

Address given by Victor Larock at the inaugural meeting of the EEC and EAEC Councils (Brussels, 25 January 1958)

Caption: In his opening address at the inaugural meeting of the EEC and EAEC Councils, held on 25 January 1958 in Brussels, Victor Larock, Belgian Foreign Minister and President-in-Office of the Councils, emphasises the economic and social objectives of the Common Market and of Euratom and defines the two Communities as a step towards a future integrated European union.

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Inaugural address by Victor Larock, Belgian Minister of Foreign Affairs, President-in-Office of the Councils (First meeting — 25 January 1958)

I hope you will allow me to begin by thanking someone who passed away long ago. When the Roman censor who was to give his name to the Appian Way decided to establish the characters of Latin script in a form and order which have remained unchanged ever since, little did he imagine that he would one day receive the gratitude of the people of Belgium. It is, nevertheless, thanks to his decision that I am able to welcome here today the Council of Ministers of the European Communities, meeting for the first time. Alphabetical order, fixed at random, is the only reason why Belgium has this privilege, and it is only provisionally, for just six months! My fellow countrymen hope that we may prove worthy of this privilege for less fortuitous reasons ...

Be that as it may, we are extremely honoured to receive the representatives of the States which signed the Rome Treaties, and especially Mr Pella, the Italian Minister for Foreign Affairs, who chaired the two preliminary conferences in Paris. I would like to welcome my distinguished colleagues on behalf of the Belgian Government and the whole country.

I would also warmly welcome the Presidents and Members of the High Authority of the Coal and Steel Community and the Commissions of the two new Communities, along with the Government Representatives who share with the Ministers the responsibility for expediting the completion of European union.

Nothing could be of greater value for the three Communities than for their leaders to start working together straight away with determination but also with flexibility, and this is something for which I fervently hope and pray on behalf of all those who still have faith in a future of solidarity between our six countries.

The Treaties, with the principles and rules they propose and the institutions outlined in them, are nothing but empty vessels unless there are men to fill them with their own lives, with the very best of themselves. Gentlemen, you are those men. You are the ones who will largely determine whether a scarred and weakened Europe can rise again tomorrow more united than at any time this century.

The tasks that we share today are mainly economic and social ones. They will undoubtedly increasingly become political ones, but their significance at the highest level will always be spiritual.

For the Europe we want to create is not just a common market in iron and steel, in other products, other areas of trade and new forms of energy. It is not just an organic synthesis of national policies. It is above all the revival of a civilisation whose pre-eminence has been determined by the continuity and intensity of its spiritual calling.

Politicians and European centres, both official and private, have spent a great deal of time explaining the Common Market and Euratom and enlightening public opinion in our six countries about them — are we now sure that these two huge initiatives are understood by the majority of the general public, which they need to be if they are rapidly to become a living reality?

Understanding of them is improving every day, but at the risk of lapsing into generalities and offending the specialists, I think we need to take every public opportunity to remind people of the aims of the two new Communities, to emphasise this or that fundamental aspect and to overcome any further possible misunderstandings. If I may briefly take advantage of the opportunity presented to me now, I would like to look at two themes, one to do with the Common Market and the other with Euratom, on which there are still prejudices or uncertainties.

The Common Market is sometimes seen as an essentially economic undertaking whose social objectives are of only minor importance.

Euratom is still suspected by some people of having directorial aims that are difficult to reconcile with

national interests and rights of private initiative.

Both interpretations involve prejudiced assumptions which need to be nipped in the bud.

If I am honest, the social objectives are rather swamped in the Economic Community Treaty as a whole, probably because they are more a matter for those putting them into practice rather than a technical issue for the drafters of the Treaty. But if we want people in our countries and throughout Europe to be won over to the ideas that guide us, these are the objectives that need to be at the forefront of our minds. What would be the point in focusing on promoting production, trade and the free movement of capital if economic progress were not used for man's benefit? The Common Market has been described as a revolutionary undertaking. Some revolutions result only in oppression, others liberate the human condition. The Common Market Treaty contains the elements of a sweeping, liberating change.

Workers of all conditions make up the vast majority of the people of Europe. What will be the difference for them, in real terms, between the fragmented market in which they now live and a huge single market? If they want to get an idea of this, they have only to compare their situation with that of American workers.

According to every criterion the standard of living in the USA is at least twice as high as that of the majority of Europeans. An American uses three times more textile products per year than a European, twice as much electricity and five times as many cars, and while he earns more, he works less. If he is unemployed in the region where he lives, he can find work 1 000 kilometres away ...

Is Europe's inferior standard of living down to its inferior resources? Partly, but it is mainly down to the superior resources which the single market gives Americans. Because European production is confined within markets that are too narrow, there are not enough capital goods and consumer goods to meet demand, and they are too expensive. Millions of men have a purchasing power that is out of step with their labour and millions of others are at the mercy of declining employment.

The European Community will succeed or fail on the extent to which its economic progress allows it to achieve its social objectives.

It is all about utilising Europe's underdeveloped regions and unemployed labour force.

Retraining for new jobs.

Agricultural and industrial expansion to generate wealth.

A better return on invested capital, and also the upward harmonisation of pay and social legislation.

Greater freedom of movement for workers, providing the most industrialised countries with a greater number and wider range of skilled workers.

If tenaciously pursued, these social objectives will not just influence our six countries. European union will fully deserve its name only when the Scandinavian and Anglo-Saxon nations join the Germanic and Latin peoples of our continent, either by direct accession or through a free trade zone. Nothing will do more to help achieve this than giving the people of Europe a higher and more stable standard of living.

Lastly, the Community, designed as it is to strengthen production, liberalise trade and improve living and working conditions, cannot help but influence and attract those people, also Europeans, who are separated from us by military occupation lines. Despite all the restrictions, or rather precisely because of the fate that has been forced upon them, these people's eyes are all turned to the West. They know they will not be liberated by arms, but all they want is to be reclaimed by Europe in mind and soul. We have a twofold duty towards them: to be economically as united and strong as we can be in our own interest, and, in social terms, to show that however imperfect our regimes may be, they are still the best at reconciling the demand for wellbeing, the right to freedom and the desire for justice.

The greatest service which the European Community can perform for the free world is to give work to those who have none, to generate affluence and to enable all those who help to create it to enjoy it.

When the idea of Euratom was first launched, some people might have thought that the aim was to create a European super-power that would take the place of the nation-states in everything to do with the peaceful use of nuclear energy. Many of those promoting and supporting Euratom wanted it to have unconditional ownership of ores and fissile materials, exclusive ownership of patented techniques, and absolute initiative for investment programmes; all of this was to lie in the hands of a supreme authority outweighing private enterprise and national sovereignty.

The authors of the Treaty soon realised that such a project was not feasible.

In fact, Euratom has two aims: to specify the research and work to be carried out in each country, and to coordinate everything in order to derive the greatest benefit from the results.

If prejudices persist, it can only be in the minds of those not familiar with the Treaty. Whether in promoting research and the dissemination of knowledge, joint undertakings, the supply system or the rules on ownership, Euratom helps and encourages national efforts and those of independent enterprise, but takes nothing away from them. Each country is still free to develop and implement its own nuclear energy research and development programme. The Community supplements the programmes through the collective provision of information and opinions, and if necessary through financial contributions. There is never any question in the Treaty of relinquishing national or private initiative.

The same respect for each partner's own interests is found in the institutional clauses. All fundamental decisions require unanimity in the Council of Ministers. Where a simple or qualified majority is required, the Commission must first be asked for its opinion, and this can only be amended by a unanimous vote in the Council.

People misunderstand the scope of the Treaty if they think it introduces a sort of technocratic or supranational interventionism. Its objectives are much more moderate. What Euratom promises Europe is the coordination of undertakings and projects, and greater solidarity leading to faster progress.

Splitting the atom caused horror when its destructive force was witnessed for the first time. Even now a terrible threat hangs over humanity. It remains to be seen whether man will have enough sense to use only its beneficial power. We still feel all the same fears, but they should not prevent us from hoping and from acting on those hopes.

None of our countries can act in isolation. Continental Europe would be surrendering to the large states that have forged ahead of it in the nuclear field if it abandoned itself to the whims of national competition. It has the chance to make up at least some of the gap and to involve its 160 million inhabitants in the peaceful use of an energy source which its own scientists discovered. It will only succeed if it can unite its scattered forces.

The two new Communities are simply a step towards the fullest form of European union, involving common or integrated policies.

But over and above this objective there is something fundamental that goes beyond economic, social and political progress and that resides in the continuity and permanence of a certain European culture, or to put it a better way, a certain European belief in man and humanity.

Europe's role, the fundamental reason for its desire for unity, is to assert in the world the primacy of certain intellectual and moral values and certain spiritual rights that are currently under threat.

The main threat here is all too evident. Regimes without freedom and state indoctrinations have imposed on

a huge area of the world lifestyles and systems of ideas which negate the intellectual heritage which Greece passed on to Rome and the western world. These huge, recently formed empires are reminiscent of some extraordinarily expanded modernised and mechanised version of the primitive planning that Lévy-Bruhl described. The lives of writers, scientists and artists are not their own, any more than those of economists, sociologists, engineers or the managers of State enterprises. They are merely cogs in a huge production chain where any mental activity is assessed in terms of productivity. The forces of mass and impact supplant or suppress the values of choice, which are inseparable from free thinking and unrestricted, unconfined creative effort. Valéry's words are even more dangerously true now than when he wrote them: 'We civilisations now know ourselves mortal ...'

Europe, in its attempt to achieve unity, counters all the threats it faces with the very essence of what makes it united: a view of man and civilisation, a concept of culture, that we want to work together to safeguard and serve.

European culture does not serve an individual nation or ideology, but the individual *per se*. Over and above everything that makes the individual part of his country, his race, a closed system of opinions or beliefs, it is man and human dignity that are the measure of everything for us Europeans. Culture as we conceive of it does not give any power the right to prohibit or curb the individual's freedom to seek the truth, the spontaneous effect of creative activity.

Our civilisation is not a means of productivity. It is not measured by the technical progress it generates or the increase in power that this brings. It is identified with any deeper awareness, any selfless search for knowledge, any spiritual endeavour which is an end in itself.

Are these considerations so far removed from the specific scope of the Coal and Steel Community, the Common Market and Euratom? They only appear to be. In fact, these political and economic structures would be very fragile, regardless of the merits of those called on to put them into practice, if everyone's hopes and efforts were not boosted by the belief that they are, at the same time, serving both Europe's interests and the primacy of the spirit. The obstacles to be overcome would be enough to frustrate the tenacity of the very best if their actions were not constantly supported by the most elevated reasons.

These reasons are shared by the whole of Europe. The country where we are meeting today has always honoured them and served them. Having faith in Europe, it welcomes the builders of the European Communities with respect, friendship and confidence. Let us hope that they find everywhere else as they do here, in the goodwill with which they will be surrounded, further recognition of the magnitude of their task and the assurance that everything will be done to help them to strive, to persevere and to succeed.