

Address given by Jean Rey on the merger of the executive bodies (Strasbourg, 20 September 1967)

Caption: On 20 September 1967, the single Commission of the European Communities appears before the European Parliament in Strasbourg for the first time. In his address, Jean Rey, President of the Commission, outlines the work carried out by the three executive bodies which the single Commission will replace and sets out the new duties and responsibilities that the institution will exercise following the entry into force of the 'Merger Treaty' of 8 April 1965.

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Address given by Jean Rey, President of the Commission of the European Communities, to the European Parliament in Strasbourg, 20 September 1967

Mr President, State Secretary representing the President of the Council of Ministers, ladies and gentlemen,

The Single Commission of the European Communities, resulting from the Merger Treaty of 8 April 1965, started its work on 6 July 1967.

The whole Commission is appearing before you today for the first time, and it is, therefore, an opportunity for us to give you a general report on our initial work and the way in which we see our task.

My speech will not be very long, and, as has always been my habit in Parliament, I shall be speaking from my notes and not reading a prepared text. I therefore apologise to Members if I am not able to provide them with the full text of my speech after I have finished speaking.

Ladies and gentlemen, before I move on to the actual report, I think that I should remind you that our Single Commission has evolved from three European executive bodies, and we are their successors.

First, the High Authority of the European Coal and Steel Community, which, under its Presidents, Jean Monnet, René Mayer, Paul Finet, Piero Malvestiti and, finally, Dino Del Bo, was the first European Community institution to be given responsibility for developing the first integrated policies and initiating the regular dialogue, firstly between the European institutions themselves and secondly between the High Authority and the governments of the Member States.

Second, we are the successors to the Commission of the European Atomic Energy Community, whose presidents were Louis Armand, Étienne Hirsch and Pierre Chatenet. That body was responsible for implementing all the provisions laid down in the Treaty establishing Euratom and, in particular, for setting up one of the very first major scientific and technical research centres, for which we now have responsibility.

Third, the Commission of the European Economic Community, of which I myself was a member under the Presidency of Professor Walter Hallstein, for almost 10 years. That body was responsible for establishing and implementing the Customs Union and then for starting to develop the common policies required by our Treaty.

I think that we owe a real debt of gratitude to those three executive bodies for their extensive achievements over the past 15 years. But you will appreciate that I want to refer, in particular, to Walter Hallstein, with whom I, along with some of my colleagues, worked more closely. You recently paid tribute to him yourselves in this Parliament. Let me just say that it is rare to come across anyone as intelligent, hardworking and politically courageous as Professor Hallstein. His qualities will certainly be quite unforgettable.

That is what I wanted to say before moving on to my statement proper. I shall start by explaining how it is arranged.

I shall talk first about the responsibilities that we have to exercise under the current Treaties, then the very topical question of the enlargement of the Communities. After that, I shall discuss the merger of the Communities and the issues that that raises; and, finally, I shall look at the new tasks that we are able to undertake as the merger takes effect.

First, as regards the responsibilities that used to be exercised by our predecessors, under the actual Treaty of 8 April 1965, we have to perform all the duties and functions that used to be carried out by the three separate executive bodies. As we address ourselves to that task, we are struck by the scale and, indeed, in some cases, the seriousness of the problems facing us in each of our three Communities.

In the Coal and Steel Community, quite apart from the difficulties that the European steel industry is experiencing at the moment, we are faced with a coal crisis which, it would be no exaggeration to say, has not yet settled down. It will therefore require further major efforts on our part and by all of us.

On the question of Euratom, as you know, having discussed the matter here, there is, unfortunately, a great deal of disagreement between our governments regarding the future functions of our European Atomic Energy Authority. That is why it has not, hitherto, been possible to draw up and adopt the 1967 budget that is on your current agenda. Opinions on the third research programme still differ widely. We are, therefore, going to look at these problems not just internally but with governments in the next few months in order to formulate proposals that will be acceptable to everyone.

In the interim, we clearly need transitional arrangements. We quickly agreed on what these might comprise. We have taken our decisions this week and are going to start considering the proposals straight away with the Scientific and Technical Advisory Committee. The Commission will then be able to adopt a final position and open the dialogue with the Council.

Finally, you are aware of the position with the European Economic Community. The Customs Union has been more or less completed, and we now have to pursue the policy of actually establishing the Economic Union. The issues involved are well known to this House.

We can certainly welcome the excellent progress achieved in certain areas, for instance the recent tax harmonisation decisions. In other sectors, such as transport and the common commercial policy, progress has been less rapid. These are just a few examples; I do not wish to review all our activities here.

However, I should like to express our particular interest in social policy. We believe that, despite the particularly impressive work done in Luxembourg, insufficient progress has been made on social policy in our Communities in the last few years. We are anxious that social progress should be given a further boost in our Community. We shall have the opportunity to explain this to you in more detail.

We must, of course, continue the current external negotiations at the same time. We now need to make an effort, with Austria, to revive the negotiations that have reached something of a deadlock, although I hope that this is only temporary. We have to start the negotiations with Spain that the Council has approved. We have to resume the talks with the Maghreb countries; they have not been abandoned, but they should have progressed more rapidly. We are facing a new problem: the agreement to be signed with Israel when our trade association comes to an end. Last, we must not only continue and develop our association with the African states but, if possible, extend it to other countries.

Those are the problems facing us in the immediate future in our three Communities. If, in this necessarily incomplete statement, I happen to have overlooked any points that Parliament considers particularly important, I hope that you will let us know later on.

The second part of my statement will be the shortest, for reasons of which everyone is aware. It concerns the enlargement of the Communities.

However, in the current political situation, and bearing in mind that, tomorrow, you will be meeting the Consultative Assembly of the Council of Europe in this same Chamber, it is impossible to deal with this matter in full. You will all appreciate, nonetheless, that the Commission and its spokesman have to be particularly discreet, because we have been asked by the Council of Ministers, under Article 237 of the Treaty of Rome, to deliver an opinion, and we have agreed with the Council that we shall do so by 30 September. In other words, the process has still not been fully completed. Work has been progressing satisfactorily in our Commission and our administration, but we still have a few questions of substance and procedure to resolve, and we have to give our decision on them next week.

Furthermore, even if our conclusions were already final, we clearly have to inform the Council of Ministers first. It would not be right for the ministers to learn about them from the newspapers.

Having said that, I think that I can explain to you the two ideas on which we based our deliberations.

First, we thought that we should, as a Commission, give our ministers positive assistance in the consideration of the internal problems that enlargement poses for the Communities.

We are faced with options. No one expects us to offer solutions at this stage; they cannot, of course, be identified until negotiations have taken place. But we can at least provide ideas, guidelines and general principles. We have endeavoured to do so in a positive manner, because we are well aware that the enlargement of the Communities required by our three treaties would represent a major step forward, an important stage in European integration.

Our second concern, from the outset, has been to ensure that the enlargement of the Communities should not take place at the expense of their power and dynamism, which must remain absolutely intact. Your Parliament has expressed that view too often for you to find it surprising.

We hope that, on the basis of this report, it will be possible for us to enter into a fruitful debate with ministers at the meetings already planned for October and November.

We hope, further, that our view that it is time to open these negotiations will be endorsed, because, if we are to look carefully at all the problems and decide whether the time has come to take this enormous step, we really need to do so with our European partners, the United Kingdom and the other countries concerned.

That is all I have to say about the enlargement of the Community.

The third part of my speech concerns the merger.

The merger required by the Brussels Treaty raises two issues: first, the merger of the Commissions that now become a Single Commission, and of our administrations, and second, the merger of the treaties.

We have already started merging the administrations: this began in July and has been proceeding with a speed that has been noted outside the Communities.

We began by allocating the responsibilities of the 14 members of our Single Commission. We then started setting up the administrations, the large directorates-general that, with their senior officials, are to be the framework of our unified Community administration.

The work has started out well. It will be very hard; we have no illusions about that. In any event, we believe that we showed, in July and September, that we do not intend to let the development of all the policies for which we are responsible be held up by the merger process, which we intend to pursue at the same time.

I should add that we are bearing in mind the provisions in the annex to the Treaty of 8 April 1965 concerning the allocation of the institutions and our administration, particularly between Brussels and Luxembourg. We firmly intend to respect and implement the decisions taken, even if, in some of those areas, we experience a few practical difficulties, which we shall try to resolve.

Coming on to the merger of the treaties, this raises a number of technical issues which, although not insurmountable, are certainly complex.

Our three treaties are not the same.

The last two benefited from experience with the first one, but they might have suffered because the political climate had changed somewhat since 1950–1951.

Together, we are going to have to resolve some of these problems.

There will also be political choices to be made, and that is, of course, a more delicate question.

Some of our governments consider this task to be urgent, because of all the preparatory work. Negotiations will be needed between our six governments, and, when they have approved the Single Treaty, it will have to be submitted to our parliaments for ratification. Furthermore, according to the Treaty of 8 April 1965, all this has to be done within three years.

Some also think, probably rightly, that the internal problems raised by the merger and the enlargement negotiations might interfere with each other and that the work should therefore start without delay. Our Commission intends to move forward quickly in the next few months and provide our ministers with a basic document with our initial suggestions on where such solutions might be found.

Before coming to the political conclusion of this speech, my final comments are on the new tasks.

We are all aware that the merger of our Communities and executive bodies, even before the actual merger of the treaties, gives to us all new opportunities to undertake new tasks or, at the very least, to give a greater impetus to the tasks upon which we have already embarked, and we must seize those opportunities straight away.

I shall not list all the ones we have in mind, but I should like at least to mention four.

The first is a more systematic study of the industrial policy to be pursued.

We have all, wisely, I think, treated the establishment of the common agricultural policy as a major priority, which we are at all events required to do under the Treaty establishing the EEC and for policy reasons, and you are aware of the successful outcome.

But we believe that it is now time, in this new phase, to look more systematically at all the questions raised by European industry, which is facing both an expanded market internally and greater competition externally. The second task that I want to mention is the formulation of a common energy policy. That is something we have all been wishing for. It has been hampered by the fact that we had separate executive bodies. Coal was dealt with in Luxembourg, nuclear energy in Rue Belliard in Brussels, oil in Avenue de la Joyeuse Entrée in Brussels. However impressive the work done by the inter-executive bodies, there is no doubt that the concentration of responsibilities gives us a chance to move ahead much more quickly.

May I respectfully point out that the same applies for ministers? The merger of the Communities and executive bodies is often mentioned. The merger of the Councils of Ministers under the Brussels Treaty of 8 April 1965 is no less significant. Take the word of someone who, for four years, represented his country on the ECSC Council of Ministers. From 1954 to 1958, I was the Belgian member on the Special Council of Ministers, and I was President of the Council three times, for three months. One of the lessons that I have certainly learned from my experience is that some ministers were there to talk about coal and steel, whilst others were concerned with the economy in general, and that was not the ideal system for reaching quick and consistent decisions. Now that we have a Single Council of Ministers, I believe that we shall make real progress.

The third task is to implement a European research policy, which you already debated back in the spring.

We all know that the time has come not just to be critical of Europe's backwardness in that area but also to seek practical remedies. We shall be applying ourselves to that task.

The fourth task to which I want to refer is regional policy. Whilst recognising the significant achievements brought about by our predecessors in both Luxembourg and Brussels, we believe that there is still a great deal to do in the Community in that field. The possibilities have perhaps not been properly identified or acted on. In particular, we need to give a fresh impetus to regional policy formulated at the same Community level and, I should point out, with regular cooperation by Member States' governments, which is essential if it is to succeed.

To put all this into effect, we thought that we should make one of our colleagues responsible for dynamic

action in these new or reinforced sectors.

We also thought that, in reorganising our administration, we should try to ensure that new or at least reinforced administrative units could concentrate more exclusively on the four main tasks to which I have just referred.

This is how I might summarise our programme: to continue all the existing policies, merge our administration and treaties, cooperate and contribute to the enlargement of the Communities and undertake the new tasks that are to be merged.

However, this statement would be incomplete if I did not finish by saying, on behalf of my colleagues as well as on my own behalf, that our Communities and Europe need a fresh political impetus. We believe that the Merger Treaty and the opportunities that it offers are one way to bring that about.

May I remind you that the Treaty itself starts, in its preamble, with the following declaration by our six governments, ratified by the six parliaments: 'resolved to continue along the road to European unity'.

Accordingly, a merger involves much more than simply rationalising administrations or harmonising three treaties drafted at different times. It is also a way of moving towards European unity, one of the stages in the process.

We realise that this means greater responsibility for the Single Commission. First, because, as I have just explained, we now have joint responsibility for every European sector. Second, because, for the time being, we enjoy the confidence of the governments that have just unanimously elected the 14 members of our Commission.

With that initial confidence, which I hope will last, and with the support of Parliament, of which more later, I believe that we have a basis for the Single Commission to work more energetically and achieve results.

When I talk about a new political impetus, I have two things in mind. The first is a reinforcement of Community policies and, if possible, institutions. I have just spoken to you about the reinforcement of policies. The reinforcement of the institutions is something about which we still have to think.

You are aware that, in the few weeks that we had at our disposal in July for the merger and in September for drawing up our report on the possibility of enlarging the Communities, we were unable to discuss in depth all the problems facing us, and we did not want to delay our appearance before the European Parliament.

However, I would say straight away that our Commission firmly believes that, without relinquishing our responsibilities, powers or authority, we should initiate more personal and regular cooperation with the governments of the Member States, not just with the Council, with which, obviously, we hold regular meetings, but also, I repeat, with the Member State governments.

Let me give you two recent examples. My friend Sicco Mansholt, Vice-President of our Commission, would never have managed to plan and implement the huge task of setting up the common agricultural policy if he had not been in regular personal contact with the six agriculture ministers responsible for taking the political decisions provided for by the treaties in the six Member States.

We would never have brought the Kennedy Round that has just ended to a successful conclusion, notwithstanding the more or less daily assistance from my colleagues and the attendance of a delegation with a sound grasp of the technical issues, if I had not myself been in personal contact with the ministers and had not travelled to Bonn, Paris, Rome and the Benelux countries in person for talks in the final stages in order to make sure that there was sufficient confidence in me personally for me to assume sometimes difficult responsibilities at the crucial moment.

We believe that these examples should be followed. We have decided that I should start by visiting the capitals of our six Member States, not on my own, obviously, but with a particular colleague depending on the place

that I am visiting.

My first visit was to Bonn, the day before yesterday. We held a general discussion on the problems facing us with the President of the Council, the ministers concerned and, finally, with the Chancellor himself.

I shall be going to Paris in the first half of October, to Rome in the second half and to the Benelux countries in the first half of November. That is apart from a visit that I have already paid to Mr Werner, the Luxembourg President of the Council.

Once that tour has been completed, we are certainly not intending just to repeat it again at set intervals. What we want to do is to maintain that personal contact between our unified executive and the governments of the Member States. Our experience has shown us that that is how we can make headway with problems when there are differences of opinion within our Council.

May I therefore say, modestly but clearly, that we hope that our Commission's approach will be reciprocated and, when the ministers themselves have to discuss matters on which they need to agree, they will make sure that they call on us, when, of course, those matters relate to the Community responsibilities that we now hold?

The second aspect of the political impetus to which we look forward is the progress of what is called political union. So many times in this Chamber, my predecessor, Walter Hallstein, and other statesmen have emphasised that the role of the Communities is already essentially political. That is quite clear. But you are aware that, in other bodies, they are discussing other political questions, that our governments have been discussing them for the past six years.

In fact, although the negotiations have been going on for six years, having started in February 1961, our governments, in 1967, have not reached any agreement on either methods or aims.

We strongly deplore this situation because, I must stress, we may well arrive at a stage where there is a dangerous disparity between the growing strength of the Communities, which have made a tremendous impression internationally, as we see from the large number of states wanting to accede to or be associated with them, and these wide political differences that still exist between our governments. We in the Commission will have to consider whether we might make a few suggestions to our ministers, other than in the public debates, that could move the situation forward.

There is at least one that I should like to offer publicly.

We considered whether, pending unanimous agreement on questions of substance, principle or method, we might, even at this stage, take on some tasks jointly, show that we are moving ahead and, hence, give an impetus to the cooperation that is needed.

I must mention here the debate that you held on the Middle East crisis, a subject on which you took the initiative. We still remember the regrets expressed that European integration had not progressed quickly enough for Europe as such to have a role in this serious crisis, at least to alleviate the causes and tackle the problems of harmonised development in that region.

Ladies and gentlemen, it is probably too early to make specific proposals on that issue, and I shall not do so. But it would be a good idea for us all to think about it. You all have responsibilities in your national parliaments, in addition to your European responsibilities. It is worth considering whether we might not take the process forward with a pragmatic approach of that kind.

In any event, let me finish by saying that we are fully aware that our task is not just to unify Europe economically but also to make political progress.

To tell the truth, when we look at the problems that have built up for us every week since 6 July, we are starting to see that there are a great many of them and that they are often complex.

Our institution is somewhat overwhelmed by their number, but they are a welcome challenge. However, we intend to make sure that we are able to take the decisions required of a European body, certainly after careful thought but also without delay, and, to date, we have succeeded.

Second, I should like to outline the spirit in which we plan to work. We do not just regard ourselves as the administrators of the Community; we also see ourselves as its driving force. On that point, may I repeat what I used to say in my previous Commission, which sometimes made my colleagues laugh: at this stage in Europe's development, we cannot simply be the clergy; we have to continue to be prophets. It is in that belief that we are starting our work.

I cannot, therefore, avoid a reference to the concerns that we hear expressed outside this Parliament, especially the public concern that there are still so many conflicts between Community and national policies and between our governments.

Your former President, Gaetano Martino, was quoted earlier.

We must remember the disagreements between our American friends two centuries ago.

They adopted their Declaration of Independence in 1776. Twenty-five years later, a violent argument broke out between the Jeffersonists and the federalists. The first group supported the third President, Thomas Jefferson, who said that the Union had been created by the 'Member States' (that term was already being used then) and in the interests of the Member States. Consequently, when the interests of those Member States conflicted with those of the Union, it was the interests of the Member States that should prevail.

Opposing them was the admirable group of federalists. They said that the Union would never amount to anything if the general interests for which it stood did not prevail over the specific interests of the Member States, however legitimate or worthy of respect these might be.

You know exactly what the outcome of that battle was.

You see how our Community policies are evolving and how, despite understandable national opposition from major countries that have for so long had different traditions, economic systems and histories, they can be defined and developed with remarkable speed.

Ladies and gentlemen, rest assured that we are determined, and we shall work hard. But we realise that we need help if we are to succeed. We need public support, and, in particular, we need the support of this Parliament.

The European Parliament embodies the democratic aspect of our whole enterprise. It has consistently given advice, opinions and encouragement to the three executive bodies from which we evolved.

We are confident that we can count on the support of this Parliament in the future.