

## Speech by Helmuth Burckhardt (Luxembourg, 26 January 1973)

**Caption:** At the ceremony held in Luxembourg on 26 January 1973 to commemorate the 20th anniversary of the first session of the ECSC Consultative Committee, the Committee's first President, Helmuth Burckhardt, recalls the first years of the Committee.

**Source:** Consultative Committee of the European Coal and Steel Community 1953-1973, Publication to honour the 20th Anniversary. Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, 1973. 51 p.

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**URL:** [http://www.cvce.eu/obj/speech\\_by\\_helmuth\\_burckhardt\\_luxembourg\\_26\\_january\\_1973-en-6794bfef-197f-4db4-9dfe-b73e725cdedd.html](http://www.cvce.eu/obj/speech_by_helmuth_burckhardt_luxembourg_26_january_1973-en-6794bfef-197f-4db4-9dfe-b73e725cdedd.html)

**Publication date:** 20/10/2012

## Speech by Mr H. Burckhardt, first president of the Consultative Committee

Mr President,

It gives me particular pleasure to have been invited by you to participate in today's meeting of the Consultative Committee which is being held on the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of the first meeting of this body. I thank you very much for this invitation, which - as I can confirm - has given me the opportunity of seeing again many friends and colleagues with whom I had been able to work during the first fifteen years of this Committee's activity.

I am happy to recall the early years of the Consultative Committee's activity, during which I was a member of the Bureau - in its first year as President, as you mentioned previously Mr President - and in which the working methods of the Consultative Committee to the High Authority of the European Coal and Steel Community had to be evolved and given shape.

The establishment of a Consultative Committee to a supranational authority was at that time something completely new. The Consultative Committee was not conceived as a parliament; it was not intended to be a control body; it was not meant to provide criticism of the actions of the High Authority; its purpose was rather to make expertise available and to advise the High Authority. In the Treaty relating to the Coal and Steel Community numerous questions are specified, regarding which the Consultative Committee has to be heard before the High Authority comes to a decision. The High Authority went further and subsequently sought the opinion of the Consultative Committee on other questions and has thus held it to be of value, Mr Jean Monnet, in a speech made at the first meeting of the Consultative Committee twenty years ago today, very aptly expressed what he expected from the Consultative Committee when he said:

'Your Committee transmits to the High Authority the expert and concrete experience of individuals who are daily confronted with the realities of life. The value of your opinions will, however, be assessed by the High Authority not according to the weight of the number of votes, where the majority may often only reflect temporary interests, but according to the weight of the reasons, concerns and experience which have been contributed to the discussions by the various groups making up your Committee and, indeed, by the individual members.'

We have endeavoured to take account of this basic concept, and have also, at the wish of the High Authority in subsequent years and especially in connexion with many difficult problems, often proceeded to a roll-call vote recorded in the minutes, so that the High Authority could clearly identify individual opinions.

At the early meetings of the Consultative Committee the Internal Regulations were also drawn up in conformity with this method of work; they have evidently been satisfactory as no essential amendments have been found necessary meanwhile. In its activities to date, the Consultative Committee has met the demands made on it and according to my impression has made an essential contribution to the development of the Community. We can, perhaps, take some degree of pride in saying that the cooperation of producers, employees and consumers of coal and steel in their appropriate fields within this Consultative Committee need in no way fear comparison with developments in other, and particularly political, areas of the Community. This comparison can certainly be made without losing our appreciation of the others. I should not like to express myself any more cautiously than this.

In the running-in period of the common market for coal and steel, the Treaty led to a number of very important questions being put to the Consultative Committee and they resulted in interesting debates. The first consultation was, moreover, on the question of fixing maximum prices for coal in the Community - one sees how times change. Then followed such difficult problems as the distribution of scrap, the organization of the steel market, which as you know came into being after the common market for coal, the treatment of turnover taxes, the so-called tax dispute of 1953 and many others. There was therefore plenty of work to

occupy the early years. We have all not only given advice and the benefit of experience but have also learnt much in so doing.

This learning was not, however, confined solely to professional questions, but - and I should like to consider this as a special gain from these years - involved mutual understanding and acquaintanceship. For many members of the Consultative Committee its first session was the first occasion when they met former foreign enemies - the second world war had ended only eight years previously. It gave me great satisfaction to find that working together on the political task of establishing the common market for coal and steel was regarded by most of us as a particularly rewarding occupation. On accepting the office of President of the Consultative Committee I said:

'Our work will enable us to help the European Coal and Steel Community to make an important contribution to the new Europe, the new Europe in which - as everyone here hopes - our peoples shall live happily in peace and freedom.'

I was very pleased to hear after the first meeting that many colleagues from very different countries fully agreed with this.

Cooperation among producers, employees and consumers, especially between the first two groups, was something quite new for many of the participants. I know that this cooperation did not appear easy to many. It was, however, soon found that the joint discussion of important questions of a practical character relating to individual branches of the economy aroused and strengthened mutual understanding. Friendly relations were created between men who in other spheres almost always sat facing each other in the course of a dispute. I regarded this development as a particularly happy one.

The concept of the community of free Europe was still new in 1953. It had been devised by famous and important statesmen. The common market for coal and steel was to lead to the solution of important political problems of our independent Europe. Today we can observe with satisfaction the extension of this Community to nine countries. In these days we worked with enthusiasm and - as far as one can say this of hardheaded men from economic circles - even with passion at the tasks confronting us. May I leave you today with the wish that this passion may return?