

Address given by Georg Kahn-Ackermann (Strasbourg, 28 January 1977)

Caption: In his address, given on 28 January 1977 at the official opening ceremony of the new 'Palais de l'Europe' in Strasbourg, Georg Kahn-Ackermann, Secretary-General of the Council of Europe, recalls the circumstances at the time of its building and describes the building's function as the 'headquarters of the Council of Europe, particularly of [the] Organisation's Assembly; but it will also play host to the Parliament of the European Communities when it sits in Strasbourg.'

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Address given by Georg Kahn-Ackermann, Secretary General of the Council of Europe (Strasbourg, 28 January 1977)

Mr President, Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am delighted to welcome you and thank you for honouring the official opening ceremony of the new "Palais de l'Europe" in Strasbourg with your presence.

All of us here today are in some way or other custodians of the common weal and now we are pledging our faith to two aspects of Europe.

First of all, Europe exists as a historical fact; may I, as Secretary General of the Council of Europe, dwell briefly on this. More than 25 years have already passed since Strasbourg, in the middle of a continent torn by war and totalitarianism, was chosen as the headquarters of the Council of Europe; here our democratic States joined together to form the melting pot of a united Europe where human freedoms and the institutions of the peoples would be safeguarded in a spirit of brotherhood and solidarity.

However, nostalgia for past enthusiasms must not be the main feature of this ceremony, Mr President. We must turn to today's reality and keep faith with our commitment.

Today Europe is taking up residence in this new building where, after 27 years, we at last have some good solid walls of our very own; the building was made possible by loans from the Caisse des Dépôts et Consignations which you, Mr President, were kind enough to authorise when you were still Minister of Finance; thank you very much.

I should also like to thank the City of Strasbourg again for providing us with this site opposite the Orangerie for a peppercorn rent.

Until the last, the building of our new home has been a great adventure – and I think the excitement will last for some time to come; I do not want to exaggerate, but it reminds me of the beginnings of the Far West – full of human, political, economic and, above all, technical problems. Almost all of them have been solved, however, because we all shared the same determination to succeed. I would like to think that the spirit in which we have worked will help us to solve other problems for Europe.

I expect we shall be rather sad to see the end of the venerable "Bruchbüttik", as our good friends in Strasbourg like to call the old building, now so steeped in history. I am told that the new building has been nicknamed "the bunker"; but I have no doubt that once its surroundings have been properly laid out it will form a pleasing harmonious whole.

We should also like to tender our most sincere thanks to those who have kindly donated gifts to the Council of Europe for the decoration of this new building.

This great building will be essentially a centre where delegates from as far a field as Ankara and Reykjavik can meet and work together, whether in the intergovernmental or in the parliamentary sphere. It is, of course, designed to be the headquarters of the Council of Europe, particularly of our Organisation's Assembly; but it will also play host to the Parliament of the European Communities when it sits in Strasbourg. And I should like to tell the representatives of the Communities' institutions here today how much we hope that the European Communities and the Council of Europe can complement each other's work of forging Europe in a spirit of mutual trust.

Here we must strive to instil in the people and in the political leaders of Europe a genuine awareness of the need for understanding, agreement and unity; only thus can we create a real European solidarity in the fullest sense. And here, Mr President, I cannot but refer to the memoirs of Mr Jean Monnet, that great French European, echoing his hope that the right of veto will not be regarded as a natural law and that the will of the European people, expressed through their democratically elected assemblies, will gain more of a hearing in

future in the ministerial councils.

I hope that governments will be encouraged by the atmosphere of this building to take the decisions needed to organise Europe and face the challenges of today when, it must be admitted, the lack of European solidarity and the lukewarm approach of national authorities are disturbingly apparent.

As we share the solemn but friendly atmosphere of this occasion, Mr President, I should like us to think first and foremost of all the people of Europe. This building must be their home and we must endeavour to make them realise that and come to Strasbourg themselves to join in our European enterprise.