

Lecture given by Guy Mollet (16 February 1951)


Caption: On 16 February 1951, in Paris, Guy Mollet, Secretary-General of the SFIO Socialist Party and Minister of State responsible for the Council of Europe, gives a lecture on the manner in which the Socialists view the European Union and the creation of a United States of Europe.

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How socialists see European union (16 February 1951)

Ladies and gentlemen,

I have been asked to speak to you tonight about the way that socialists perceive European union and the possible creation of a United States of Europe.

The answer to this question would appear to be as follows: socialists would like to see all the countries of Europe become socialist and therefore federated, i.e. work towards the creation of the United Socialist States of Europe. This was also the hope of socialist party militants who supported federalism — as you know, our earliest movement was for a long time called ‘Movement for the United Socialist States of Europe’ — which means we already passed this stage some years ago.

Socialists and the European idea

The representatives of 18 socialist parties of the free countries of Europe came together at one of the annual conferences held by our international organisation (COMISCO), with our great friend Léon Blum acting as rapporteur. The conference decided unanimously that socialist militants would join forces with other non-socialist democrats who nonetheless held the same views on the defence of peace and freedom, in order to build a United States of free Europe. The final resolution, adopted unanimously, stated that a United States of free Europe, viewed as a step towards the unification of the world, was the best way peacefully to achieve the economic, social, political and cultural objectives of these countries’ workers.

This is an important date for socialists. It is important in terms simply of European unification; yet it is also important in itself, for this was the first time that an idea that was not specifically socialist was taken up by the various countries’ socialist movements, which undertook to do their utmost to bring this idea out of the realm of speculation and make it a reality.

This brings us to a first question: what led the representatives of the socialist parties to this conclusion? Was it legitimate for traditional adherents of internationalism in its broadest sense to confine themselves to building a United States of Europe, relinquishing the wishful dreams of those who believe that our planet needs a universal government and still live in hope of seeing a United States of the World created one day?

The UN and Europe

It is true that for many socialists the only international solution has to be at world level. There is little point in reminding you how, in the course of our history, men for whom we have the greatest affection and whose opinion we hold in the highest regard, from Jaurès to Blum — and including many others, men like Briand, or Jouvenel — devoted the best part of their lives to bringing the various countries of the world together, whether under the umbrella of the League of Nations or of the United Nations. Even more recently, at the end of the war, we and others shared a great hope, when the signing of the Charter in San Francisco gave birth to the UN. Unfortunately, however laudable the efforts of the League of Nations, and however important its achievements — which must not be trivialised — we have to recognise that as things now stand it would be vain to hope for world unification through the efforts of the UN alone.

First of all, our international organisation is still paralysed by the veto rule. Furthermore, the differences between the nations as a whole in cultural as in economic and social terms remain such that it would be rather far-fetched to dream of rapidly achieving a world government. For that reason, because we want to break out of the straitjacket of nations but know we cannot attain the wider, planetary framework of our dreams, we have ended up with the idea of a free Europe ...

Our great hope

We would have liked to see Europe as a whole united, since Europe should not really begin a couple of hundred kilometres west of Berlin and end at the western shores of France or the Netherlands. The real,

geographical Europe begins at the Urals and ends at the Atlantic shores of Great Britain and Ireland. We should have built this Europe immediately after the most recent bloodbath. Many of us cherished that great hope, we socialists perhaps longer than anyone. We were probably the last to go on refusing to accept the division of Europe ... Our international socialist organisation has kept in contact with representatives of the socialist parties of the countries on the other side of the 'iron curtain'. It was with real despair in our heart that we had to break off relations with our erstwhile friends, Hungarians, Poles, Romanians and, more recently, Czechs. We were able to remain in contact only with those groups who now face the terrors of working underground or living in exile ...

The USSR against European unity

It was not our fault or that of European democrats in general that it proved impossible to create the Europe we would have wished for. We have to say, without too much bitterness, that responsibility for this failure lies solely and entirely with the USSR. Take the latest example: when the first American offer was put to Europe, the USSR did not refuse it immediately but participated in the activities of the Paris Conference for several days. The real tragedy that undermined both the creation of Europe and perhaps world peace was that when the USSR decided that it had to reject this offer, the other countries in its sphere of influence followed suit.

A brief aside: today people very often accuse us in particular and others too of having given up our support for national independence. The politest reproaches are along the lines that we have become 'flunkies' or 'lackeys' in the pay of the Americans.

It is easy to show that we remain as committed as ever to national independence. In any case, if any reproaches are to be made, under no circumstances could they come from people who are scarcely qualified to teach us any lessons.

Looking back to this period, you will find that it was not 16 but 17 states that accepted the first Marshall Aid proposal. I need not remind you that on receiving a phone call, citizen Gottwald, the then Vice-President of the Council — he may still be President today for all we know — went to Moscow. Forty-eight hours later he told us he had made a mistake ... we should not have understood him to say 'yes', he had meant to say 'no'. This attitude to national independence certainly does not encourage us to take certain strictures seriously.

What is important is that as from that day, the break was complete. It meant that we ended up with the stunted Europe that many people today tend to describe as 'Western'. We socialists try to avoid that term and would prefer it not to be used, because such a purely geographical division of Europe does not tally with reality. What unites the peoples of Europe is something quite different.

What unites the nations of free Europe

What unites this remaining part of Europe is not a chance of geography that has placed us one beside the other: it is a shared concept of the world, a shared concept of democracy and freedom. That is why we often refer to 'free' Europe and we want to keep to our preferred term. It changes everything ... For while our concept of democracy and freedom may restrict the number of participant countries, whether or not they are situated in Western Europe — and here I am thinking of a country that does not meet the criterion of defending democracy or freedom, regardless of fine words — at the same time it has the huge advantage of expanding the basis on which we have united to a global context.

A common concept

The message that free Europe sends out to the world goes far beyond the confines of its mere geographical borders. It could not be otherwise given that the various countries of Europe are uniting not as neighbours, not in pursuit of common interests, but on the basis of a common concept of life, both private and public.

The Preamble and Chapter II of the Statute of the Council of Europe (a Council that is still embryonic but already very much alive and full of hope) state as follows:

‘Reaffirming their devotion to the spiritual and moral values which are the common heritage of their peoples and the true source of individual freedom, political liberty and the rule of law, principles which form the basis of all genuine democracy;’

Article 3 adds:

‘Every member of the Council of Europe must accept the principles of the rule of law and of the enjoyment by all persons within its jurisdiction of human rights and fundamental freedoms.’

Moreover, every member undertakes to uphold these ideas at home and abroad.

Like you, I am profoundly convinced that beyond the ‘iron curtain’, in the Soviet bloc, millions of women and men are equally committed to the same fundamental principles; that beyond Europe, in the immense and wealthy American continent, millions of men, grouped in vast trade union organisations, vast democratic movements, share the same hope and the same resolve ...

Given, therefore, that the message sent out by the Council of Europe is valid at world level, socialists believe that its aim becomes easy to accept, especially because the people of a Europe united on these bases will certainly come to support our concepts.

A united Europe means peace

What would a free Europe offer?

A free Europe, a united Europe, is above all a factor of peace. Many of those who believe in the idea of European unification have understood this. This concept of Europe as a factor of peace has probably also encouraged more and more people to support the idea of European union over the past few years and months. In fact, it would be hard to imagine now that any European country could defend itself alone if it was under attack, even if it devoted all its energy, all its men, all its wealth, to that end. No politician, of whatever party, could maintain that we can still legitimately speak of national defence. We must all realise that this issue, like many others, can no longer be dealt with in a purely national framework. What does this mean?

If Europe, by uniting, became strong enough in every field, economic, social, political and, I would add without any reservations, military, not only could it ensure its security — highly important as that is — it would also be able to hold discussions on an equal footing with other parts of the world (which is also highly important since, alas, we live in a period when the strong, the ‘big’ countries, only hold discussions with other strong and ‘big’ countries); lastly, and just as importantly, it could guarantee its independence.

Let me make it clear that we are certainly not envisaging a Europe that, thanks to being united and strong, tried to stand aloof from international issues and to declare itself neutral in the current debate. In the world in which we live, there is no room for neutrality! ... unless you want to be crushed.

No national defence without European defence

We have no intention of seeing our Europe turn into a larger-scale Korea, occupied one moment and liberated the next. We want to preserve it, keep it intact, and keep its independence intact.

Now, if it is true that no European country is capable of ensuring its own defence, it is perhaps even more true, and for the same reasons, that no European country is capable, in isolation, of ensuring its national independence in the long run. Today there can be no national defence without European defence, no national independence without European independence.

The Europe that we want to build could not, therefore, be a neutral Europe. We want it to be prepared to defend itself against aggression, willing to be a faithful ally that meets all its commitments while also firmly resolved to guarantee its full independence; and it knows the value of independence and is as attached to it as anyone.

Building Europe can therefore be a factor of peace. That is the first point.

As I said, many of our fellow-citizens, aware of the growing threats to peace in Europe and the world, have come to support the concept of a new Europe, based on the necessary alliances and agreements.

Before it is too late

I said it in Strasbourg, and I repeat it at every opportunity: federalist that I am, and have always been, it is a rather bitter thought that the factor that federates Europe may well be fear, the resolve to combat war.

Those who believe today in the need for Europe must surely perceive that if the risks and threats were to decline tomorrow, there would be other reasons that made European unification even more important.

Defence is not the only reason that we need to build Europe. To think otherwise would be the greatest confession of impotence by 20th-century man. It would suggest that we were capable, with respect to war and in times of war, of doing things of which we proved incapable with respect to peace or in times of peace.

I often refer to these words by President Spaak (which I am sure you have read): ‘Do democracies really always have to be late and have to await the hour of danger before they hear the hour of wisdom sound?’

Let me also return briefly to a time that you will all remember, given your interest in European union, to the time in 1940 when the great British nation offered to unite with France. That union between France and Great Britain would have been more complete than anything that we dream of building. Why? Because, in a time of common adversity they saw the need for a common organisation.

Like all those who want European union, we socialists hope that the peoples will not wait to be faced with another such misfortune and that they will prove capable of doing as much to prevent war as they would be forced to do if they had to repair or suffer the damage of war.

So we need to build Europe not only in order to establish peace; we must also do so for the sake of the European economy and its advance along the road of social progress.

Economic unification

Is there any economic or social problem whatsoever that we could hope to resolve in a strictly national framework today? Certainly not, and nobody doubts this. Nevertheless, even though everyone agrees, the efforts to achieve unification are moving slowly.

Yet a Europe exhausted by war and deprived of its foreign investment is quite different from the Europe of some 50 or even 30 years ago. It is no longer what it was for several generations: the workshop of the world. Now it has to reckon with the newly industrialised countries. Its almost permanent trade deficit would already have spelled disaster had not Marshall Aid provided the necessary respite; but even this would be useless unless Europe used it to forge the economic weapons of its salvation.

Make no mistake: Marshall Aid is not a solution. At most it can be the spark that gets the European motor running again. We must be prepared, so that as soon as this aid comes to an end we can continue under our own steam.

Now as it stands, fragmented and chequered, Europe could neither recover its position in international trade nor, which is of most concern to us socialists, prevent a decline in its living standards; once again the chief victim would be the working class. We must therefore make serious changes to the structure of European trade and create and develop industries. We must realise that this can be achieved only in a broader framework, in the huge unified market made up of nearly 300 million inhabitants. This market represents a gigantic force when we think of the part that the various overseas territories could play in an enlarged European union that included them.

Economic *détente*, the abolition of customs barriers, a reduction in taxes and duties, a more or less rapid and complete return to the free movement of persons and goods: these are all reforms that, however desirable, can be achieved only if at the same time we pursue a policy of practical economic coordination. It is quite clear — and this is a problem that comes up every day in the countries of Europe — that we must avoid returning to the various cartels of private interests we saw operating before the war, cartels that had such a disastrous influence and would now like to take revenge for the defeats that they suffered in the countries in which they tried to establish themselves.

If we work towards coordinating economies that exclude these cartels, the united Europe that this would produce could not only be a living entity but would also be able to offer the peoples that make it up a better status. If, however, we do not achieve this coordination, the various countries may well collapse, one after the other, through hardship or war. We are not alone in saying this: every statesman has repeated it, and only last year one of them firmly maintained that the real problem for European countries was whether to seek salvation together or to perish one by one.

A new political structure

These imperatives in regard to the defence of peace and at economic and social level are joined by another, at political level. We must give the modern world new structures and create the necessary institutions. It would not suffice to seek solutions at economic level. It may surprise you to hear a socialist speak in these terms, but surely everyone realises that the constant affirmation of the primacy of economics over politics lies at the very heart of socialist thinking.

It would be deluded and dangerous to believe that economic agreements are now sufficient. Sadly we now know that economic achievements, however enduring, do not always, or necessarily, lead to the political developments for which we might have hoped.

Here I should like to quote some words that struck us at the 1948 conference. The great writer Ignazio Silone, a member of the Italian Socialist Party, said: ‘The entire experience of modern socialism reminds us that a culture of cannibals can grow from the economic basis of collectivism and that we can no longer expect political and cultural development as an automatic product of economic factors.’

We must, therefore, create a new political structure. That is why, in many parts of Europe, the representatives of socialist parties have sought to play their part in the difficult process of European integration, and especially in the Consultative Assembly of the Strasbourg Council of Europe; they have sought to fight side by side with other democrats in order to build this new structure, at political, constitutional and institutional level. This gave rise to the difficulties of which you will have been told elsewhere and which I shall describe in my turn.

‘Functionalists’ and federalists

One of these difficulties is the contrast between northern (British and Scandinavian) and southern Europeans (who apparently include us, to the surprise of some, especially our Belgian friends). Most northern

Europeans have very their own particular concept of institutions. Basically they are ‘functionalists’ (I did not invent this neologism) and regard southerners as federalists (this is slightly less true than the other side suggests, for federalists are, alas, far from being in the majority in our country). Yet we must admit that there is some truth in this distinction. Most peoples of Latin origin to some extent deserve the reproach of being too concerned with specifics, with a carefully defined framework, with a well-made constitution. When our British or Scandinavian friends speak of this aspect of our temperament, they say that we define a framework and once we have done so we try to breathe life into it, even at the cost of somewhat damaging that life or breaking out of the framework. Often, indeed, rather than calling us ‘federalists’ they prefer the term ‘constitutionalists’ and contrast our method with theirs. They declare that they do not need a written constitution (which is true, at least, of British constitutional law): custom takes its place. They use existing institutions, and then make them ‘function’ by running them in, by driving them as best they can towards the jointly defined goal, without establishing a framework in advance, without a formal, written constitution. They call this empirical method the ‘functional method’.

Since I know the ‘northerners’ well, having spent much time with our British friends and some time with our Scandinavian friends, I believed at first, and for some time in fact, that this would prove a real and well-nigh insurmountable stumbling block. I have a confession to make: I no longer believe this. After 18 months in the Council of Europe, more specifically in the General Affairs Committee, I now know otherwise. True, if the next session sees a repeat of the splendid theoretical debates, the superb academic discussions between supporters of the ‘federal approach’ and supporters of the ‘functional approach’, not only will the two sides not come closer together, their views will become entrenched and the differences between them even wider. Nevertheless, experience has taught me that whenever federalists and functionalists sit round a table to consider a practical problem, they find a solution by working together. Federalist that I am and always have been, I am now entirely in favour of the functional method, provided it produces results.

A question of pace

Another difficulty, which we are told is just as serious — no doubt you have heard the same — is the widening gulf between the same two groups that we saw before, northerners and southerners, who this time are split into ‘minimalists’ and ‘maximalists’ (the terms are self-explanatory). The former are accused not only of slowing down the progress towards a united Europe but even of being opposed to it deep down and of doing their utmost to prevent it ever happening. As for the latter, they repeat indefatigably, year after year, that this is a grave moment, time is short, it is now a matter of weeks, if not days or hours. Each group accuses the other of preventing the whole project from working.

Once again, we must admit that there is a grain of truth on both sides. In a moment I shall turn to the reasons why some representatives in the Council of Europe, in particular the northern groups, are slowing down progress. Quite a few of the maximalists are neophytes: having very recently discovered the concept of a united Europe, they now show great surprise at the slow pace of achievement.

Time certainly is short. This means that we must move as quickly as we can; yet just because we are not moving as quickly as we should like, this does not mean we should despair or accept as a foregone conclusion an outcome that we can still fight.

Last year in Strasbourg, after some well-meaning colleagues condemned the entire project because ‘it was not moving fast enough’, it was my pleasure to repeat an anecdote told by Charles Péguy.

Three young seminarists in the Basque country were playing pelota. Suddenly, one of them stopped: ‘What would we do if we were told that the world would end in a quarter of an hour’s time?’ The first replied: ‘I would think of my mother ...’ The second said: ‘I would go down on my knees and pray to God ...’ Then it was the questioner’s turn: ‘I would suggest that we go on playing pelota.’

We are certainly not facing the end of the world in a quarter of an hour and we are not playing games. Yet I would wish us the same serenity, the same calm, as that young student and say that we must continue with our quest for European integration, for that is probably the way in which to save it and ourselves.

If this is the case, however, if the contrast between ‘maximalists’ and ‘minimalists’, ‘federalists’ and ‘functionalists’, is merely theoretical, where are the real differences?

Sovereignty and national independence

We often come up against a very serious political objection: some countries find it hard to surrender part of their national sovereignty. This position is not as clear-cut as the arguments might sometimes lead to believe. Most of these countries have already surrendered part of their national sovereignty within certain international organisations, especially in the defence field.

Just as man has gradually surrendered part of his sovereignty to the ‘community’, just as citizens have given up part of their own sovereignty to the nation, similarly nations must agree to give up part of their national sovereignty to international organisations.

I want to draw particular attention to a confusion that we often still find in the mind of a number of our fellow-citizens between national sovereignty and national independence. There is a risk of this confusion in the attacks currently levelled against us. Every time that we democrats of whatever persuasion, including socialists, propose that our country should surrender a necessary part of its national sovereignty, our opponents cry out (and not always in good faith): ‘So you would agree to surrender a part of our national independence?’ I cannot think of more cautionary words than those spoken by Léon Blum. During the 1948 conference which I mentioned, he made a remarkable and much remarked-upon speech, concluding as follows:

‘What I call “independence” at international level is more or less equivalent to human rights and citizens’ rights at national level, in a national framework. However, “sovereignty” as it is currently perceived goes infinitely further. “Sovereignty” at international level would be equivalent, within a national framework, to freedom with no restriction, no limits, no appeal, no judge: I am free, I am sovereign, I do what I please; it is nobody else’s business; I could not care less how my actions might affect others.’

He ended thus:

‘To summarise my thoughts, I would say that the aim then would be to reduce sovereignty to the limits of independence and that consequently we must transfer to the international or European community all those parts of sovereignty that reach beyond “independence”.’

So this is where we come up against one of the greatest obstacles to our action, and one that we must overcome.

British reservations

An even greater obstacle is that the European countries have different ideas on how to resolve economic and social problems. This is a fundamental issue. Some countries tend toward a more or less generalised system of economic planning, others want to return to certain forms of liberalism; as a result, the former fear that what has been achieved at national level will be jeopardised at European level.

At times, it is true, the arguments take on a more selfish or more national tone; some of the conflicts that often arise between us and our British friends are of a different nature.

It is quite clear that many of our British friends feel, deep down, the desire or hope that thanks to the Commonwealth Britain will almost by itself regain its position as a great nation in the world, perhaps going so far as to give up its idea of ‘leadership’ of Europe and confine itself to ‘leadership’ of the Commonwealth. Apart from this view, which may be shared by our British friends, there is a position that is quite certainly taken by the Labour Party itself and which informs its economic doctrine: if people strongly believe in the need for certain social improvements and in full employment, it is in my view legitimate —

and comprehensible at least, for those who do not share this conviction — that they should not want to sacrifice the best of their achievements on the altar of European union. What they fear, in regard to European Union, is not so much the method of unification ...

The Scandinavians, and in nearly every instance our friends in the Netherlands, rally behind our British friends.

Europe without Great Britain?

This obviously sparked off reactions in the Council of Europe, as it inevitably did in all the movements concerned with European unification. During this struggle for Europe, we have found friends, partners, who have concluded that if it proves impossible to build Europe with Great Britain and the Scandinavian countries, let us simply unite those who agree to be united and create a federal Europe with those who want to do so.

Some people think that this view harks back to an old dream from the days when men who strongly believed in the European idea took some successful measures. They dreamed of creating what they themselves christened the 'Europe of Charlemagne'.

Others have accepted this view reluctantly because they see themselves as realists. Since progress has been too slow in the other direction, they say, let us try this one. Generally they add that if we set off in this direction, then the British, who are also realists, will follow suit.

Let me quite simply and openly give you the socialist response to this, which I defined at our last session in Strasbourg.

An unacceptable idea

First, however, let us consider what union within a free Europe would mean if it excluded Great Britain, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Ireland, Iceland and the Netherlands (for the leaders of the Netherlands have stated unconditionally that in this event they would side with Great Britain).

One of the most highly qualified Belgian representatives, whom I have had the pleasure to welcome this evening — he represented his country in Paris at the Interparliamentary Council of the European Movement — told us in no uncertain terms: 'you would not get two members of the Belgian Parliament to vote in favour of this kind of proposal.' Luxembourg would certainly follow suit. Apart from Turkey and Greece, which would probably also follow the British example, what countries would be left? Italy, Germany and France.

French socialists quite simply, and with no hesitation, say no to this kind of proposal!

No, because we are socialists. It is all too clear that a union that was so restricted in economic terms would be bound to be detrimental to the French economy and in particular to French workers. (I shall not dwell on this; it is too obvious).

No, because we are Europeans. To suggest that the only way to unify a Europe that is already embryonic and already terribly fragmented would be to mutilate it even further is a paradox to which we could not subscribe. Anyway, in that case, could we continue to speak of Europe? Would Europe not be, at most, a piecemeal organisation of small groups? This would have nothing in common with the real concept of Europe.

No, lastly and without further comment, because we are French. We certainly appreciate and have great sympathy for the major efforts made by representatives of all the democratic parties in Germany and Italy, and for all that they have done to re-acustom these two nations to living together in a world based on democracy. Not only do we salute them, we are also resolved to help them as much as we can. But to move

on from there to the idea of a union confined to Germany, Italy and France — i.e. basically in opposition to those who were once our allies — once again, no!

We must pursue our efforts

In that case, you will ask me, what can we do? Yours is a negative approach. You have destroyed many things ... What conclusion do you propose?

There is only conclusion that I can see. First of all, it is to forge ahead with the overall project. We must continue our attempts at persuasion and propaganda and, let me stress this point, not just at home but abroad too. In this instance, it is not so much a question of convincing the militants of the French federalist movements, but far more the representatives of the various northern countries, Great Britain and Scandinavia, where we need to launch a huge propaganda campaign. Some of their arguments may be serious. It is not a matter of disputing the value of these arguments, although they are, we must admit, a touch selfish. We simply have to tell them, as did Mr Bevin, their Foreign Minister, that either we shall seek salvation together or we shall perish one by one, that if the continental European countries really were to succumb one by one to adversity or war because of their isolation, nothing could prevent our Scandinavian or British friends from suffering the same fate in the near future.

We are more likely to rally our British and northern European friends by real achievements than by efforts at persuasion. We must lay far more emphasis on this than on theoretical or philosophical discussions. But that is easier said than done.

An important proposal

Yet changes are already occurring, although they may not be spectacular, provide food for major speeches or fine words or make the newspaper headlines. One important event has, however, recently occurred in regard to European integration. Our Swedish friends have submitted a proposal for the unification of the OEEC and the Council of Europe. Surely this is a far more constructive proposal than any proposed amendments to the rules and regulations.

Imagine a European organisation supported, economically, by research, by remarkable work done by the finest team of international experts that Europe could assemble, and with enough time to secure the opinion of parliamentarians on a given subject; this would be the most vital and productive organisation, automatically destined to play a real part in European life. For if it is true, as many say, that the function creates the organ, conversely, I am sure that, as soon as an organ of that kind came into being, it would not take long for it to function, to become the embryo not perhaps of a parliament at this stage but at least of a European authority in this field.

Two major initiatives

The Schuman Plan and the 'Green Pool'

Although I am not sure that everyone would agree with me, I believe that one area in which it is easier to make progress and where it is at all events more important to gain ground is that of specialist authorities. That is where we can make headway with the European idea and that is where we must set to work. France has already proposed pooling European coal and steel resources; I was about to say the Schuman Plan ... (*President Schuman is in the Chamber*).

That is probably one of the most promising examples that we have ever seen in terms of the opportunities for European integration.

Tomorrow our Council of Ministers will consider a French proposal for pooling Europe's agricultural and food resources. At the same time, a serious and quite far-reaching study will be carried out, headed by one of France's representatives in the Council of Europe, on a project to unify the European transport system.

In this area, as in many others, it is possible if not easy to make headway, but on one condition: in regard to the methods used and results obtained, we must do our utmost to ensure that all the European countries take part immediately in European union, or at least have the means, the wish and the desire to take part at a later date.

Europe is born in Strasbourg

Ladies and gentlemen, these are the objectives, the difficulties and, finally, the means of achieving success. We are advancing with difficulty, certainly, and perhaps too slowly, but nevertheless surely. It is easy enough to point to the slow pace and inadequacies of our action. In reality, although it is scarcely 18 months old, the Council of Europe has already brought many changes. First of all, it has managed to assert itself. It is now taken seriously by all the major international organisations. It is the forum where, for the first time in the history of Europe, people of different persuasions sit side by side, speaking as men rather than as representatives of their respective nations. This is as great a revolution as the one that enabled the members of the National Assembly of 26 June 1789 to vote in person rather than as a body.

The attitude of mind in Strasbourg has changed to an extraordinary degree. You need to have experienced this transformation. At its first session, during the first two days, a Swede, a Dutchman, an Italian and a Frenchman took the floor in turn. The Swede said ‘on behalf of my government’; the Frenchman spoke ‘on behalf of the French delegation ...’ This hardly lasted three days. After those three days, each delegation wanted to make it clear that it could no longer be a question of ‘representatives’ of this or that delegation; all that remained was a number of parliamentarians speaking out of their own conviction, using their human judgment. For the first time, these men thought and spoke as *Europeans*.

So we have no right to judge the Council’s activities so severely. We must urge those who want too much too soon to be less impatient and to allow those who want the whole of Europe to unite to get on with their work. At the same time and in the same way, we must dispel the reservations of the timid and the hesitant, and not allow them, as they so often do, to use the mistakes of the former (for which they are often to blame by inciting and fuelling them) as a pretext for paralysing all action.

That is how we shall move towards a United States of Europe. And since I have chosen in my conclusion to use that term, for those of you who have not had a chance to read it up, let me take you back briefly to the debate during which this expression was used for the first time.

When Victor Hugo spoke of a United States of Europe

A colleague of mine has discovered some documents from which it appears that on 17 July 1851, Victor Hugo, then an MP — called a ‘representative’ in those days — spoke as follows before the Legislative Assembly (this was a debate on amending the Constitution, which only goes to show how easily the same problems crop up again and again in France), displaying the methodical style so typical of him, full of wonderful flights of oratory:

‘The French people have carved out of indestructible stone and placed in the midst of the old monarchic continent the first brick of this immense construction that one day will be named “the United States of Europe”.’

The *Moniteur* (the *Official Journal* of the time), noted, after those words: ‘Unrest in the Chamber. Prolonged laughter on the right’ (*Laughter in the Chamber on this occasion as well*).

In the margin of a book belonging to the poet, and now carefully preserved in the Victor Hugo Museum, we read this handwritten note:

‘This term “United States of Europe” was greeted with surprise ... it was new. It is in this speech that it was used for the first time. It infuriated the right and also greatly entertained it. There were shouts of laughter,

mingled with rude remarks of all kinds. Representative Bancel picked up some of them and noted them down. Here they are:

Mr de Montalembert: — “United States of Europe? That’s a bit much! Victor Hugo is mad.”

A certain Mr Molé (*Sustained laughter*).

(I hope that all I have in common with that gentleman is the sound of his name!)

Mr Molé: — “The United States of Europe! What a thought, quite over the top!”

Finally, Mr Quentin Bauchat: — “Those poets! ...”

Yes, at the time it was but a poet’s dream. But did not poets have a certain gift of divining the future? And should we not repeat with Victor Hugo and after him what he said in magnificent verses about the poet as magus: ‘with the torch that he bears he sets the future ablaze’?

(*Sustained ovation.*)