

## Speeches by Gerd Muhr to the ad hoc Committee for Institutional Affairs and a People's Europe (1985)

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## European Union, a People's Europe and the Economic and Social Committee (1985)

[...]

### A. Early deliberations and initiatives by the European Council on a 'People's Europe'

Allow me briefly to look back at the period when for the first time the European Council focused its attention on a 'People's Europe'.

In the mid-1970s the European Council attempted to break out of the already existing impasse by seeking to bind together more closely the body of Community law and the achievements in the field of political unity in order to create a European Union.

The first tentative step in this direction was the Summit Conference of the Heads of State or Government held in Copenhagen<sup>2</sup> in 1973 which issued a communiqué on the European Identity.

A year later, at the Paris Summit in December 1974<sup>3</sup> the Heads of State or Government went so far as to consider the practicalities of granting the European citizen specific rights within a 'Community legal area'.

At that time there was already talk of a European passport and of the abolition of frontier checks for individuals.

The report initiated by the Heads of State or Government and named after its author, Mr Tindemans<sup>4</sup> did not concentrate merely on the need to develop the substance and form of Community institutions and policies; a special chapter was devoted to the 'People's Europe'.

According to Mr Tindemans this special chapter was justified by the fact that the citizens of Europe had an essential role to play in the development of the European Community into a 'European Union'.

In parallel with the Council's initiatives, the Economic and Social Committee brought its thinking on European Union to the attention of the other Community institutions in late 1975 in the form of an own-initiative Opinion.<sup>5</sup>

In the Opinion the Committee gave a comprehensive account of its views on the principles of a 'People's Europe'.

The Committee stressed that a 'European Union' must take account of the ideals and aspirations of the peoples of Europe. They wished to live in peace, freedom and security and to see the abolition of frontiers and the creation of a natural 'living area'.<sup>5a</sup>

Whether the people gave their support to a European Union would depend on its effects on the everyday life of the individual. People needed to be aware of and understand the actions of the Community - what effect these had on the consumer, for instance. And this in turn would require practical measures in the appropriate areas, together with an objective and coherent programme of education and information.<sup>5b</sup>

Workers would gain direct experience of the Community through the harmonization of working conditions.<sup>5c</sup>

The Committee called for a 'Charter of the Objectives of European Union' which would define the rights of European citizens and draw attention to the economic and social objectives of European Union.<sup>5d</sup>

Ever since, we have consistently maintained our support for a European Community which takes account of the interests of its citizens.

Allow me to tell you more about the scope and range of our activities.

## **B. The Economic and Social Committee and a 'People's Europe'**

### **1. The Economic and Social Committee is involved through its Opinions in the decision-making process of the European Community**

As we are an advisory body of the European Community, a large part of our work is of course subject in timing and content to the rhythm of proposal and decision in the Commission and the Council.

However, since 1972 we can deliver Opinions on our own initiative on subjects which interest us particularly.

We have not so far delivered any Opinion formally entitled 'A People's Europe', but we have dealt with the subject exhaustively in a number of more general fundamental Opinions.

I should like to name a few of them:

- (i) on 'European Union' (1975);<sup>6</sup>
- (ii) on the 'Prospects for Community policies in the 1980s' (1981);<sup>7</sup>
- (iii) on 'Tourism in the Community' (1983);<sup>8</sup>
- (iv) on 'Strengthening the internal market' (1983);<sup>9</sup>
- (v) on the 'Consumer/producer dialogue' (1984);<sup>10</sup>
- (vi) our study of a 'Community code on nuclear safety'(1977).<sup>11</sup>

We have also addressed detailed aspects of this question in many other Opinions - between 40 and 50 of them.

I shall refer to these Opinions in more detail later.

I should like today to present to you a kind of mosaic of the Economic and Social Committee's statements on the 'People's Europe' theme in recent years.

One general point should be made at the outset:

### **2. We fully support the Commission and Parliament proposals on a 'People's Europe'**

However, we have the impression that the Council, for lack of a firm political will,<sup>12</sup> leaves too many questions to the national bureaucracies, which waste far too much time and attention on unimportant technical details.

This leads to neglect of the really important tasks, such as the dismantling of administrative obstacles to trade, the creation of a European customs union and the completion of the internal market.

We in the Economic and Social Committee are just as impatient as the Commission and the European Parliament when we see how slowly these proposals are being implemented and in how many sectors Council decisions are currently blocked.

### **3. I shall now turn to the sectors to which the ESC has devoted special attention**

I am sure you will not be surprised if, as Chairman, I concentrate on those aspects which have always been of most interest to our members, who are both citizens of this Community and representatives of the various social groups within it.

I should like to summarize these aspects as follows:

- (a) the European citizen as traveller/tourist/transport user;

- (b) the European citizen as consumer;
- (c) the European citizen's quality of life (as affected by cross-frontier environmental changes and risks arising from industry, traffic, etc.);
- (d) the European citizen as entrepreneur/business partner,
- (e) the European citizen as worker, whether employed or self-employed;
- (f) the European citizen as information user;
- (g) the European citizen as participant in monetary transactions.

As you see, these aspects overlap to a certain extent with those which you addressed in your interim report to the European Council and which are included in the conclusions of the European Council meeting held in Fontainebleau.

I see from your interim report that you think it important to propose to the Heads of State or Government a range of practical measures selected from the proposals already submitted to the Council of Ministers - some of which have been held up for rather a long time - measures which will be noticed by people in their everyday life and which can be rapidly implemented.

We, too, have the impression that these are mostly problems which, in the view of the average European citizen, should be fairly easy to solve.

If they were rapidly solved the European Community would be seen in a much better light and the average citizen would be able to identify with it more easily.

We therefore fully support your proposals, as listed in points A, B and C of your interim report, and would like to complement them with a few more detailed aspects from our opinions.

We also wish to assist you in providing new stimuli for the work of the Heads of State or Government.

Allow me now to comment in detail upon the views which the Economic and Social Committee has expressed on the broad theme of a 'People's Europe'.

I shall start with the first of the seven aspects I mentioned earlier:

*(a) THE EUROPEAN CITIZEN AS TRAVELLER/TOURIST/TRANSPORT USER*

People who cross the frontiers within the Community for personal reasons or for work purposes still encounter substantial administrative or legal obstacles which clearly conflict with the ultimate political, economic and social objectives of the Treaty of Rome.

The Economic and Social Committee regrets that although some obstacles to the free movement of tourists have been removed others have been introduced in their place (e.g. additional exchange controls and restriction of currency flows).<sup>13</sup>

On the other hand, the Economic and Social Committee endorses all measures to simplify the crossing of frontiers within the Community and calls for checks at these frontiers to be ultimately discontinued.<sup>14</sup>

A decisive step in this direction would be the introduction of the European passport and European driving licence, advocated by the ESC on a number of occasions.<sup>15</sup>

Further simplifications and reduction of checks and formalities at frontiers within the Community would, in the ESC's view, result from the introduction of standard tax-free and duty-free allowances for certain consumer goods carried in baggage, e.g. wine or tea.<sup>16</sup>

In this connection the ESC has pointed out that the current intra-Community duty-free allowances and the increases proposed by the Commission are inadequate.<sup>17</sup>

However, the Committee welcomes the Commission's approach to the introduction of a system of automatic annual correction of tax-free and duty-free allowances.<sup>18</sup>

In addition, the abolition or reduction of tax formalities and checks for removals within the Community (simple change of residence or cross-frontier carriage of household effects for a second home) would simplify life for European citizens.<sup>19</sup>

In the ESC's view the import of motor vehicles could be simplified if the proof of tax payment related to the country of residence (and not as hitherto to the country of origin or of previous residence).<sup>20</sup>

The ESC also attaches great importance to the safety of the individual citizen in intra-Community travel.

The ESC therefore gave a comprehensive view on this field in its 1983 Opinion on tourism policy in the Community.<sup>21</sup>

An important aspect of travellers' safety is the guarantee of adequate medical care in the event of accident or illness.

The system using the E 111 form, which has applied up to now, appears to the ESC to be unsatisfactory and in need of reform. In its view the Member States, which all profit from the tourist trade to some extent, should undertake to provide automatic cover for EC tourists, provided that they are compulsorily insured under the relevant national social security system.<sup>22</sup>

Another form of tourist assistance could be provided by the introduction of a European emergency health card for seriously or chronically ill travellers, to ensure that the necessary help is speedily given them if they are involved in an accident or taken ill.<sup>23</sup> Knowledge of the medical history recorded on the card can enable doctors to save lives in such cases.

The ESC feels that further standardization of national traffic regulations would help to improve safety on European roads.<sup>24</sup>

The ESC has submitted a range of proposals for maximum rapidity in the settlement of damage claims covered by compulsory motor vehicle insurance.<sup>25</sup>

An equally important aspect is the safety of hotel guests.

Here I need only mention the ESC proposal for the laying-down of a European standard for safety systems (especially to guard against fire).<sup>26</sup>

This should, among other things, provide for a possible obligation on hoteliers to take out insurance covering personal injury and damage to property.<sup>27</sup>

With regard to travel insurance in general, the ESC is concerned at the apparently increasing tendency to insure tourists more than once against the same risks. For the sake of greater clarity and transparency it therefore recommends the introduction of a Community-wide standard minimum insurance for tourists and the compilation of a list of additional risks which can be covered by an optional extra insurance.<sup>28</sup>

We have always come out in favour of standardizing certain living conditions, e.g. summer-time (now almost standard throughout the EC).

However, we also propose that holiday periods in Europe be better staggered than hitherto, so that the quality of life in holiday areas does not seriously deteriorate at peak times in the summer months.<sup>29</sup>

*(b) THE EUROPEAN CITIZEN AS CONSUMER*

The European citizen as consumer has been the subject of many Opinions of the Economic and Social Committee. One of the 'leitmotifs' of the ESC's views was the need to ensure free choice of goods and services for the consumer.<sup>30</sup>

In an own-initiative Opinion adopted in May 1984 the Economic and Social Committee calls for a permanent dialogue between the consumers and the producers and suppliers, including the producers and suppliers of public services at Community level. This could contribute to the development of a Community consumer policy while supplementing existing legislation with a voluntary and more flexible element.<sup>31</sup>

In this context dialogue is seen as an exchange of views which can contribute to greater understanding between the partners concerned.<sup>32</sup>

It could lead to the conclusion of voluntary agreements between producers/suppliers and consumers in certain fields of trade and sectors in order to avoid unnecessary State interference as far as possible.<sup>33</sup>

We, in the ESC would suggest as possible areas for this the sectors of advertising, tourism, insurance, the motor trade and the motor repair trade.<sup>34</sup>

What is required here is a European framework directive covering the various forms of dialogue, of agreements and of codes of behaviour, implementing instruments and legal protection.<sup>35</sup>

Such voluntary agreements between producers and consumers could later be extended to other fields.<sup>36</sup>

In the traditional fields of consumer policy, consumer protection and consumer information we have of course repeatedly urged that the consumer's capacity for choice be increased by greater clarity, truthfulness and comparability in the supply of goods.<sup>37</sup>

We strongly support the Commission's latest proposals that the indication of the sale price of a product be accompanied by the price per unit of measurement for all products in daily use,<sup>38</sup> so that the citizen can rely on a standard of comparison. The same applies to Community-wide standardization of measurement units.<sup>39</sup>

Both measures are likely to improve the image of the European Community in the eyes of many consumers.

### *(c) THE EUROPEAN CITIZEN'S QUALITY OF LIFE (AS AFFECTED BY INDUSTRY, TRANSPORT OR ENVIRONMENT)*

When we talk of a 'People's Europe' we should think not only of freedom of movement for travellers, transport users and business partners, but also of keeping citizens safe from disasters which may occur across frontiers and indeed on a European scale as a result of the production and transport methods of industrial society, if precautions are not taken in time. Community-wide regulations are the only answer to these challenges.

We have therefore repeatedly and strongly urged in various Opinions the need for a Community-wide harmonization of legislation on the orderly disposal of waste:<sup>40</sup> this includes the supervision of the transport of toxic waste (Seveso containers!).<sup>41</sup>

A few years ago we were the first to demand measures following' the oil disaster caused on the Breton coast by the 'Amoco Cadiz'. We take the view that, particularly in view of the dreadful consequences of the toxic gas disaster in India, it is high time to implement the necessary harmonization of the appropriate safety provisions on a European scale.<sup>42</sup>

In the field of nuclear safety we did not envisage - as Tindemans did in 1975 in his Report on European Union - a common European authority for the control of nuclear power stations.<sup>43</sup> But precisely because many nuclear power stations are situated in frontier areas of the Member States, greater safety must be ensured for the citizen on a European scale through strict controls and standards. In 1978, therefore, we

brought together in a study the most important aspects of a 'Code of nuclear safety in Europe'. This code should take account of the concern of large sectors of the population about accidents and disturbances resulting from the operation of, nuclear power stations, and make possible an adequate Community-wide safety standard.<sup>44</sup>

As a general rule the 'polluter pays' principle should be applied to ensure effective environmental protection in frontier areas.<sup>45</sup> It is unimaginable that part of a region should benefit from jobs and tax revenue while another part has to suffer atmospheric and water pollution or endure safety risks from neighbouring areas.

We have, moreover, stressed the primary importance of European environment policy, especially in the 'Quality of life' section of our Opinion on the prospects for Community policies in the 1980s.<sup>46</sup> We take the view that the European Community should ensure in the medium term, through increased research, that less energy, and different raw materials, are used in industrial production, thereby causing less pollution for human beings and the environment.<sup>47</sup>

In this connection a European awareness must be developed of the fact that on the one hand we should use non-renewable raw materials carefully and economically and on the other hand we should find new processes for better recycling of expensive raw materials.<sup>48</sup>

The ESC also attaches great importance to consideration of the role of forests for the environment and the quality of life.<sup>49</sup> The main emphasis should be placed on the importance of forest areas for leisure time, breaking up urban and rural areas, storage and filtering of water, protection from erosion, noise and wind and protection of natural beauty. European citizens' awareness of such considerations should be increased.

Accordingly there is widespread support in the ESC for Community-wide reduction of the dangers to forests resulting from the operation of oil-fired and coal-fired power stations, industrial plant and motor vehicles.<sup>50</sup> (Desulphurization of coal-fired power stations and less harmful car exhausts!)

We further suggest that Europeans take in hand the rehabilitation and renewal of urban and rural areas following a European competition for ideas (cf. our colloquium on the subject of the building trade and growth, 1980).<sup>51</sup>

Standardization of building components and materials could, as a desirable side-effect of this competition, contribute to reducing the costs of these rehabilitation measures on a European scale.<sup>52</sup>

#### *(d) THE EUROPEAN CITIZEN AS ENTREPRENEUR/BUSINESS PARTNER*

If we place great emphasis in nearly every important Opinion of the ESC on the need to complete the internal market, it is because we are convinced that it would be a decisive step towards a 'People's Europe'. For a real internal market means the circulation of people, goods and services without frontiers and hence without interference or restriction of the personal freedom of European citizens.

We have the impression that the campaign begun in 1983 and 1984 by the Commission for the completion of the internal market, supported both by the ESC and by the European Parliament in their various Opinions and Resolutions, has set the wheels in motion. The overall concept underlying this campaign - that of the total and unconditional opening of frontiers and the complete dismantling of obstacles - would create a different, decisively improved situation for European citizens.

While the obstacles facing individuals wishing to cross frontiers within the Community are usually tiresome and time-wasting, the position in economic matters - in business and the movement of goods - is even worse. Here formalities, import, export and transport duties are a far more serious, because expensive obstacle (the costs amount to about 5 to 10% of the value of intra-Community trade).<sup>53</sup> Thus they prevent greater specialization of enterprises which could occur in a true common market, and this can adversely affect their competitiveness in relation to third countries.

Moreover the costs and complexities of these formalities constitute a serious obstacle for many firms, particularly small and medium-sized enterprises, since they prevent them from fully exploiting their potential and from seizing the opportunities offered in the EC for greater expansion across the frontiers of the country of origin.

They frequently hold small and medium-sized enterprises back from competing on the markets of neighbouring countries and thus cause them to lose opportunities in the European market.<sup>54</sup>

Measures to complete the common market, particularly through the dismantling of technical obstacles to trade, administrative obstacles and obstacles in the transport sector, are also urgent and essential elements of a European strategy for economic and social recovery.<sup>55</sup>

The Committee therefore favours the reduction of formalities attached to the forwarding of goods within the Community<sup>56</sup> and the harmonization of existing provisions through the introduction of a uniform document.<sup>57</sup>

This proposal is, however, practicable only if the formulation of the uniform document guarantees wide applicability. It would be particularly difficult to formulate since account must be frequently taken of national statistical concerns. In the ESC's view, however, it is essential to keep the information on the uniform document to an indispensable minimum. The presentation should be appropriate to the data conveyed.<sup>58</sup>

In addition, existing simplifications of formalities, e.g. the use of collective customs procedures, should be retained.<sup>59</sup>

This also applies to existing simplified procedures at the national level (such as the national simplifications between Belgium, Luxembourg and the Netherlands).<sup>60</sup>

#### *(e) THE EUROPEAN CITIZEN AS WORKER WHETHER EMPLOYED OR SELF-EMPLOYED*

In our Opinions on the introduction of the European limited company we have repeatedly stressed that it is not only to encourage the formation of transnational company mergers that the development of a body of European company law is necessary. European companies and European cooperative associations should also create for workers and entrepreneurs a European legal framework and sphere of action within which they can consolidate and extend their independent rights as social partners at the European level.<sup>61</sup>

The creation of this legal instrument would lead to an awareness of being European citizens in an economic sense who could also accept the Community as a reality in the commercial field. This would be a decisive step forward from the present situation, where European-minded entrepreneurs, ready for cross-frontier cooperation, must resign themselves to the fact that there is as yet no truly European level for companies. Despite the goodwill of those involved, many cross-frontier cooperation projects are rendered impossible for fiscal, labour-law or other reasons.<sup>62</sup> The failure of the Estel-Hösch merger and the difficulties in the cooperation between AGFA and Gevaert are cases in point - among many.

A European cooperative association, which should simplify co-operation among small and medium-sized firms in fields such as joint research, joint purchasing, and joint marketing and selling, could in our view be agreed upon without much difficulty.

It would simply be necessary to take account of the proposals of the Economic and Social Committee<sup>63</sup> and the European Parliament on workers' participation.

The development of transnational firms and the increasing business concentration in Europe call for a corresponding development of the workers' right to participation and codetermination at plant level and at a higher level. Minimum standards for the protection of workers' interests must also be introduced. On this last point, I would refer you to the ESC's Opinions on the directives relating to measures in the event of



large-scale redundancies and the safeguarding of rights when firms, plants or parts of plants change hands.<sup>64</sup> With regard to increased workers' participation in the affairs of the plant, possible European codetermination regulations were dealt with in the context of the supervisory bodies of firms (in connection with the European limited company and with the fifth Directive on the approximation of company law.<sup>65</sup> However, it seems to me that the provisions in these two documents relating to factory councils and the company-level council are just as important as institutionalized representation of workers in the management bodies.<sup>66</sup> The creation of European factory councils would undoubtedly constitute a form of practical integration in everyday working life.

The Economic and Social Committee endorsed by a majority the Commission's proposals on information for and consultation of workers in complex (mostly multinational) enterprises.<sup>67</sup>

In this it was concerned to ensure for workers a Community-wide minimum standard for information and participation possibilities in enterprises of this kind.

Improvement and harmonization of vocational training<sup>68</sup> will also contribute to a 'People's Europe'. In view of the high unemployment in the Community a flexible vocational qualification can help to reduce unemployment - especially among young people looking for a first job - on a European scale, or to prevent it from the outset.<sup>69</sup> To this end there should be more exchange of young workers within the Community.<sup>70</sup>

The Economic and Social Committee has also repeatedly pointed out that new technologies should not be allowed to lead to a worsening of working conditions.<sup>71</sup> Their introduction must be accompanied by appropriate extension of training, improvement of its content and permanent further training using syllabuses applicable on a European scale.<sup>72</sup> Initial vocational training should be supplemented by possibilities for further training in line with technical development<sup>73</sup> - in other words further training should be based on 'building block' modules.<sup>74</sup> In this connection Community-wide minimum standards for certain job descriptions should be aimed at.<sup>75</sup>

A very serious hindrance to the formation of a European awareness is the petty withholding of recognition for diplomas issued in another Member State. For the medium term we envisage a systematic harmonization of the more important training courses. When the diplomas are more comparable, it will be easier to achieve more rapid recognition of them.<sup>76</sup>

#### *(f) THE EUROPEAN CITIZEN AS INFORMATION USER*

The formation of a European consciousness is impeded by the purely national organization and orientation of reporting in the mass media, which also has a negative effect on the presentation of the 'European dimension' of subjects in the realms of general, economic and social policy. In addition, in recent years people have been fed an increasing amount of deliberate disinformation in which the Community is made the scapegoat for national failures and wrong decisions.

A scandalous, overwhelmingly national choice of issues in a number of countries for the 1984 direct elections to the European Parliament - potentially a golden opportunity to draw attention to the 'European level' of economic and social policy within the European Community - aggravated the 'negative image' of the Community in the eyes of European citizens.

In its Opinions, particularly that on prospects for Community policies in the 1980s, the ESC has urged that the position of the Community as such and the varying views of political, commercial and social groups be reflected fully and without distortion in radio and television programmes.<sup>77</sup>

To this end the information policy and technique applied must be consistent in conception, visual approach, tone, language and choice of subject-matter.<sup>78</sup>

The Community needs a 'house style' recognizable to every European - in the same way, whichever Member State he or she belongs to.

We take the view that the mass media must give more attention than hitherto to events organized by the European institutions, through which a European consciousness can be formed - e.g. the European conferences of the Economic and Social Committee.<sup>79</sup>

One example is our conference on the economic and social effects of new technologies, held in November 1984.

A 'People's Europe' will not emerge if, as has hitherto been the case to some extent, our national mass media create an information market which takes no account of the European Community level or reflects it only in a fragmentary or distorted way.

In the coming months we will have the opportunity, in our Opinion on the Commission's green paper on 'Radio and television in the European Community', to give our views on this aspect and once more to stress the need for an information policy with a European dimension. It will become even more necessary given that from 1986 onwards it will be possible to receive the same television programmes by satellite in large areas of Europe (without a cable connection). The European Parliament's proposal to develop one of these satellite TV programmes as a European television programme would be a contribution to the necessary 'Europeanization' of information policy.

Thus the Economic and Social Committee's conclusion is: A 'People's Europe' must have Community-wide information provided by European-trained media which take account of the European dimension and report objectively.

#### *(g) THE INTRODUCTION OF THE ECU AS A EUROPEAN MEANS OF PAYMENT*

Your interim report to the Dublin European Council makes it crystal clear that a European Community spirit can develop only if the Community makes its presence felt by the individual citizen in his or her daily life.

In our view these day-to-day aspects should include the rapid introduction of the ECU as a means of payment in bank transfers and cash transactions. A greater role for the ECU would of course depend on further development of the European Monetary System. We are ready for the transition to the second institutional -stage of that System.<sup>80</sup>

#### **Conclusion**

Finally, on behalf of the Economic and Social Committee, I would like to stress that we have consistently worked for a 'People's Europe', in our proposals regarding:

- (i) freedom of movement for persons, goods and services in the EEC,
- (ii) consumer protection and information,
- (iii) the quality of life in the face of dangers from industry, transport and the environment,
- (iv) increased rights for entrepreneurs and workers in the Community,
- (v) a European dimension to information policy, and
- (vi) the ECU as a European currency.

We have the impression that, out of the host of proposals we have made, affecting the daily lives of most of us, there are some which could be adopted by the Heads of State or Government without undue difficulty.

However, we also have the impression that the real difficulty lies in the inertia of some of the national bureaucracies which determine the rate of progress of the Council of Ministers. Another factor is the lack of courage and confidence in the future of the European Community on the part of some leading national politicians. The consequences are a reluctance to take decisions, immobility or opting for the easy way out.

We believe, however, that progress towards Community-wide, sensible solutions can be made by the

political representatives of the peoples of Europe, meeting in the European Parliament, and by the representatives of the socio-economic groups, meeting in the ESC. Much greater use should be made of these opportunities. Otherwise, and I say this with an undertone of resignation, the European commitment of the leaders of the major European trade associations and organizations will be in vain in the long run.

We have great hopes for your Committee. You, who enjoy the trust of the Heads of State or Government, must finally persuade them to stop playing the role of crisis-manager, to take their courage in their hands and go forward.

While you would have to overcome the resistance of some of your ministries, you would, as the abolition of border checks between France and Germany showed, have the support of the people.

At all events you have our support. On many occasions, generally at moments of crisis in the Community, we have appealed directly to the Heads of State or Government to meet their responsibilities.

You can count on our specialist and steadfast support in removing the obstacles in the way of a 'People's Europe' and in pointing the way to a European Union.

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