

Address given by Jacques Chirac to the Bundestag entitled Our Europe (Berlin, 27 June 2000)

Caption: In an address given in the Bundestag on 27 June 2000 in Berlin, Jacques Chirac, French President, announces the start of a transitional phase towards an institutional recasting of the European Union. Chirac proposes that an initial consideration seeking the restructuring of the treaties, open to all, might pave the way for the first European Constitution. The French President also suggests the setting up of a ‘pioneer group’ of countries which, together with Germany and France, would take part in all forms of enhanced cooperation.

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Mr President of the Bundestag,
Mr Federal President,
Mr Federal Chancellor,
Honourable Members,
and may I convey my especial greetings to the Members of the French National Assembly here today.

Thank you, Mr President, for this great moment, one which neither my countrymen nor I will ever forget. Thank you for inviting me to speak to the German parliament here, in this building which bears the marks of your country's sufferings but now stands as the dazzling symbol of modern Germany.

For half a century the Reichstag, a gaping wound in the heart of a divided Berlin, ruined, never rebuilt, remained the symbol of the pain and expectations of an entire people — the symbol of a Europe torn in two. And how right it was that when Germany, and then our continent, rediscovered themselves, German democracy should once again have set up home here, tying up the loose ends of History and, at last, bringing this tragic parenthesis to a close.

As you have said, I am among those who have always hoped and always waited for the time when Germany would recover its unity and its capital. Imagine, then, how moved I am to be the first foreign Head of State to speak to the whole of Germany from this podium! Germany, our neighbour, our enemy in the past, our companion today! United Germany! Germany in her own house!

Today, my thoughts go to all those men and women who have made it possible for the dream of generations of Germans to come true. To those men of conviction and vision who helped their nation believe in its future. To those men and women who, in that city on the banks of the Rhine which welcomed the Federal Republic, gave the Republic its institutions and its values. To those men and women who raised the country up from its ruins, rebuilt it and placed before the world, at the cost of a lavish outpouring of intelligence, work and sacrifices, their testimony to an extraordinary achievement. To those men and women who have restored Germany to its place in the front rank of the world's nations.

But first of all my thoughts go to the statesmen who, in both our countries, embarked on the historic reconciliation of Germany and France. How bold and brave they had to be, when the war was hardly over, to talk to each other in the language of trust and cooperation. The wonder is also that, at each vital stage, our two countries found men to consolidate the rapprochement and take it still further.

At the outset it was Konrad Adenauer and General de Gaulle who kept their appointment with History and found a way to open up, I would even say to force a way along, the path that we are travelling together.

My mind goes to Willy Brandt and Georges Pompidou.

I think, too, of Helmut Schmidt and Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, who stimulated the growth of Franco-German solidarity and encouraged Europe to take fresh steps forward.

Lastly, I want to take this opportunity to salute Helmut Kohl and tell him that the enormous amount of work that he did with François Mitterrand to further strengthen European cohesion and the European identity remains graven on the memory of the peoples of France and Europe.

It will soon be 40 years since General de Gaulle, on a visit to the Federal Republic of Germany, spoke of Franco-German friendship in these words: 'The reason why we have embarked on rapprochement and then a union between us, events which will be among the most significant in History, is so that we can work together. A union, so that on this old continent of ours there will be a centre equal in power, prosperity and authority to the United States. A union, too, so that when the time comes the whole of Europe will be able to secure its equilibrium, its peace and its development. And lastly,' he said, 'and perhaps most importantly,

because of the enormous task of ensuring human progress which the world must undertake and of which a combination of the values of Europe, and primarily our values, can and must be the major feature.'

Ladies and gentlemen, 40 years have passed. The ambition, though to a large degree realised, remains.

Take prosperity first. The European Union is now the world's largest economic and trading power, a giant in research and innovation. Franco-German cooperation, emulation and synergy have been one of its most powerful driving forces. Now that groups large enough to succeed in the severe competition for world markets are being set up, the peoples of Germany and France quite naturally turn to each other.

We took a historic step forward with the adoption of the euro, another project which enjoyed joint German-French backing from the outset and which has been a success. With the euro, we have consolidated the unification of the single European market and equipped ourselves with a powerful instrument for boosting trade. We have anchored in the minds of our fellow citizens a sense of belonging to a single economic entity and, beyond that, a political and human entity. The people of Europe now have their own currency.

Then come the balance, peace and development of the whole continent. The main proof of how successful European integration has been is certainly the powerful attractive force that it exerts on those peoples of Europe who were separated from us for so long. The dazzling success of Europe made it daily more absurd that there should still be totalitarian regimes in power at its very gates and that our continent, particularly Germany, should be divided. The whole of Europe remembers those magic moments when Berliners from east and west, defying the Wall of Shame, joined together to launch the signal of freedom to the peoples living under oppression.

Europe, lastly, a militant and an active force for progress in the world. What brought Germany and France and their partners together was, of course, the deep-seated longing of their peoples for peace. But it was also, and perhaps even in the first instance, a certain idea of what it is to be human which gave the European project its horizon of freedom, dignity, tolerance and democracy. That is why belonging to the Union means subscribing unreservedly to the ideals and values which underpin it.

Beyond its frontiers, the European Union is making its voice heard. It calls for a more balanced international system of organising trade which is attentive to individual well-being and respectful of the world's cultural diversity. It calls for true solidarity between rich and poor countries and sets an example through an active development aid policy. It calls, and it acts, for peace and for an end to barbarity.

I am thinking, of course, of our joint commitment in Bosnia and Kosovo, a clear sign of the profound significance which both our countries attach to our European project — that moral imperative which unites us and which to our minds constitutes grounds for Europe, with due respect for its alliances, to equip itself now with the means of pursuing its own foreign and security policy.

Here, in the Bundestag, I want to salute the historic decision that Germany has taken in agreeing, for the first time in more than half a century, to despatch soldiers to a theatre of operations outside its borders. The German people have done this in the name of respect for individual human dignity. Germany's commitment, its rank as a great world power, its international influence — France wants to see all these acknowledged in the form of a permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council!

Ladies and gentlemen, in three days' time France will be taking over the Presidency of the European Union. It will be responsible for implementing decisions with an impact on the future. I have in mind, of course, the first of these: the absolutely vital task of reforming our common institutions, which we shall conduct, I know, with the support of our German partners.

France will have to see that progress is made on a number of important projects. One of these is the defence of Europe. We hope to be able to press ahead further with this, in line with the substantial progress made in the space of a few months, particularly under the German Presidency.

We also want a Europe which is closer to its citizens. People in the Union must all be in a position to gauge the benefits that it brings them in their day-to-day lives. At the moment there are many Europeans who actually regard it as being a little abstract, too far removed from their real concerns: growth, employment and training, justice and security, the battle against drug-trafficking and clandestine immigration networks, the environment and health, and other issues too. In all these fields, we must find ways of making progress in the next six months.

Looking beyond these immediate commitments, however, our responsibility as founder members is to keep asking ourselves what Europe means and what its future should be, and never to let our resolve weaken. I salute the profoundly European spirit which prevailed here, just recently, at the resumption of a debate where the issues at stake are, in the truest sense, matters of life and death. A debate which involves our nations and our peoples, their history and their identity, and which affects the very manner in which our societies are organised, the will and capacity of Europeans to take the Union further. This is no small matter! There are times when you have to know how to take risks. To abandon the well-trodden ways. That is what it will cost to press ahead with the great venture of the European Union!

And here, in Berlin, I should like to light up the way, to share my beliefs with you, to consider future prospects with you.

My first belief is that enlargement of the European Union is a great, legitimate and necessary ambition. It is under way already. It will be difficult for the candidate countries and for the Member States alike, but, in the future, there will be 30 or more countries represented in Brussels, Strasbourg and Luxembourg.

That is an achievement! An achievement for peace and democracy, firmly rooted in our continent, and something which gives our shared enterprise its full meaning. For the candidate countries, sustained in their fight for freedom by the hope of joining us. For the Union itself, which will be made stronger by it, politically and economically.

All the same, though, the demands on us are clear. Enlargement is not going to turn into a stampede. We shall not let the European project unravel when you and we, with our partners, over nearly half a century, have put so much determination and so much energy into it. And it is a project which has given us so much, not just peace but also economic success and hence social progress. A project which, for us all, has proved to be a tremendous factor in the increase of power. In the years to come our Union will not be quite what it was, but it will not be watered down, nor will it slide backwards. Our responsibility is to make sure that this does not happen.

Another of my beliefs is that the rate of European integration cannot be dictated. To a large extent it is governed by how quickly a feeling of a European identity and of belonging to Europe, of a 'desire to live together' in a mutually supportive community, makes progress among our peoples. And I am confident about this because that feeling is growing stronger and stronger, especially among young people.

Lastly, I think that I need to throw some light on the discussion about the nature of the Union. It is a distortion of the truth to say that, on the one hand, there are those who defend national sovereignty and, on the other, those who sell it off cheaply. Neither you nor we envisage creating a European superstate which would take the place of our nation-states and spell the end of their existence as players on the international stage.

Our nations are the wellspring of our identities and of our sense of belonging somewhere. The diversity of their political, cultural and linguistic traditions is one of the strengths of our Union. For the peoples of the future, nations will continue to be the first points of reference.

To contemplate abolishing them would be as absurd as denying that they have already chosen to exercise part of their sovereignty jointly and will continue to do so because it is in their interest. Yes, the European Central Bank, the Court of Justice in Luxembourg or voting by qualified majority are features of a shared sovereignty. By agreeing to these forms of shared sovereignty, we shall gain new power and increased

prestige. So let us please stop hurling denunciations and oversimplifying the issues and agree once for all that the Union's institutions are and will continue to be original and specific!

But let us also admit that they are open to improvement and that the major enlargement facing us must be an opportunity for looking more deeply into the institutional question, going beyond what the Intergovernmental Conference achieves. With that in view, I should like us to be able to agree on a few principles.

First of all, making the European Union more democratic. European integration has been far too much a matter solely for our country's leaders and elites. It is high time that our peoples once more became the sovereigns of Europe. Democracy in Europe has to start faring better, particularly through the European Parliament and the national parliaments.

Next, we need to make the division of powers among the various levels in the European system clearer, though without setting it in stone. That means saying who does what in Europe, so that we get answers at the most effective level, closest to the problems. In a word, applying the subsidiarity principle at long last.

We must also make sure that in an enlarged Europe the capacity for forward impetus survives. We must always be able to open up new pathways. For this to happen, and just as we have done in the past, countries which want to take integration further, on a voluntary basis and on specific projects, must be able to do so without being held back by those who, as is their right, do not wish to advance so quickly.

Lastly, Europe as a power in the world, that Europe which we all want to see, a Europe playing a major role on the international stage, must have strong institutions and an effective, legitimate decision-making mechanism, a mechanism, that is, which is based fully on majority voting and reflects the relative weight of the Member States.

Those, ladies and gentlemen, are the main lines on which, I believe, the process of recasting the Union's institutions ought to proceed. We have still to trace out the future face of Europe. It will depend on how the discussions and negotiations go. And of course, above all, on the willingness of our peoples. But we can already plot out the path to be taken.

The first, indispensable step is for the Intergovernmental Conference held under the French Presidency to be a success. Let us not underestimate the importance of the Conference. The four essential items on the agenda, including developing the procedures for enhanced cooperation, will make it possible for the Union's decision-making mechanisms to be adjusted to fit its future composition. The success of the IGC is the vital prerequisite for any progress. So neither you nor we can be satisfied with a lowest-common-denominator agreement, I would even say a cut-price agreement, which would paralyse the Union for years to come!

After the Intergovernmental Conference, at the end of the year, there will be a period which I would call a 'major transitional' period, at the end of which the Union must have stable frontiers and stable institutions. There are three major projects that we shall have to carry through during that period.

There is, of course, enlargement. It will take us several years at least to complete the accession negotiations and incorporate the new Member States successfully.

There is also the work to be done on deepening policies, on the initiative of those countries that I mentioned a moment ago which want to go further or faster. Standing together with Germany and France, they could form themselves into a 'pioneer group'. This group would open up the path by relying on the new enhanced cooperation procedure defined by the IGC and, where necessary, setting up forms of cooperation outside the scope of the Treaty, though without ever calling into question the coherence and existing achievements of the Union.

This, of course, is the way that the composition of the 'pioneer group' will emerge, not on an arbitrary basis but through the will of the countries which decide to take part in the entire range of forms of enhanced

cooperation. I would therefore like the ‘pioneer group’, from next year, to be able to get to work on more effective coordination of economic policies, a strengthening of defence and security policy and increased effectiveness in combating crime.

Should these States conclude a new Treaty among themselves and equip themselves with sophisticated institutions? I do not think so. We should be aware that this would mean adding an extra level to a Europe which already has a great many! And let us avoid perpetuating any divisions in Europe when our only aim is to safeguard a capacity for forward impetus. What we should do instead is devise a flexible coordination mechanism, a secretariat responsible for ensuring consistency between the positions and policies of the members of this pioneer group, a group which should of course remain open to any country which wants to join it.

Europe, during this transitional period, will then continue to move forward while preparations are being made for a recasting of the institutions.

Indeed — and this is the third project we need to work on — I propose that, after the Nice Summit, we launch a process which, going beyond the IGC, will enable us to supply answers to the other institutional questions facing Europe.

First of all, we should reorganise the treaties so as to make the way in which they are presented more coherent and easier to understand for Europe’s citizens. Then we should clearly define the division of powers, as you, Mr President, have rightly stressed, of powers between the various levels of Europe. While we are about it, we could also give some thought to the ultimate geographical borders of the Union, specify the nature of the Charter of Fundamental Rights, which I hope we shall have adopted at Nice, and, lastly, prepare the ground for the necessary institutional adjustments, as regards both the Commission and Parliament, to make our Union more effective and enhance democratic control over it.

This preparatory round of thinking must be conducted openly, involving our governments and citizens, through their representatives in the European Parliament and the national parliaments. The candidate countries must, of course, play their part. One could imagine a number of possible approaches, from a Committee of Wise Men to a model based on the Convention which is drafting our Charter of Fundamental Rights.

And once this work, which will no doubt take a certain amount of time, has been completed, our governments and peoples would be called upon to vote on a text which we can then enshrine as the first ‘European Constitution’.

But if European integration is to progress we must first deepen Franco-German friendship at every opportunity.

The cooperation between us in so many spheres, and in such familiar forms, the close political consultation at all levels between our institutions, the rich dialogue between our cultures, the exchanges between our young people on the basis of our thousands of town-twinning and language-learning schemes, all these have fashioned a unique, irreversible and irreplaceable bond between us.

For more than half a century now we have been working hand in hand. Between us, reconciliation is an established fact. We take it for granted. It is a fact of everyday life which forms such an integral part of the landscape that we no longer notice its true dimensions. And the new generation now in charge inherits it after reading about it in books but without feeling the same emotional charge as was once the case. Well then, let us get our second wind, recover our original momentum! Feel the burning need to talk to each other! Let us set up places where we can get to know each other and work together! That is what I noticed yesterday, in the streets of Berlin, when I saw how many Germans, with a smile, made a spontaneous gesture of friendship towards us, a gesture from the heart, something which we do not often see on official visits and which greatly touched me.

How many characteristics we share, how many reasons there are for paying greater attention to each other! Although we each have our own traditions, our history, our particular qualities, which no doubt explain the forms of government for which we have opted; although Germany feels at ease with its federal system, in which its citizens can play an active and lively part at every level of political life; although France has managed to preserve but at the same time modernise a unitary tradition which holds its national community together, the challenges that we face today are the same ones. They are economic growth and competitiveness, changes in our educational system, employment protection, adapting our social security systems to changing demographic patterns, modernising and perfecting our systems for health, security, the environment and immigration. We need only look through the agenda of your assemblies and ours and listen to the discussions which stir the passions in both our countries to see how intimately related are the problems and expectations of our peoples.

I think that we still lack a separate forum in which leaders in the realms of politics, the economy, the trade unions and associations, representatives of the media and eminent figures in the arts could easily meet each other. A place to which a forward-moving Germany and France could bring the questions that concern them, the questions that they are asking and the ambitions that they cherish, and meet each other in whatever configuration. I propose that a German-French conference should be held every year. It would be the major meeting-point for our two countries, where Germans and French would embrace the future together.

Over the last few months the economy has made spectacular progress. Our big firms have forged new and powerful links for mutual support in the key areas of the aerospace industry, chemicals, the energy sector, insurance and services. Last night Chancellor Schröder and I met their leaders.

I think that our priority must be to give still more encouragement to this strong drive for integration between our economies, with all their potential, and to make the Franco-German duo the driving force for the creation of a powerful industrial pole in Europe. And I call upon economic circles in our countries, with, of course, the support of our two governments, to set up a foundation in which leaders and managers, both German and French, could meet and gain what I think is perhaps what we most lack, a better knowledge of the business culture which prevails in the other country.

We also need to develop this spirit of partnership in the disciplines of the mind. I hail the quality and the scope of the dialogue which takes place between our thinkers and artists. But I firmly believe that we can give it an added intensity and greater mutual support at a time when we have to fight together to preserve cultural diversity in the world.

On your initiative, Mr Chancellor, we now have our Franco-German Film Academy, whose first meeting we attended yesterday. In the same spirit, we have started putting our heads together to think about the future of books and the development of the media.

Let us give back to our artists and our writers a taste for, and the means of, composing and creating work in each other's countries, thereby reviving the splendid European tradition of travel and immersion in other cultures. I propose the establishment of a centre in Berlin, similar to those in Rome or Madrid, where those of our creative artists who wish to seek inspiration in this city, currently experiencing a major revival, would be welcomed and find conditions conducive to their intellectual activities.

We must cultivate this spirit of dialogue between our peoples by encouraging the learning of each other's language. As I salute the members of the Bundesrat present here today, I would like to offer special congratulations to the authorities of those Länder which have resolutely committed themselves to that path and taken decisions which are a model to others. For our part, we shall ensure that the German language maintains its status of excellence and its place at the forefront of the modern foreign languages taught in our schools.

Lastly, I propose that we join together in this symbolic year to make a powerful gesture towards our young people by inviting 2000 of our secondary-school pupils to end their first year of language learning with a stay abroad during which they will learn about the country, the traditions and the culture of the people

whose language they have chosen.

Mr President of the Bundestag,
Mr Federal President,
Mr Federal Chancellor,
Honourable Members,

what Germany and France have lived through and suffered in the course of History is unlike anything else. They, better than any other nation, grasp the fundamental meaning of peace and the European project. In Europe, only they, by forcing the pace, were able to give the signal for a rallying of forces. Together, at the pace dictated by the renewal of their relations and the determination of their peoples, they have ensured the progress of the idea of Europe.

Only they can take the action which will carry Europe further, realising its ambitions, extending its frontiers and winning hearts. Action that will make Europe into that great arena of peace, rights and freedoms, that home of the spirit worthy of its inheritance, that land which our citizens will be glad to live in, cultivate and turn into a shining light together.

Long live Germany! Long live France! And long live the European Union!