

Address given by Anthony Eden (Strasbourg, 15 September 1952)

Caption: On 15 September 1952, addressing the Consultative Assembly of the Council of Europe, Anthony Eden, British Foreign Secretary, outlines his plan for the Council of Europe to be given political authority to monitor the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) and the European Defence Community (EDC).

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Speech to be delivered by the Rt. Hon. Anthony Eden, M.C., M.P., Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, at the Consultative Assembly of the Council of Europe, Strasbourg: Monday, 15th Sept. 1952

This is the first time I have had the privilege to see this European Assembly in action.

We are all brought up to understand the atmosphere and the procedure of our own Parliaments. But it is a new experience — for me at least — to take part in an international Parliamentary debate.

I am speaking to-day, as you know, with the consent of all my colleagues on the Committee of Ministers. That is required by our Statute. But I am not in any sense speaking for them. What I shall have to say will be purely in my capacity as British Foreign Secretary.

The Council of Europe has now become an established part of the international scene. It is already entering its fourth year. Its meetings, which began experimentally, have acquired an established routine. Ministers and parliamentarians from every member-country have met together, some of them many times, in this European forum where the destinies of our Continent are under discussion. It is therefore appropriate that at this time I should pay tribute to the late Count Sforza, whose presence here in Strasbourg on numerous occasions added lustre to the debates and whose work as the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Italy won general regard from us all.

Europe was hesitant and shaken in the aftermath of the war. Many doubted whether it could survive the devastation which it had suffered and remain free. The weakness of Europe in face of the aggressive power which lay to the East was a grave source of danger to peace. Some were discouraged by the evident hazards and the scale of the effort required. Rare courage was needed, and faith. Fortunately these qualities were not lacking. Nor was help in generous measure from across the Atlantic. Confidence was gradually restored, and Europe awoke to a sense of survival. The nations felt able to face the challenge and to begin to redress their precarious weakness. The establishment of the Council of Europe was one of the steps which helped our Continent to find its faith again. Its main purpose, as I see it, was to create a sense of community amongst the European peoples. It was to provide a forum to discuss our common European problems. It was to lay foundations on which a united Europe might eventually be built.

Many differing hopes and expectations have been aroused by this bold venture. Some have believed that we could proceed faster towards the goal than others. Some have sought to achieve European unity by setting up unified institutions while others believe in a more pragmatic approach. The famous confrontation of the federal and the functional methods echoed through these halls in the early days. Relations between the Committee of Ministers and your Assembly reflected at certain times the ebb and flow of these controversies. All this was to the good. All this, if I may say so without offence, was educative. Through these discussions and arguments, through disputes about procedure and powers, through the early difficulties which hamper any new venture, the Council of Europe has brought to each one of us a wider understanding. It has helped us to value the overwhelming common interests which unite us. It has helped us also to understand those shades in national characteristics which make us separate nations.

If we have learned one lesson of special importance, it is, I think, that the unity which we seek in Europe is not a simple, monochrome unity. One of the principal qualities of our Continent is its diversity. We have diversity not only of race and language, but of character, tradition, method, taste and style. It is right that these should be preserved. The task that faces us is to find a common basis of action, to find political and economic unity without damaging the variety of our national ways and institutions. The approach to unity is not by one road only. Nor need we all drive on the same side of the road. Though it is remarkable how many people of all nations drive in the middle! There is no single solution, no unique method of tackling the problem, which can be recommended to us all in preference to other methods. It is not necessary, nor would it be right that we should all make the same choice, at the same time, between the various ways in which unity can be achieved. We need not necessarily all agree, for example, as to whether the federal or the functional approach would suit us better; whether government co-operation or that of individuals is the more profitable; whether large or small groupings of nations for particular purposes are the more effective. All

forms of co-operation between European peoples contribute to the end we seek. We all know that European unity is not just a matter of agreements and skilfully constructed constitutions. It is founded upon the contacts and the common interests of our peoples. Everything that brings us nearer in understanding and trust is to be encouraged.

Thus the pattern of European unity which we seek is diverse and many coloured. Some of us will find one design easier to follow, some another. Some can adopt closer union with a group than with all fourteen member nations of the Council. I see no disadvantage in this. Diversity in character, diversity in the methods of association — these are the hallmarks of a natural and healthy unity between nations of a continent such as ours.

I am tempted to quote the words of the Apostle Paul, who said: “Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit, and there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord, and there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all.”

It is of course well known that my country has not felt able to pursue the course of federation. At the same time, we have been anxious that this should not divide us from those of our European friends who feel that they can do so. We have repeatedly expressed our wish to be closely associated with them in their work. We have taken positive steps to make this possible. Inevitably the existence of supranational or federal arrangements amongst a group of members of the Council of Europe creates a problem of their relationship with the others. I know that you have all given a great deal of thought, as we have, to this very real difficulty. Failure to solve it would not only be frustrating to the hopes and enthusiasms which have been built here in Strasbourg. It would be dangerous for Europe. If we cannot maintain harmony between the various approaches to the common objective the result may be separation. It was in an effort to find a solution of this problem that I put forward to the Committee of Ministers in Paris last March certain proposals on behalf of Her Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom. You are already familiar with them. Indeed you have been generous enough to approve them in principle. They have since been studied in detail by your General Affairs Committee, whose report will be a basis for your discussion during the present session. For my part I should like at once to declare my entire agreement with the general conclusions of that report and to express the hope that this Assembly will find it possible to endorse them.

Our suggestions were designed, as I have explained, to meet a situation of fact. They were not intended to be a rigid or sensational plan. Their purpose was simply to help reconcile the aim of the six Powers to create a supranational community with the need to keep Europe united. The essential idea is very simple. Briefly, it is this:

that all European “restricted communities”, such as the Coal and Steel Community, which require Ministerial or Parliamentary institutions, should draw upon the facilities existing here in the Council of Europe.

In other words, that they should make use, so far as is compatible with their own smaller membership, of the Ministerial and Parliamentary machinery which we have evolved here. That is the idea in its simplest terms. Of course it is not suggested that our Assembly or our Committee of Ministers, sitting with full membership, should take over control of the restricted communities. Not at all. When they are functioning as the organs of a restricted community, obviously their membership would be limited to representatives of the countries concerned. But the fact that they were established here, and formed part of the facilities of the Council of Europe, would enable the new communities to develop in harmony with the wider European work.

Nor are these proposals simply a device to find new activities for the Council of Europe. They would, if adopted, certainly give a new impetus and direction to its work. But this is not their central purpose. It is above all as a practical means of preserving the essential unity of Europe that I commend these proposals to you.

Notable progress has been made in Europe during the last year. We have seen the signature of a Treaty setting up the European Defence Community. Another treaty, signed at the same time, has established new contractual relations between the Federal Republic and the three Occupying Powers. By these instruments, when they enter into force, the Federal Republic will become an equal partner in our joint enterprise.

And now the Treaty setting up the Coal and Steel Community has come into force. It will be for ever associated with the name and fame of my colleague and friend, Monsieur Robert Schuman, the far-seeing Foreign Minister of France. The High Authority has been established. The Community's Council of Ministers and its Assembly have met. Moreover, a Special Assembly, appointed to prepare plans for a European Political Authority, has met here in Strasbourg this morning. It has taken practical decisions which will ensure that all members of the Council of Europe will be in continuous touch with the development of this project. This is in full accord with the spirit of the proposals of Her Majesty's Government. Meanwhile other projects, such as that relating to the creation of a European Agricultural Pool, are also under study.

But there are other and wider achievements embracing Western Europe as a whole which must not be forgotten. The Brussels Treaty, the O.E.E.C., the North Atlantic Treaty, in all these we have learned the benefits of close co-operation and the need to reconcile our own interests with those of our neighbours. These great organisations secure the fabric of Western Europe. They express the realities of European life. Our safety and economic well-being are bound up with them.

Thus, each one of the member-countries of the Council of Europe is working towards the essential unity of our Continent.

All of us here want to see Europe develop, and believe that our Continent has a special message for the world to-day. It would be sad if, as a consequence of these valuable new ideas, new divisions were created. It was with these thoughts in mind that I put forward our proposals. They do not lay down detailed machinery, nor dictate constitutional doctrine. Their purpose is to link the communities with the rest of Western Europe without impairing their independence. There is no intention of subordinating them to the Council of Europe, still less to make the Council of Europe a court of appeal against them. They would retain their full independence; to develop freely, and to exercise the powers and functions which have been conferred on them by the six nations. They would be free to decide to what extent and in what way other countries should be associated with their work. None of us who are not members of the Six could expect to have the right to attend their meetings unless invited to do so. But I would hope that the link with the Council of Europe which I have proposed, would make it easy and natural for the communities to share a great deal of their thought with the rest of us.

These proposals are flexible. They do not attempt to lay down rigid lines on which the relationship between the Council of Europe and the communities should develop. Our object was to suggest the means, and promote the action, by which the two main trends towards European unity, the supranational and the intergovernmental, could be linked together. We did not expect immediate or spectacular results. The restricted communities are only just coming into being. Their institutions are experimental. It will be some time before we can see exactly how they will develop. The links with the Council of Europe must therefore be established gradually. The most we can do at present is to provide facilities here which the communities can use as they see fit. But once these links are created the institutions of Western Europe will be closely interlocked, with real advantage to us all.

This morning the Special Assembly, set up to prepare plans for a European Political Authority, has endorsed a resolution of the six Foreign Ministers which is in full accord with our proposals. The Assembly will meet in this hall, here in Strasbourg. Observers from other countries represented on this Council are being invited to take part in its work. It is to send periodic reports to you. The Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe will also receive reports from their six colleagues. All this is encouraging. It clearly shows that our proposals have been understood and are being translated into action by the countries of Europe. I warmly welcome this new phase in European co-operation, and it is right that it should be embarked upon in full view of the European family as a whole.

There is nothing unusual or surprising in the fact that the United Kingdom Government should be concerned with this problem. Knowing that some of our European friends were disposed to tread paths where we could not follow, we have always been anxious to avoid any real divergence from them. The present proposals follow naturally from the Washington Declaration of a year ago, in which the United States, French and British Governments — it was then the Labour Government — expressed their desire to establish the closest possible association with the European Continental Community at all stages of its development. Her Majesty's Government have already taken certain steps in this direction. We shall be in the closest relations with the High Authority of the Coal and Steel Community through our newly appointed delegation. We have demonstrated our concern for the common economic problems of Europe by accepting the Chairmanship of the O.E.E.C. We have extended to all members of the European Defence Community the guarantee of automatic assistance against attack which we undertook under the Brussels Treaty. We have also suggested ways of associating our considerable armed forces in Europe with those of the European Defence Community for training, supply and other purposes. We have joined in signing a Protocol to the North Atlantic Treaty which extends to all members of the European Defence Community the assistance and safeguards provided under that Treaty. And, we recently declared, in conjunction with the United States, that we should regard any threat to the integrity or unity of the European Defence Community as a threat to our own security, and would act in accordance with Article 4 of the North Atlantic Treaty. Apart from these contractual and technical relationships, Britain is playing an essential part in the defence of Western Europe. In the air and on the sea our contribution is well known. And what is more, for the first time in modern history we now maintain important land forces on the Continent of Europe in peace-time. These include the largest armoured contingent of any power in Western Europe. These facts speak for themselves.

All of us here to-day, meeting in this European Assembly, have an equal concern for the future destiny of our Continent. Over the last few years we have sailed some rough seas together, and as a result of much effort and some courage we are better found than we were. The immediate risk of an aggression against Europe has sensibly diminished. This must be attributed to the firmness shown by the West and to the action taken to bind the free nations together in a defensive alliance. The North Atlantic Treaty and all that has flowed from it was the most important of these events on this side of the world. The resistance of the United Nations to aggression in Korea was its counterpart in the Far East.

Already it has been made plain that aggression will and can be resisted. The need now is to convince any would-be aggressor that an attack upon the West is too perilous a venture. Only by unity and strength can we put this beyond doubt. Thus, with patience and restraint, we can make possible a real negotiation and settlement of differences. I do not accept that what we are doing in any way diminishes the possibility of talks with the Soviet Union, or the chances of agreement, on any particular subject. Quite the reverse. All of us know that growing strength, exercised with restraint, is the way to peace. For we know that we in the West shall always use our strength for the purposes of peace.

We also know, by painful experience, how grievous is the burden which rearmament places on our economies. The problem we have to face now is to produce the maximum effort we can for common defence without putting too great a strain on the economic life of our people and without endangering the standard of life on which they depend. This is a preoccupation which is in all our thoughts. Most of us are faced, too, with the related problem of the unbalance between the dollar and the non-dollar world. This is one of the main preoccupations of the O.E.E.C. It will be one of the problems which the United Kingdom Government will be discussing with their Commonwealth partners this autumn. Somehow or other we in Europe have got to become more truly competitive in the world's markets. A tremendous effort of will-power, ingenuity and hard work is required.

And with all these tasks we have to remember the importance of preserving our democratic way of life, the traditions of European civilisation and the freedom of the individual.

In all this the Council of Europe can have an outstanding part to play. It is here that the broad problems can be discussed in common and thoughts exchanged on the progress we are making. It is here that a body of European doctrine can be built up, for example, in the matter of Human Rights — to guide our peoples and to fortify their faith. We live in an age when ideas are proving that they still have the ascendancy over

material things, despite the incredible advance of science. We have rejected Communism; we have to develop and strengthen the alternative faith. For even our growing material strength can be of little avail without that.

But, as we all know, the very diversity of our culture, the freedom and variety of our opinions, make it far more difficult for us to define our faith than it is for the exponents of totalitarian doctrines. No-one has yet succeeded in finding a formula to describe the democratic way of life which will satisfy any considerable number of his contemporaries. I am certainly not going to try. It may indeed be the essence of a free society that hardly any two members will give the same reasons for believing in it. The more our political system respects the diversity of human character and opinion, the more difficult it becomes to define it in clear-cut terms.

But even if we cannot define, we must agree about the urgency of defending our European way of life. Without that there would be no common purpose for our work here in the Council of Europe. After the war, as I have said, Europe lay stricken and grievously weakened. That stage is past. If we can set positive objectives before us, we may now move forward with an irresistible impulse to a new era in the history of our Continent. The sense of community, the consciousness of belonging to a European family, can be one element to inspire us. But we need more than that. We need also a robust faith and a broad confidence in our institutions, great and small. It is of very little use to build up new, centralised institutions if the lesser, local ones upon which they rest do not command respect. Confidence and pride in one's own nation are no obstacle to loyalty to a larger unit. On the contrary, I believe that we can best make a new Europe through confidence in our own institutions, local and central, national and international.

But to achieve this, one other condition is necessary; that our institutions should be founded upon respect for man. Here is what we know distinguishes our system from the totalitarian practice. Nothing reveals more clearly the bankruptcy of Communist policy than the campaign of hatred which they feel obliged to wage against the world at large. The whole object of their teaching today seems to be to produce division and hatred between man and man throughout the world. The germ warfare campaign, the incitement of the peoples of Asia and Africa against the West, the hostile propaganda which they pour out, hour by hour, against us in Europe and elsewhere. These are immediate examples that come to mind. Even their own people are cruelly deceived and abused by this. Natural instincts of friendliness are stifled. What can be the reason for a such policies? Can it be anything but a basic distrust and contempt; for human thought and opinion? Must it not be that their institutions are wrongly founded?

Our purpose must be the opposite of all this. It must be to unite and not to divide; to respect and not to despise our fellow men; to compose and not to embitter the differences which stand between us. That is a positive programme. It can be applied in all our actions. In all fields of international life we should use the same method. We should never be discouraged. There is nothing new in dictatorship. There is nothing original in trying to solve problems by force and tyranny. But to organise and unite modern society and at the same time preserve individual freedom, that is the difficult task. That is the challenge to statesmanship.

Meanwhile we have to recognise that the world is at varied stages of development. We here are learning the lesson of the interdependence of nations, so that we know that even the most powerful amongst us can achieve little by his own unaided efforts. At the same time others are imbibing for the first time the heady wine of nationalism and find it difficult as a consequence to distinguish between imperialist exploitation and a genuine offer of friendship. Here we must be patient. We must try to understand and try to guide and lead.

I should like to conclude by thanking the Assembly for the honour which you have conferred upon me today and for the support and encouragement which you have given to me. I should also like to thank your General Affairs Committee for their sympathetic approach to the U.K. proposals. These proposals have been put forward in the spirit of Western European unity. They seek to bind us all close together in our common enterprise. They represent one part — but a very important part — of the complex of relations within the Atlantic Community. Freedom in the West rests on the conjunction, in harmony and strength, of the British Commonwealth, Europe and the United States. If, through our work here, we can add something to the power and unity of the free world, we shall have fortified the present, and have served the future.