

Address given by Franco Maria Malfatti (Strasbourg, 14 March 1972)

Caption: On 14 March 1972, in Strasbourg, Franco Maria Malfatti, President of the Commission of the European Communities from 1 July 1970 to 21 March 1972, explains to the European Parliament the reasons for his resignation and the circumstances surrounding his decision.

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Address given by Franco Maria Malfatti, President of the Commission of the European Communities, to the European Parliament, Strasbourg, 14 March 1972

In my capacity as President of the Commission of the European Communities, I have asked to make a statement to the European Parliament, as is right and proper, concerning my resignation.

Over and above any personal aspects, this is a problem concerning the smooth running of the Community institutions and the Commission in particular.

It is with this in mind that I wish to give the European Parliament all the necessary clarifications.

A. I was appointed President of the Commission for a term of two years.

— I accepted this responsibility for a term of two years but I said from the very beginning that, at the end of my Presidency, I would be returning to Italy to continue my political battle.

— I believe that the Commission, which is the driving force in the European integration process, working together with the other Community institutions and with all the various forces in our countries, is a political institution which has very specific tasks: to submit proposals that are capable of advancing European integration and to uphold the treaties. If its political role is to be maintained, politicians must be prepared to become part of it. For this to happen, that is to say in the interest of the institution itself, these politicians must be able to continue to act as such after they have become part of the Commission.

— I also believe that the campaign to achieve European integration is not the exclusive prerogative of anyone, either a person or an institution, but that this campaign must be pursued by all individual people, by all political and social forces and by all national and Community institutions. This is the precondition for our success. That is what I said in my first statement to the European Parliament on 8 July 1970.

— When I accepted my appointment as President of the Commission two years ago, I came to Brussels to serve the European cause. Returning to national political life, I hope that, in the years to come, I shall be able to continue to serve the European cause, which is also inextricably linked to the fundamental interests of my country and to those of the other countries in the Community.

B. I would now like to clarify the legal situation regarding the Commission Presidency following my actual resignation. I say my actual resignation, because until then the situation is governed by the Commission's Rules of Procedure which provide that, in the absence of the President, his functions are to be exercised by the Vice-President appointed by those Rules of Procedure.

This appointment is made on the basis of a rotation system established by the Commission at the beginning of its term of office. We divided the 24 months scheduled for my Presidency into three periods of eight months, beginning with Vice-President Sicco Mansholt, continuing with Vice-President Raymond Barre and finishing with Vice-President Wilhelm Haferkamp. We are now in the final eight months, and the President's functions will be exercised during my leave of absence by Vice-President Haferkamp.

However, express provision is made in the Treaty for the situation following the resignation of the President. Article 14 of the Treaty merging the executive bodies requires the Member States to appoint a new President after consulting the Commission. This requirement holds, irrespective of my replacement as an Italian member of the Commission. This is the legal situation based on the mechanism that ensures the smooth running of the Commission in any event.

C. I shall now turn to the political situation at the time of my resignation. This is not a time of crisis for the Community but a time when it is undoubtedly being strengthened. To our general satisfaction, we are on the verge of creating the institutions for the Community of Ten. The Commission has made an important contribution towards the achievement of this aim, which is of key importance for the future of a united Europe.

Over these two years, the European integration process has progressed more than ever. We have succeeded in enlarging the Communities, the ongoing objective for which democratic forces in Europe have fought for years. No one can fail to recognise the Commission's role in this. The decision has been taken to create economic and monetary union in the next ten years. This decision was taken on the basis of our proposals, which were sometimes criticised but which were deliberately intended to facilitate an agreement which would otherwise have been impossible. And, if we took the first firm step in that direction one week ago, it was once again on the basis of our realistic proposals. For the first time in history, the Community has begun to take its own distinctive stance on the international monetary scene.

These last two years have seen the political cooperation process set in motion, a process which, after many discussions, had never managed to take off since way back in 1963. However, unlike the plans drawn up then, this process has been initiated today not outside the Community institutions but in cooperation with them. Admittedly, we have not achieved all our aims in this area, but it is an undoubted success for the Commission to have been involved in the preparatory work for the Conference on European Security.

With regard to external responsibilities, it is the Commission that deserves credit for taking the initiative to propose, last March, the holding of large-scale multilateral negotiations in 1973 in order to reform international economic relations, a reform which is incorrectly being called the 'second Kennedy Round'.

Lastly, this is not the first time since the creation of the Community that the Heads of State or Government have met, but it is the first time that the Commission has been involved from the outset in the preparations for the summit meeting.

What I am presenting here is not a review, and it is less still a display of triumphalism; it is an objective contribution — I hope — the purpose of which is to take stock of what we have done together over these last two years and to clarify where we have reached.

I am, therefore, firmly convinced that I am leaving not a weakened Commission but a Commission that has accepted and, I am sure, will continue to accept properly and fully its role in initiating policy.

I was appointed to be part of the Commission as a politician, and that I remained in my role as President of the Commission. I believe that, in the absence of direct elections to the European Parliament, it is in the interest of an institution like the Commission to allow national politicians to take on political responsibilities at Community level so that it can become fully integrated into the political life of each of the Community's Member States.

It is against this background that I accepted my two-year term of office as President of the Commission, and it is against this background that, in the light of the exceptional circumstances of the early elections in Italy, I have regretfully taken the decision to curtail my term of office as President of the Commission.

The commitment that I make to this Assembly is that, in the years to come, I shall continue my political activity in support of the great democratic objective of a united Europe.