989, n° 3-383. [s.l.]. "Address by François Mitterrand to the European Parliament", p. 152-155.

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Publication date: 02/12/2013

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Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, as you know, and as you have just been reminded, a special session of the European Council was held in Paris last Saturday. The agenda was simple: to look at the events taking place in Eastern Europe and draw the first conclusions.

After talking to the President of this House, I thought it would be helpful to the smooth running of our institutions if, in my capacity as President of the European Council, I were to speak to you briefly, without holding up your work too much, about what happened at that meeting.

It was less than a month ago, on 25 October, that I spoke to you here in this chamber as I am doing today. I mentioned the situation of our neighbours in Eastern Europe where, as you know, history is being made every day. I referred to the vast movement towards democracy and freedom. I referred to the determination of the people which was dictating the course of events, bringing down walls and opening frontiers and I said: once again the people are on the move, and when they move the effect is decisive.

Well, in Berlin on 9 November the onward march of history offered the world a sight which had still seemed unlikely even the day before - the sight of a hole in the wall, that wall which for nearly 30 years had been the very embodiment of the division of our continent. It was on that day that democracy and freedom - inseparable from one another - carried off what I see as one of their finest and most telling victories. The people moved. The people spoke, and their voice carried beyond frontiers and shattered the silence of an order which they did not want, which was imposed on them and which they clearly wished to reject in order to recover their own identity.

I am therefore delighted to be able to express here, before Chancellor Kohl, before the representatives of the peoples of the twelve Member States of the Community, how deeply moved we were at those stirring events, a depth of emotion which it is pointless to dwell upon, since it is personal to each of us, a part of our inner experience of history, as well as being a formidable example of a mass movement in which we can, I believe, be proud to have played a part.

The movement began in Poland and then spread to Hungary. I am talking of course about recent events, because for a very long time, indeed from the very first, free men have hoped, free men have fought. Many risked the loss of their freedom, risked death. Many met that fate. How then can we pinpoint the moment of the first sign, the first awakening? If we are talking about recent events, then it has to be what happened in Poland, in Hungary, a movement sought and encouraged by the Soviet Union, and we can never overemphasize the role played in this situation by Mr Gorbachev.

(Applause)

Here is a man who is certainly a product of his own culture and history, the history of his country, but a man who has understood that it is time to move on to new ways of doing things, that his country, like others, must now bow to the dominant forces in human society which are - let me repeat the words, it is such a pleasure to do so - democracy and freedom. In short, the movement is gathering pace, it is expanding, it is spreading throughout Europe, and we want this to happen - and I hope you don't mind if I speak for you here, even though you have not empowered me to do so, but I feel we are in unison - we even want the movement to continue. Our hunger is not assuaged, we see what has been happening in towns throughout Poland, what is happening in towns throughout East Germany, what has happened in Hungary. We hear the call of the crowds in Prague; and if we do not hear the voice of the Romanian people it is because it is still stifled.

(Applause)

But we are aware of it. The silence is deafening. Sooner or later that people will join the concert of nations already formed by our twelve countries which have been much divided by the history of this century and

which have come together again because they wished it and perhaps also because necessity taught them that they must so wish.

Why then hold this meeting in Paris on 18 November? Would it not have been better to hold it sooner? I do not wish to reopen this argument, which had its merits, but it is a difficult matter to decide. I was thinking about it from the very first day. It seemed to me that perhaps it was necessary to stand back a little from events, the breathing space was not very long, some eight days. It allowed us to distance ourselves a little from the feelings and emotions of the first hours, before we began to see our way more clearly, before the peoples themselves began to discern what separated their ambitions, their deepest desires and sometimes their dreams from the reality of today, from the realities of our political debates, our parliamentary assemblies, our government decisions.

I did not bring forward the Strasbourg European Council meeting, for what seemed to me an obvious reason: it is due to take place on 8 and 9 December. Everything in its time; you know very well, ladies and gentlemen, from having experienced it in other places besides our Community, that meetings need to be prepared and matters need to be ripe for discussion. The Strasbourg meeting was arranged to coincide with a decisive moment for the future of our Community, for reaffirming its structures, for defining its principles. I wished it to retain all its importance.

On Saturday we spoke chiefly, I would say almost exclusively, about the events in the East and what we should do about them, we the countries generally regarded as the Western countries. I shall come back to this in a minute. What should we do? Answers are beginning to emerge. We need to amplify these answers. Both you and I have a great deal of work before us. We are all faced with the situation, we must decide how we are to forge the Europe of tomorrow. But we had a twofold objective: to make a joint analysis of the situation in Eastern Europe and weigh up the possible consequences for the balance of Europe and at the same time to express the wish of the Community and its Member States to assist the countries of the East in the process of reform.

We wish to assist all the countries of the East but more specifically and more precisely those which have committed themselves to a course of action, those which have made promises, not verbally to us, but to themselves. The arrangements already announced show that they are on course towards democratic systems. The circumstances clearly justified the meeting. The matter was one which required detailed consideration without further delay, the issues at stake required the Community to look at what was going on and define its position on events which were of direct concern to it.

Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, you wished to organize a debate on political developments in Central and Eastern Europe and their implications for the future of Europe and consequently for the future of the Community. I congratulate you on that initiative. Your debate will, I am sure, enhance the message which the Twelve are holding out to the countries of Europe. Given my present role and the fact that I am currently responsible for this task, I felt that I could not accomplish it without at some stage reporting to you on the matter, that is what Parliament is for, it seems to me, even if it is also in a state of permanent flux, and evolution; it is at least necessary to mark certain stages in a significant way, and I hope that is what will be done today.

(Applause)

Do not think that this is merely a duty. It is also a pleasure for me, even if it is something of a repetition, to have this opportunity of laying our conclusions before you.

But as I was speaking to you about the European Council meeting on Saturday, and it was that which occasioned and which is the reason for our meeting, I shall just dwell on that a little, if you will permit.

The first of our conclusions, and I think I can say that it affects the very future of our Community, let us use terms which have already been employed, is that it is the existence of an ever-stronger Community which has provided a point of reference and a stimulus to events in the East. We do not take the credit for those

events, that belongs primarily to the peoples of those countries and then to their leaders who understood the need for this development, who permitted it, who facilitated it. Some credit is also due, I am convinced of it, to that Community which today represents the only real point of attraction around which to build a structured future for this, our continent.

And then there are the values, those fine values which are so often talked about, you know the ones I mean. The values which these peoples are laying claim to are very close to our own, we ourselves have expressed the same aspirations. They are our own aspirations, aspirations which we hold in common; but, civilization being what it is, the course of centuries has seen the birth of Europe, has seen it come together, split apart and come together again. These values exist independently of fixed points, frontiers, splits and walls: we have the proof - walls are coming down, we are meeting up again, and we understand one another.

I am convinced, as I have already said that existence of a strong and structured Community is a factor for the stability and success of the whole of Europe. We should therefore affirm our identity as a Community, confirm our determination, strengthen our institutions and set the seal on our union. That in my view is the first lesson to be learned, because I can see no other alternative to the opening up of the East and the completion of the Community construct. The two things go hand in hand. I have said it before, and I say it again, they are complementary. We must not look inwards but must draw on the Community's success, its strengths, its reserves of energy, the driving force which will enable Europe as a whole to come together. I used that expression at the press conference which followed our meeting on Saturday evening, when I said that the great political lesson to be learned from all this is that we are two inseparable factors in the European equation. As events unfold in the East, the Europe of the Community, - at the same pace, and indeed why not even a little more quickly in order to anticipate the result - must decide to strengthen itself more than it has yet done, must press on rapidly towards the full realization of its structures. And those structures will depend absolutely on the Community's political will to see unity -political unity - finally hold sway over all the measures initiated since the founders conceived the idea of Europe.

(Applause)

And I think I can say that that was the spirit in which the twelve Heads of State and Government met. That was what they wished to express, what they wished to see happen. They wanted to encourage and support steps towards democracy wherever such steps were being taken, but also to take those factors as an indication that our Community should itself learn something from the lesson of events.

You can make the connection after what I have just said between the meeting on 18 November and the meeting which awaits us on 8 and 9 December.

But a lot has happened in the meantime and will happen yet. I would nevertheless like to tell you straight away how the few specific measures were examined, according to the very different circumstances of the East European countries in the process of change. To turn first to Poland and Hungary. The Twelve have stressed the urgent need for these two countries to conclude agreements with the International Monetary Fund, and it was decided that the Community bodies would take energetic steps to urge that body to come to a decision before the end of the year. Of course Poland and Hungary will also have to make an effort to arrive at a sound agreement which is in keeping with the rules which must govern our international institutions. But the matter is so urgent that the Community should back up these two countries in pleading a difficult case which nevertheless deserves to succeed.

The recent visit to Warsaw and Budapest by the President of the Commission, Mr Jacques Delors, and the President of the Council, Mr Roland Dumas, provided an opportunity for assessing those two countries' needs. Poland needs a stabilization fund estimated at one thousand million dollars, while Hungary is requesting a bridging loan for the same amount. I can tell you that these two things can already be regarded as agreed in principle.

The Twelve have also discussed cooperation with other countries. They have considered and entirely agreed to the signing of a trade agreement with the German Democratic Republic. We perhaps have a tendency to

forget it in the hurly-burly of events, but we must not forget that the country was perhaps the first to show a power of resistance and a courage such that, even though the economy was not thereby improved, we really are morally obliged to help its people, along with the others, especially since the country is going through a severe economic crisis, as you know.

Furthermore, to support the movement for reform, we examined what measures might be introduced. These were of several kinds, and I shall come back to them in a moment. There was discussion on one question which indeed requires some discussion. Should conditions be imposed on the countries which need our help? Yes and no. In the case of countries which have shown a clear intention of acquiring democratic institutions based on certain simple themes: respect for human rights and free, and hence secret, elections, those are the countries for which we felt we should make an extra effort and pass straight on to helping them obtain a number of the advantages they should enjoy, as well as entry to certain institutions, as if the Community (while not contemplating enlargement without due process) considered that there already existed a community, a group of nations and of peoples, which could take such a step. A certain link has therefore been established for this kind of measure between Poland, Hungary and the countries of the Community. This does not of course mean that we are abandoning countries which have not reached the same stage to their fate.

We would not want aid from our countries in any way to provide fresh fuel for perpetuating the dictatorial and totalitarian regimes which persist in certain places. That would be absurd, but at the same time we can see how unfortunate it would be if we were to refuse our aid, simply because, if we did, those countries which have not had the opportunity to free themselves earlier from oppressive regimes would be deprived of our assistance and friendship. We must therefore tailor our intervention, and that is what we are trying to do. And although we have decided on a course of action, have arranged for a series of agreements, something now clearly in prospect for Poland and Hungary, we are also blazing a trail and providing pointers for the others, so that the way ahead is clear.

If we are to support the reform movement we cannot simply remain passive observers, merely counting the blows struck. We must enter into the movement, help to carry it further. The measures to be taken have already been outlined and are to be discussed again in the days and weeks to come. I shall mention a few, for example the project which I referred to on 25 October, that of a bank for the development and modernization of Eastern Europe.

I was speaking personally at the time; decision taken in Paris was a mandate to the 'Troika'. I believe that such a bank, comparable to the regional banks for South East Asia and Africa, should involve widespread participation by all those who wish to contribute to its capital, starting with the 24 countries which attended the Arche Summit on 14 July of this year. That is what would constitute - until such time as there is explicit agreement among the members of the Community - the unusual feature of this bank.

Of course the EIB was mentioned. It springs to mind immediately. It is not that we have a mania for creating new bodies at every opportunity, or at least I don't, I don't like bureaucracies any more than you do, it is simply that this is not a role for the EIB. The task of the EIB is basically linked to the structural funds, it is oriented towards another part of Europe; the EIB consists only of the twelve Community countries.

I believe - and there are several of us who think this way - that the new bank should have a special flavour, that of the East European countries, and that instead of involving only the members of the Community it should involve all the well-wishers of the world and all types of capital, from whatever source, in order to launch a powerful movement on a scale commensurate with the size of the task ahead. This therefore is the characteristic that I wish to highlight and which I shall continue to highlight. The 'Troika' has begun its discussions; it will report on 8 and 9 December. I hope that this project - an idea which has sprung from several quarters, including a number of benches in this House and in our national Parliaments, an idea which many have thought of - I hope that this bank for Eastern Europe will really tackle the development question, and help to form new forces, to pull them back from the brink of the abyss before which they stand. And from this point of view matters are extremely urgent, I think that since the setting up of this bank might take some time, and I fear that it will, it is necessary to find an immediate solution. That is to say that from next

week we must begin to mobilize the bodies capable of carrying out this task until an institution is set up.

In a similar vein, thinking about the sort of things we have all heard, I remember a conversation I had with Mr Gorbachev. I do not usually confide the contents of private conversations at meetings of this kind, but it is something that has been said so often that I feel I can repeat it. I remember the day he said to me: 'what we need most is to train our managers'. How many other countries have we heard say that? We need to train bosses - it seems that the men and women called on to run these countries are no longer able to do so because they have not been trained for it, they were trained for something else. They have not been able to adapt to the new forms of management. That, after all, is our job; let us do it, without attaching conditions.

Let us draw up a plan for the training of managers in all these countries, just as we have decided to open up to the East European countries the programmes which the Community already has for education and training. One day we may see - and I am giving my imagination free rein - a Hungarian student doing an Oxford doctorate under the Erasmus programme, a student from Leipzig following a training course in a Dutch or Italian, or indeed French firm under the Comett programme. We could see a teacher of French from Warsaw perfecting his knowledge of the language under the Lingua programme. I don't think I need to go on, you get the idea. These programmes are not exclusive. We have already taken our activities way beyond the Community framework in a number of areas, especially that of technology, and we shall continue to do so.

Other suggestions have also been made, such as allowing certain East European countries to have access to the Council of Europe and GATT, initially as observers. Each of these suggestions will of course be examined in the appropriate forum and by the appropriate procedures, to use the language of our administrators. We shall see what the appropriate procedures are when the European Council meets on 8 and 9 December and takes up the matter. I hope that there will not be any going back over the issues, or at least if there is that it will be in order to do more and to do it better.

Has the Community lived up to the expectations of those who have placed their faith in it? Has it really responded to the anguished appeal of Mr Mazowiecki that there should no longer be a Europe of the poor and a Europe of the rich? Has it lived up to your own expectations, the expectations of you who have put forward projects on many occasions? Has the Community met the aspirations of those men and women of Europe who want it to make its voice heard in all world affairs and to confirm its place as a protagonist in a new European balance and as one of the fundamental protagonists in human life on this planet?

We can never go far enough or quickly enough. Swiftiness of action does not mean lack of thought. But it must be said - and here I am preaching to the converted, since you remind us of it often enough, and I hope that the message will spread beyond these walls - none of this will come about if we are unable in the next few days, among ourselves, within the Community, to agree on the fundamental projects which will endow our Europe with the instruments of an economic and monetary policy, the instruments of a social policy, of an environmental policy. It will not come about if we do not complete the internal market according to the pace and timetable we have already decided on.

(Applause)

This is what we are going to turn our hands to now. This is what we shall be looking at and these are the questions which I shall be asking in Strasbourg in a few days' time. Everyone will have to respond. And, while I am on the point, I am sure that within the minds of each of us, as responsible people, light will dawn, not a blinding light but one which will illuminate the whole horizon: from what we are able to do among ourselves and for ourselves will flow the things which will seem valuable, worthwhile and lasting for others. In short, we hold in our hands much more than our own fate. We can now show the way, without pretension, without any wish to dominate, without the feeling of fulfilling some authoritarian role, but out of a profound desire for democracy, as demonstrated time and again by each of our countries. We want the way in which the Community decides on its action to serve as an example for the countries of the East who are on the move, searching for something, suffering, hoping, an example to those millions who dream, like us, that one day Europe will be Europe.

This then, ladies and gentlemen, is what I expect of the European Council in Strasbourg. You are aware of what is at stake, I have no need to tell you how important it is, I am speaking to an assembly in which the vast majority is already convinced that this is the path we should follow, that this is where our duty lies; we must embark on the venture together.