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VICE PRESIDENT OF THE COMMISSION OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES
RESPONSIBLE FOR EXTERNAL RELATIONS
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Mr Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honour to appear on a Conservative Group for Europe platform alongside so many old friends and colleagues. And I am delighted to have this opportunity to contribute to your discussion of the vital question how the Conservative Party should address itself to the European elections which will be taking place in the summer of 1978.

Let us above all be clear as to what the significance of these elections will be.

They will not - and this will please some of you and disappoint others - they will not usher in a federal European state or a sort of United States of Europe. You have only to look at the ground-rules under which the directly elected European Parliament will work to see why this is so.

These ground-rules are laid down in the Community's treaties, which are, if you like a sort of written constitution, and which can only be changed with the agreement of the Member States and their parliaments. The treaties define very clearly the limits within which the Community institutions - including the European Parliament - can act. And these limits are so drawn as to leave out many of the most important functions and preoccupations of the modern state. Defence, education, housing, law and order, the social services, monetary policy - the treaties leave all of these subjects more or less completely outside the field of action of the Community institutions.

Nevertheless, the running of a Common Market for industrial and agricultural goods in Western Europe is already in itself an enormous operation with far-reaching ramifications in many fields of policy - external trade policy, competition policy, industrial, regional and social policy, economic and fiscal policy. And our ambition is to build on this unified market an increasingly integrated economic system and an increasingly unified foreign policy. The Community is therefore an enterprise of first-class importance in world terms - and its stature will continue to grow. But neither its constitutional arrangements nor its purposes are such as to justify the view that it is poised to make a comprehensive take-over bid for the functions and responsibilities of its Member States.

In fact of course the powers and responsibilities of the Member States are not only intact in the areas not covered by the treaties - they are also deeply entrenched within the fields of action which the treaties preserve for the Community institutions.

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The Council of Ministers which represents the Governments of the Member States and which looks at the Community's problems primarily through national eyes, is in practice both the Community's legislature and, speaking generally, its executive. The European Parliament has certain rather limited powers over the Community's budget, but otherwise its powers are closely circumscribed. It has the right to dismiss the Commission en bloc - but this is an ultimate weapon which is very hard in practice to use. It has the right to be consulted and to express its opinion on the Commission's proposals. And it has the right to question and cross-examine the Commission and the Council and to bring them before the bar of public opinion. Each of these powers is capable of being considerably developed - perhaps particularly those concerned with public scrutiny and exposure - and as the Community grows and develops the Parliament will surely go on acquiring new powers, as it has already done in recent years. But there is no doubt that for the present and for the foreseeable future the effect of these arrangements is that the balance between the Community institutions is such that the national views represented in the Council of Ministers inevitably weigh more heavily in the decision taking process than either the Commission or the European Parliament.

To sum up, direct elections to the European Parliament will not by themselves change the ground-rules under which the Parliament must work. And since these ground-rules are not the rules that would be needed for a European Federal State, such a United States of Europe cannot - whether we like it or not - be brought into being merely by the fact of direct elections or of a democratically elected European Parliament.

So much for the negative side, where - given the Community and its purposes - there are surely checks and safeguards for national powers enough to satisfy even the most die-hard advocates of national responsibility. Let them rest assured that the fact that the European Parliament is going to be directly elected will not of itself change the balance between the powers of the national parliaments and the powers of the European Parliament.

But what of the more positive side: granted that the powers of the European Parliament are thus circumscribed and counter-balanced and are unlikely to develop with great rapidity - granted all this, why is it so important that the Parliament should be directly elected?

The importance of direct elections lies first of all in the fact that they will extend real democratic accountability into areas of Community decision-making which cannot at present be subjected to effective Parliamentary scrutiny.

In the Community structure as it is at present, accountability to the electorate is only indirect, exercised through the nominated European Parliament and through what control the national parliaments are able to exercise over their national ministers meeting in the Council.

The European Parliament in its present form - nominated from the national legislatures - makes valiant efforts to scrutinise Commission proposals and Council decisions. But its part-time character and the limitations which grow from it being only indirectly elected inevitably put it at a serious disadvantage. At the same time, the national Parliaments - and

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in particular the House of Commons - also do their best to 'keep tabs' on what their ministers do in the Council. But they are finding that there is not as much scope for this as they would like - since ministers quite reasonably believe that the national interests for which they are held responsible are best served by keeping their hands free to negotiate and bargain at Council meetings. Either way it is plain that there is a serious gap in the process of parliamentary scrutiny in the Community structure - and it is a gap which can only be filled by the development of a European Parliament confident and strong enough to make its weight felt, and with the time available to do its job.

The necessary confidence and strength on the part of the European Parliament can only be supplied by the added legitimacy and authority that direct elections and full-time working will give it. And the importance of this lies not only in the new & direct relationship which it will bring about between the European peoples and the institutions of the Community, but also in the new political balance which a strong and confident directly elected Parliament will bring to those institutions.

Now I believe that it would be a profound error to think of national interests and the European interest as being opposed to each other and ultimately incompatible one with the other. The Community depends upon the fact that the European interest corresponds with the highest national interest of each of its Member States, and it can only continue to work so long as this is the case. But as the Community has grown over the past 20 years, the political balance between the institutions - their relative political weight - has turned out in such a way that the national element in the Community's decision-making has been very much more prominent than the European element. And this tendency has recently been greatly reinforced by the creation of the European Council of Heads of Government.

The added political direction and authority which the emergence of the European Council has brought to the Community is of course very welcome. But it is crucial that the formation of European policies should not come to depend essentially on inter-governmental agreements and the primarily national processes which they reflect.

A broader European perspective must also be brought to bear - and this can only be done if national points of view are enriched and set into the wider European context by men and women who are dedicated to a strong and vigorous Community, and who know that they have both the right and the duty to make their views felt. This will be the character of the European Parliament once it is directly elected. Only out of the new political balance which all this will bring into being - involving both the Member States at the highest level and the peoples of Europe through their directly elected representatives guiding and goading the Commission and bringing effective influence to bear on the decisions of the Council - only out of such a new political balance will it be possible to provide real impulsion for further progress within the Community.

For let there be no mistake about it - the most fundamentally important aspect of the holding of direct elections will be their capacity to engage the imagination and interest of the peoples of the Community in European questions as citizens of Europe.

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The development of a dialogue between the people and their representatives in the European Parliament will bring a new life and reality to the Community, and the way will be opened for what is essential for its success - the emergence of a genuine European public opinion which is so greatly lacking today. This will be a new dimension in European affairs and it will mark a qualitative change in the character - if not the constitutional structure and functioning - of the Community. And as the Community continues to grow and develop so will the power of the European Parliament to shape and influence that evolution be increased.

All of this will make it increasingly important for us in the Conservative Party to have a coherent view not only of what sort of society, what sort of polity, what pattern of economic life we want for Europe in the years ahead, but also of how we can use the European Parliament to achieve our ends. We have to understand that what is at stake in Europe is the formation of an increasingly integrated and homogeneous society whose character we ought to be seeking to mould because it will more and more in the future shape our own character and the way of life of generations to come.

How is this to be done? In the context of the European Parliament and the European elections which should take place in only 18 months' time, it is clear what the answer must be. If our cherished tradition of British Conservatism is to make the contribution that it should to the future politics of Europe, it will only be by way of its participation in an effective organisation of the forces of the Centre joining us with the traditions of other parties and other nations.

From the philosophical point of view I have no doubt that we can find sufficient common ground to build a common approach to the specific and detailed issues which will confront us, first of all in the European election campaign, and then in due course in the day-to-day work of the European Parliament. Indeed I believe that we of the Centre have more of what it takes to run a working European coalition than the various Social democratic, Marxist and Communist forces of the divided Left.

As we address ourselves to the problems of the advanced and increasingly integrated industrial society which is emerging in Western Europe the political forces of the Centre throughout the Community share two great themes.

We are committed to the freedom of the individual. And we are equally committed to social unity and an ordered and harmoniously developing society.

The first of these themes runs through our opposition to the concentration and centralisation of power and our commitment to freedom of choice. We believe in the widest possible diffusion of economic and political power, and broadly speaking, we share a common view of the means by which this is best secured. Hence our shared concern for constitutional government and the rule of law.

Hence also our shared commitment to private property and private enterprise. In our different countries this commitment has taken a wide variety of forms. Each of us has struck a different balance between the rights and

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responsibilities of property. Some have given more emphasis than others to the social and cooperative elements in the rights of property and enterprise. Some permit a greater degree of public regulation than is regarded as appropriate elsewhere. And some of our societies do more than others to temper the inequalities which are the inevitable concomitant of personal and social freedom.

But these differences are insignificant when set against our common commitment to private ownership as such, which provides the basic element in the operation of what the German Christian Democrats christened 'the social market economy' and what the Belgian Christian Democrat Prime Minister, Mr Tindemans, called the other day 'an economy at the service of man'.

We of the Centre all share the purpose of developing in Europe a mixed economy on these lines, giving individuals the greatest possible incentive for personal initiative and a larger share in Europe's social and economic progress. This is the way in which we can use the instruments provided by our advanced industrial society to promote our common aspirations to personal freedom, equal opportunities, growing prosperity and a wide diffusion of power throughout society.

Our second theme - that of social unity and orderly progress - runs through our shared conception of the legitimate authority of government. Today none of the elements which make up the tradition of the Centre adheres to the classical doctrine of laissez-faire and the uncontrolled and unregulated play of economic forces. We all recognise that government has important and legitimate claims upon the people, and clear duties towards them. We see one of our most important political functions as that of sustaining the sense of patriotism and active citizenship that is one of the chief purposes and disciplines of life and society. And we recognise that it is the special task of the political forces of the Centre to hold the balance between the excesses of individualism on the one side and the excesses of collectivism on the other.

These of course are very general considerations. But I am convinced that if we were to set out with a will to trace the implications of these ideas through the various issues which are already beginning to confront us as we face up to the challenge of direct elections - issues of economic and monetary policy, of industrial policy, of social policy, of external relations - I am convinced that we can find sufficient common ground to reach concrete and practical conclusions in every sphere. And often we shall find that these conclusions are significantly different from those of the Left, which are reached by a different route, starting from a different place, and aiming at a different destination.

Now I do not believe that we will reach agreement with our friends and allies in Europe merely by seeking to draw up a detailed blue-print of agreed policies. Men never quarrel so furiously as about words. It is when they find that after all they are the same sort of people with the same sort of faith and the same sort of ideals facing the same sort of situation that they best agree.

As the Community acquires greater responsibilities and powers the scope for influencing its policies will increase, and the stuff of party politics will be more and more in evidence at the European level. Above all, we of

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the Centre will find our cohesion and capacity for common action tested by the strength of the rival political forces which are also contending for influence in Europe. In this way the logic of unfolding events will increasingly oblige us to define together the common interests that support our alliance and to give to it the kind of depth which philosophy alone cannot supply.

Nevertheless, if we are to put a Tory spin on the European ball we shall have to work hard at it, and work at it in harmony with all the European parties of the Centre. We must aim at the largest possible flexibility and freedom of manoeuvre in our relations with our partners, but at the same time we must accept that our influence is greatest when we accept, and are seen to accept, common disciplines and a shared allegiance.

Mr Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen, this will require a large measure of give and take on the part of all of us who share the same broad political beliefs. No single element in our alliance of the Centre can aspire to a preponderant influence, and the policies which result from our common action will necessarily be a genuine synthesis. Just as the Community interests cannot be the lowest common denominator of the various national interests, so we must strive to think in terms of policies which will suit the needs not only of our own country but also of our 200 million fellow-Europeans.

Because of the historical distinctiveness of the character and traditions of the British Conservative Party, all of this will require of us in Britain an exceptional effort of reflection and adjustment - an effort which is bound to be as difficult as it is worthwhile. In the elaboration of new policies there will be things that will go against the grain. Most difficult of all, we will have to accept a psychological change affecting our vision of ourselves and of the world which presses in upon us.

Europe, in short, will not be Britain writ large. And neither will a European alliance of the parties of the Centre be a European-sized replica of the British Conservative Party. But just as the presence of Britain in the Community contributes an essential and indispensable element to the making of Europe, so the presence of the Conservative Party in such an alliance will give a special weight and character to the political life of the Continent to which we belong. "The Conservative Party", said Disraeli, "is a national party or it is nothing". A hundred years later, I believe a further element should be added to this celebrated sentence: the Conservative Party of today and tomorrow is a party with a European dimension or it is nothing.

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