

Statement by Hans-Dietrich Genscher to the European Parliament (14 October 1982)

Caption: On 14 October 1982, addressing the European Parliament, Hans-Dietrich Genscher, Foreign Minister of the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) and supporter of enhanced European political cooperation (EPC), defends the draft European Act drawn up by the Italian and German Governments.

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Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, almost a year ago Mr Colombo and I were given the opportunity to put the motives and underlying ideas for our common initiative on Europe before this House. Since then the debate on Europe has continued here and in the public forum. In defiance of the sceptics, Mr Colombo and I are now even more convinced we are on the right road. It is correct parliamentary usage to keep the elected representatives of the people informed of major negotiations in progress. In appearing before you we would, however, quite naturally like to express the hope that we can count on your support and encouragement for our endeavour. Mr Colombo and I are grateful to you for this opportunity to do so.

(Applause)

Allow me to state the following at the outset, ladies and gentlemen. On 4 October 1982 a new Federal Government took office in Bonn. As we have said to our friends in the European Community, to our allies in the Atlantic Alliance, to the governments of the Warsaw Pact countries and the Third World, this new government in the Federal Republic of Germany stands for continuity in foreign policy.

(Applause)

I should like to add a rider that the new Federal government will be particularly active on behalf of European unification. It regards this as the core of its foreign policy.

Mr Kohl, the Federal Chancellor, is a proponent of European unification, and this has coloured his entire political thinking and activities. He will give his full support to every effort to adopt a substantive European Act in the near future.

(Applause)

On 19 November 1981, standing in this very spot, I said that in these critical times in Europe it was vital that the political unification process be relaunched. The Community could develop further only if it rediscovered the political will for unification to which it owed its inception 25 years ago: if it did not develop it would decay.

Not to go forward is, in reality, to go backward. What is needed is dynamic endeavour in order to bring the process of European Union a step closer.

(Applause)

We have been very attentively reading your Political Affairs Committee's interim report on our initiative. The support it gives our proposal and its call for speedy adoption have given me great satisfaction. I shall gladly accede to the request by the Political Affairs Committee to report to the European Parliament on progress at regular intervals, over and above what is already being done. I am open to suggestions for improvements to our proposal, especially in respect of relations between Council and Parliament. I am also prepared to raise such suggestions during meetings of the Council of Ministers.

(Applause)

In this connection I am also glad to express my full agreement with the main themes expressed by this House in its Resolution of 6 July 1982 on European Union, namely the European Community and the forms of cooperation based on it have been greatly beneficial both to the Member States and to the international community. They are an element of international stability. However, the emergence of new political and economic challenges makes reform necessary.

Without beating about the bush I think we can say that the political, social and institutional development of the European Community falls far short of meeting the needs and aspirations of European citizens. We must

not be afraid to recognize this.

(Applause)

In the face of exacerbating international conflicts, the Community must finally assume the role due to it in the world — that of the catalyst of peace and development, and, ultimately there is no substitute, not even an institutional substitute, for joint action to meet the political, social, economic and technological challenges of today and tomorrow.

Ladies and gentlemen, I anxiously ask whether there can be any doubt, in view of international political and economic developments over the last 12 months, that these words were justified? Is it not even to be feared that the breathing space bequeathed to us by history for the creation of European Union is running out, and that we are in danger of reverting to politics governed by national interests?

(Applause)

Since my speech of 19 November 1981, the Community's capacity to act in the international arena has again been put to the test by world events.

One example has been the attempt by the rulers of Poland to reverse the social and political development of that country by the imposition of martial law. The Community has provided the appropriate political and economic reaction to this challenge. We jointly urged the Warsaw military council to repeal martial law, to release those arrested and to restore a genuine dialogue with the Church and 'Solidarity', and thus to redeem the pledges the Polish leaders themselves gave when martial law was declared on 13 December 1981.

(Applause)

On 8 October 1982 our hopes were again bitterly disappointed. On that day the Sejm adopted a new trade union Act, which hinged on the banning of 'Solidarity'.

The governments of the Ten will now have to wrestle with the implications for mutual trust and hence the policy of security and cooperation in Europe and for international relations of this ban on a trade union supported by the majority of Polish workers.

Europe's special sympathy for and interest in developments in the Middle East have been expressed in many unambiguous statements by the Ten. Two Member States of the Community have despatched their sons in international peace-keeping forces in South Lebanon, in the Sinai and in West Beirut, for which we all owe them thanks.

(Applause)

Finally, I would mention the differences that have emerged this year between Europe and the USA. These differences have concerned basic international economic questions, the East-West relationship and the proper reaction to the challenge which both we and the USA see in the events in Poland and Afghanistan. I regard it as a matter of the highest importance that the Member States and the Community have retained their cohesion here, and managed to conduct the talks on defusing our differences with the USA on this basis.

Here too we see the emergence of another facet of the European identity, which we wish to incorporate in the Atlantic partnership, so vital to us all, between free peoples dedicated to common ideals. I am convinced that joint action by Europe will have a stabilizing effect on transatlantic relations. Only in concert can we lend our interests, our opinions and our counsel the weight required by a healthy Atlantic partnership between free nations if it is to preserve its unity. Impotence leads via frustration to a sterile antagonistic attitude which does nothing to promote an agreed solution to the problems we share.

Frankly I am not impressed by those Europeans who, whilst complaining that our interests are being neither represented nor heeded, are themselves either unwilling or unable to define these interests jointly and to make them effective.

(Applause)

Those who condemn such shortcomings in the transatlantic alliance have no right to point the finger at Washington but would do well to look much nearer home for our failure to make the full thrust of our weight felt.

(Applause)

The international economic situation remains a cause for anxiety, representing a formidable test of the Community's strength. Inflation has eased in Europe, but the process of our much-needed structural adaptation is progressing only sluggishly.

The unemployment rate in the Community has risen above the 10% mark. The economic and social foundations of our democracy and of the European Community are at stake. It is the duty of the Community and each government to do everything in their power to restore the strength and confidence of our economy. If this does not happen, we shall be unable to tackle unemployment effectively. At national level we must finally get to grips with budgetary deficits.

At the beginning of my speech I mentioned continuity in our foreign policy; I should like to add that the new Federal Government will be taking vigorous action to reduce the budgetary deficit, to encourage investment, to trigger new factors for growth within the social market economy and thus to combat unemployment more effectively.

If the current economic situation is the sum of the individual economic errors of our economies this is tantamount to an admission that the only viable method of tackling the problem is through a joint remedial economic strategy.

(Applause)

However, within the Community we cannot avoid the overdue settlement of the budgetary problem and the related reform of the Community's spending. Financial constraints and the many new tasks awaiting the Community require restraint in agricultural spending too. We also have to settle those other long-outstanding questions which must be solved in the interests of the Community's cohesion. As examples I would quote the common fisheries policy, the negotiations on southerly enlargement and the abolition of frontier checks, to which solutions are long overdue.

(Applause)

My colleague, Colombo, has already referred to these aspects. We cannot afford, by further postponing the negotiations, to betray the trust of the democratic forces of Spain and Portugal in our desire to see them accede to the Community.

(Applause)

I further believe that recent developments in one of these two prospective Member States should be a spur towards a realistic appraisal of the full dimension of this accession.

Against this background of a Community struggling to solve its own internal problems and for a world role, in the last nine months the Foreign Ministers, their personal representatives and the representatives of the Commission have been meeting to discuss the German/Italian draft European Act, on the basis of the mandate issued by the European Council. This work has not yet been completed. However, since January an

extensive programme has been completed and a large measure of agreement has been achieved, under energetic Belgian and Danish chairmen, to whom I should now like to extend my thanks. On 7 July the then President of the Council Mr Olesen reported to this House on the most recent development.

I should like to outline the results achieved so far:

- It was our intention to bring the general political goal of European unification back into the centre of the arena. The convoluted process of European unification and European action should be given the specific goal of European Union. The preamble and the recitals represent a basically agreed text meeting these requirements.

- In the institutional field Mr Colombo and I have set a number of goals:

- The structures for decision-making in the European Communities and European political cooperation should be merged under the responsibility of the European Council. Different viewpoints were brought closer here.
- The institutional structures of the European Community and European political cooperation should be harmonized. The agreed text for the Council of Ministers will produce stronger links between the machinery of EPC and the European Community's external relations.

A substantial chapter is now devoted to common EEC economic and monetary policies; this can be traced back to a proposal by Mr Colombo to add a 'Statement on economic integration' to the act. (Mr Colombo has already spoken on the subject.)

It represents a balanced programme listing what is required and what is feasible to promote economic integration.

The objective of our initiative was to encourage the widening of European cooperation to include new areas. This applies firstly to the field of security. I believe that we must devote particular attention to the maintenance of Europe's political and economic security. There can be no doubting the Western alliance's need for a common political and economic strategy in its relations with the Warsaw Pact States. Given this self-evidence the European Community as such must make its voice heard.

(Applause)

Equally important is the area of cultural cooperation, harmonization of legislation and, finally, the battle against cross-border crime.

To put it another way, the goal of dismantlement and eventual elimination of border checks, which we all desire, could be brought much nearer if progress is seen to be made in combating cross-border criminality.

(Applause)

Looking at the results of the negotiations so far, it is clear that here too a great deal of progress has been made. The texts drafted so far provide for further consolidation and intensification of cooperation in the field of foreign policy.

Allow me a frank remark at this point: In German we speak of 'foreign policy cooperation' (Aussenpolitische Zusammenarbeit) and this is so translated in other languages. I would dearly like to substitute for it the term 'European foreign policy'. That is what we badly need.

(Applause)

I very much regret that the positive reception accorded to the coordination of the political and economic

aspects of security policy within the framework of the EPC could not have been extended to the two areas to which Mr Colombo and I attach particular importance: the strengthening of the position of the European Parliament and the return to the decision-making procedures established by the Treaties in the Council of Ministers. The use of the word 'return' should raise one's suspicions given that Europe's mission is that of going forward.

Ladies and gentlemen, as you know, the European Parliament has been accorded an important position in our draft European Act. The Government of the Federal Republic of Germany is convinced that the European Parliament has a vital role to play in the development of European Union.

The belief in parliamentary democracy lies at the heart of the Community's political order. The activities of the Community must therefore be founded on a democratic basis and subject to parliamentary control.

(Applause)

This is the mandate that the House has obtained from its electorate by virtue of being directly elected. It can legitimately demand that its powers should be commensurate with this mandate. In the future I shall therefore continue to press for a strengthening of the role of this Parliament.

The German/Italian draft Act sets out a dual objective :

- firstly to establish the vital role of Parliament in the creation of European Union in a binding and forward-looking form,

- secondly, to strengthen effectively the powers of Parliament in five specific areas of its day-to-day activities which, if I may, I shall enumerate again here:

(1) the right to make *recommendations* to the European Council and the Council on major issues in a broad range of areas, on which the Council is required to comment if Parliament so wishes;

(2) the improvement and extension of the *conciliation procedure* between the Council, Parliament and the Commission;

(3) the hearing of Parliament before- the *accession* or *association* of further States and before the conclusion of other *international agreements* that are of major importance to the Community;

(4) consultation of the enlarged Bureau of Parliament *before the appointment of the President* of the Commission;

(5) an investiture debate or vote of confidence in Parliament after the appointment of the President of the Commission.

These five points contain important innovations. In addition, there are various provisions concerning Parliament's right to submit questions and the Council's obligation to report to Parliament, which give a legally binding form to procedures which have evolved in practice.

In drawing up these proposals we were inspired by resolutions adopted in this very House. Two particularly important proposals, on the conciliation procedure and on external relations, have since been taken up by the Commission and translated into formal draft decisions.

Our proposals will not, of course, meet all your demands. On 19 November 1981 in this very Chamber, I pointed out that we had limited ourselves to proposals which did not require any amendment to the Treaties. We were concentrating on exhausting all the possibilities offered by the Treaties. In this, I know that I am in full agreement with the House, which adopted the same approach in its resolutions of July 1981 and February 1982. I also told you that we anticipated that our proposals would meet with the approval of all our

partners.

Today I have to report that although our proposals have not yet been discussed fully, progress in the negotiations to date indicates that the proposals relating to Parliament are among the aspects of the draft Act which are still controversial.

Mr Colombo and I will do our utmost to convince our partners that the role of Parliament must be strengthened in anticipation of the forthcoming European elections in two years' time.

(Applause)

We are not interested in hasty compromise solutions. We are concerned with practical improvements and the creation of a political situation which will give the European Parliament, in the eyes of the public, the status that is due to the directly-elected representatives of our peoples. We will hold fast to this goal and trust that this House will bring its influence to bear to win over those who are still vacillating to support our proposals.

A further demand that I regard as important is the improvement of the European decision-making process and I am aware that this is also a subject which is of concern to the House. Mr Olesen has submitted to you that the institutions function satisfactorily; however, he also stated that there was disagreement among the Member States on this point. That is a fact.

At all events, there is agreement on two things:

- Firstly: the ability to act depends essentially on the provisions of the Treaty concerning the decision-making procedure in fact being applied.
- Secondly: even where unanimity is required, use of the possibility of abstaining would make it easier to reach decisions. This is a constant, albeit unpublicised, feature of the everyday workings of the Council of Ministers and it is useful to reaffirm it expressly in the Act.

What is in dispute are the circumstances in which a Member State can invoke its vital interests. You are aware of the divergent positions on this issue. In a Parliament where majority voting is taken for granted, I am sure I can count on your support when I say that more use should be made of the majority rules laid down in the Treaties. They are of course restricted to cases which the authors of the Treaties assumed would not be prejudicial to the fundamental interests of the Member States. The inability to take decisions that we have experienced in recent years has done nothing to improve the image of the Community in the eyes of its citizens.

(Applause)

The track record indicates unfortunately no improvement. Quite the contrary; it reveals a practice in which diverse points and subjects having no factual connection are grouped together so that, by an erratic yes/no voting pattern a package deal can be assembled. This makes a mockery of the voting procedure laid down in the Treaties.

(Applause)

But now a word of warning against a misapprehension — the misapprehension that majority voting is a miracle cure which will preserve the Community's ability to act. This would be to overemphasize procedural aspects. More important than the mechanics of majority voting is what lies behind it, namely a willingness to bridge the gap between diverging interests, which stems from a political commitment to integration. The question is really whether within the decision-making procedure narrow national interests are allowed to prevail, with each Member State intent on getting as much as it can out of the Community or whether a much-needed change of heart will take place with Member States deciding to pull together in order to assure the progress of the Community as a whole.

(Applause)

This issue, involving, as it does, the individual Member States' deep-seated attitude to Europe, cannot be resolved by decision-making machinery. No one would deny that vital interests exist, indeed the Community frequently has to intervene in key areas of our national life. However, the invoking of such interests should not be allowed to bring the decision-making process to a standstill. We therefore propose, in the Act, that specific reasons must be given for invoking vital interests. Voting in the Council may then be deferred to allow more room and time to find a solution. However, at the next Council meeting a decision should be taken even though it may be only of a procedural nature. As we all know, pressure is essential to bring about agreement and this formula will generate such pressure. I do not see how the Community can approach the next few years and enlargement to include the countries of southern Europe without streamlining its working practices. Moreover I am convinced that the citizens of Europe will appreciate this more than an endless series of fruitless Council meetings. I know that I am in agreement with you in arguing that only then can both Parliament and Commission fulfil their roles properly.

I should like to bring my remarks to a close with an appeal that is threefold.

I would appeal to all those who have regarded the efforts made by Mr Colombo and myself with scepticism to await the results of these negotiations and to assess them in the light of the progress that has been achieved and not in the light of what it might have been desirable to achieve over and above this. As I stated in this Chamber on 19 November.

We have deliberately restricted the draft Act to proposals on which we are convinced that the Member States can now reach a consensus. We have not postulated what is desirable but have tried to formulate what is feasible. An organized and united Europe will be the result of long and laborious efforts.

Our delegates will continue working on the outstanding issues and I am confident that the Foreign Ministers in the near future will be able to submit a joint text which can be adopted by the European Council during the first half of 1983 at the latest. Mr Colombo and I are prepared to come before this House again at that time to report to you and answer questions on the progress and results of the discussions.

(Applause)

I appeal to you, ladies and gentlemen, to continue to give Mr Colombo and myself your support. It is with considerable sympathy that we observe the efforts of the European Parliament to make its own special contribution to the creation of European Union.

From the setting up of a Committee on Institutional Affairs, via the guidelines for the reform of the Treaties and the realization of European Union it is a direct road to the Treaty contemplated in those guidelines. As I stated in Bremen on 12 December 1981 — if I may quote myself —

'On this issue I am pinning all my hopes on the European Parliament. It would be a great boost for the forthcoming European election campaign in 1984 if a draft European constitution had been drawn up by then.'

(Applause)

Mr President, you have labelled the second direct elections to the European Parliament in 1984 the real test of the legitimacy of Parliament. This means that we are all under an obligation.

The German/Italian initiative is designed to bring about improvements on the basis of what exists at present. It is not in competition and still less in conflict with the important revision of the Treaties drafted by you. On the contrary, it is an initial step in that very direction, a step that can be taken today. If, with your support, it becomes a reality, then this subsequent more far-reaching draft cannot but be valuable. Even the Act itself

has not been elaborated as a final point.

Finally, I would appeal to Community Member States to show a willingness to compromise on the outstanding issues and not to close their eyes to the needs of Europe at this point in time.

I shall not tire of pointing out that we must not lose sight of the prospect of European Union, not despite the existing economic problems but precisely because of these problems. Both require a long-term policy. I am afraid that the solution to our economic problems at both national and Community level will be achieved only after a long period of effort and sacrifice. There are no short cuts along the path that must be followed in this unsettled and radically changing world. If we are to convince our citizens of the need for such a policy we must be able to hold out to them the prospect of a Europe which goes beyond economic aspects. We want Europe to be a politically and economically viable entity. We want a Europe that will work for peace and equality in the world, we want a Europe that, in conjunction with other like-thinking countries, will stand for the ideals of democracy and human rights. This, ladies and gentlemen, is the Europe that we hope to build.

As a Member of Parliament, prior to my appointment as minister, I always believed that governments should come before their respective parliaments and plead for the latter's support. In coming before you today we are giving substance to this belief and, in so doing, making a plea for your support for the proposals contained in our draft European Act.

(Prolonged applause)