

Address given by Enrico Gibellieri on the occasion of his election (Luxembourg, 10 October 2001)

Caption: On 10 October 2001, on the occasion of his election as the final President of the ECSC Consultative Committee, Enrico Gibellieri summarises the activities of the Committee over the past 50 years and announces that it will be his task to ensure that they can continue with other instruments in a new context, after the expiry of the ECSC Treaty in July 2002.

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Address given by the President on the occasion of his election (10 October 2001)

Senior President, Ladies and Gentlemen, colleagues,

Thank you sincerely for the trust you have shown in electing me as President of the Consultative Committee, the only ECSC institution still existing in its original form. Allow me to thank in particular the workers' category, which chose me as its candidate. I am particularly honoured to receive this responsibility in the final year of the ECSC Treaty and hope to be able to meet your expectations at such a special, sensitive time.

My task has certainly been made easier by the excellent work carried out by my 43 predecessors, of whom I would like to mention in particular Mr Reichel, who, in the course of the last year, worked with competence and tenacity to guarantee the continuation of the structured sectoral dialogue of the ECSC through its inclusion in the work of the Economic and Social Committee, in accordance with the Commission proposal.

Work carried out in conjunction with the Economic and Social Committee has already made considerable progress and is showing signs that there is a possibility of a result which, although not exactly what was hoped for in the documents adopted by the ECSC Consultative Committee, could lead to an acceptable, honourable solution.

We must make the most of the remaining few months to achieve concrete, feasible objectives by continuing along the path we are already going down. My task will above all be dedicated to this aspect, which I consider of prime importance. In fact, the experience of the ECSC has been and will remain above all an example of constructive, constant, competent dialogue between the interested parties of the coal and steel industries and between them and the Commission.

Other important successes have already been achieved in recent years thanks to your commitment, which also led to substantial changes to the Commission proposals and the Council decisions taken at the beginning of the last decade concerning the changeover phase for our industries from the ECSC Treaty to the general one.

I refer in particular to the Council resolutions of 1998 and 1999 on the allocation of ECSC reserves and guarantee funds to the remaining Communities, which will allow the financing of technical research with a social content in the coal and steel industries to continue even after the expiry of the ECSC Treaty, a decision which also received the agreement of the Intergovernmental Conference which concluded with the proposal for the Treaty of Nice.

One of my tasks, with your help, will be to work towards a smooth transition and the seamless continuation of ECSC research activity in the new context.

This is certainly not the moment to recall past successes and failures. We will be able to assess them on other occasions, such as the final conference at the end of June 2002. However, the time has arrived to take stock of the ECSC experience, which has represented for our two sectors and for the European Union in general a fundamental stage in the construction of Europe and in the consolidation of peace on our continent.

Thanks to the ECSC Treaty, over the last 50 years we have managed to transform industries of war into industries of peace and human and civic progress, substantially improving the living and working conditions of past and present workers.

This fundamental outcome appears even more important nowadays, with war again headline news in all the newspapers and other forms of media and the cause of concern for most people in all parts of the world.

Thanks to the ECSC Consultative Committee and the instruments provided for in the Treaty, difficult, in some cases dramatic, moments have been dealt with and resolved which have involved many workers, their families, businesses, regions, employers and directors in our two industries and in each of the European countries which over time have joined the six founder Member States.

We can all be proud to hand over to our successors busy, modern, efficient and competitive industries. Those working in them now are different from those 50 years ago, but they still have the same attachment to their work which, in our two industries, has never allowed room for indifference and routine.

People have worked on this Committee who have borne responsibility, in their respective spheres of activity, in the two industries in each of the Member States. They have found ways to engage in dialogue, to integrate their experiences and to draw up positions and resolutions that have guided Commission proposals, Council decisions and, finally, the opinions of the European Parliament on issues at the heart of the development of the coal and steel industries.

The debate has sometimes been heated, but it has never been pointless, general or false. It has always gone to the heart of problems, because it has been genuine and it is the link between the members of the Consultative Committee and the industrial sectors it represents. It has become increasingly clear that this feature in particular and the strong link with reality has made this Committee different and unusual compared with other consultation bodies at European level, which are more general and horizontal.

Ladies and Gentlemen, colleagues,

We are all aware that in the months leading up to the expiry of the Treaty we must continue dealing with real problems concerning the constant adaptation of our businesses to the global market which, as always, will involve social consequences which have to be resolved appropriately in the ECSC tradition.

We know we can rely on your help and active cooperation to conclude our task in full activity according to the ECSC Treaty, in order to be able to continue with other instruments in the new context which we are creating. We are also sure that the Secretary, Mr Lafili, and his colleagues in the secretariat will continue to provide appropriate support up to the last day.

In some quarters - and this is not a recent phenomenon - the ECSC Treaty and our Committee are viewed as relics from the past and historians have already started studying the experience of the ECSC with the distance that for them is necessary and possible. This is not possible for us. We have to continue working until the last day, taking care to ensure that these ten months of activity are not turned into one long closing ceremony.

I thank you for your attention and wish you success in your work.