

tot

Extracts from an address by Laurens Jan Brinkhorst, State Secretary for foreign Affairs of the Netherlands for the Congress of European Journalists, in Nice, 8 October 1976.

1. Anyone who has been actively involved in matters of European integration in the past few years may have become a wiser, but certainly a sadder man. European integration is not going very well, to put it mildly.
  - There is serious stagnation, in the internal development of the EEC. There is no field in which substantial progress has been made in the recent past.
  - Worse still, the Common Market is even sliding back. National authorities, in a rather unco-ordinated way, have resorted to national measures to protect their own interests instead of relying on a common endeavour.
  - In this situation of malaise, the decision-making and decision-taking process in Brussels has virtually ground to a halt.
  
2. Leaving aside the achievements in the field of external relations, there is, however, one ray of light in the European sky. I am referring to the decision to hold direct elections to the European Parliament. Although certainly not a panacea for all the difficulties we are experiencing, it is a significant development all the same. There is a legitimate hope that direct elections will provide a new impetus in the process of European integration.
  
3. What is the basis for such hope? I think there are four very good reasons why direct elections to the European Parliament are important. In the first place:  
It is essential that the European Community has a firm democratic basis. It is unacceptable that the Community itself

does not meet the minimum democratic standards prevailing in its member states. Paradoxically, the Community as it exists today for its lack of democracy does not conform to the very requirements it makes of new countries seeking membership.

4. In the second place:

Direct elections will strengthen the legitimacy and "visibility" of the European Parliament and their members. By establishing a direct relationship to the electorate, the citizens of Europe will hopefully become more involved and interested in European issues. As we all know these issues do not figure in national elections or hardly at all, which enhances the preoccupation with national policies and interests at the cost of a wider European approach -- and ultimately at the cost of those very national interests.

5. This brings me to the third argument.

Direct elections will bring about a more balanced relationship between the institutions of the European Community. The relationship as it is at present is clearly inadequate. Directly elected parliamentarians will have a stronger position vis-à-vis the Commission and the Council.

6. My fourth argument has to do with the inspirational role of Europe towards the outside world. Its importance goes beyond being the largest and one of the most prosperous trading blocs in the world. Economic achievements are not enough. I will not elaborate here on the external relations of the Community, the numerous economic tasks and obligations of Europe vis-à-vis the outside world. What I would like to stress here is that Europe's *raison d'être* is closely linked to the structure of its society: a democratic society in which not only the material prosperity is assured but non-material values are respected and honoured.

7. However important in their own right, the mechanics of direct elections alone will not suffice. The elections must come alive to European citizens. They must be convinced that such elections are of immediate relevance to their own lives, not just to anonymous technocrats in Brussels. What can be done to spark off this life?
8. Firstly, there is of course the role of the press. Without a free press which gives its attention to the political, economic and social issues of our society, a democracy is not even conceivable. That applies as much to Europe as to each of the member countries. The press is an indispensable link between the European decision-makers and the European electorate.
9. Secondly I think it is essential that many prominent European politicians stand for the elections. A parliament of back-benchers is a parliament that can't assume its proper role in a democracy. On this issue I quite agree with Willy Brandt.
10. Thirdly, there is the question of European political parties. In the present indirectly chosen European Parliament there are several political factions: socialists, liberals, christian-democrats and so on. They comprise national representatives of parties which may well have a common name but by their policies actually fall into different categories.  
If the European Parliament is to achieve political maturity, it will be necessary for truly European parties to be forged. Here, clearly lies a great task and challenge for politicians.
11. Fourthly the powers of a directly elected European Parliament will be of crucial importance in the long term. There is no unanimity on this in the various member countries. You certainly will be aware that we, in the Netherlands, would like to see a substantial widening of the powers of the European Parliament. For the moment, however, it seems wise not to let that issue divide us. We should not forget that the outcome

will also be influenced by the performance of the European Parliament and the way it asserts itself, once directly elected.

12. As I said at the outset European integration is in a poor state, possibly poorer than it has been for a long time. That means that we cannot wait for the direct elections of 1978 to provide a new momentum in the European integration process. Something must be done about the present decision-making in Brussels to halt the ongoing desintegration and to move in a more positive direction.
13. My Government, which as you know holds at present the chair of the Council of Ministers, attaches particular importance in decision-making in the socio-economic and monetary fields. Our Minister of Finance has put forward a proposal to improve monetary cooperation. No common socio-economic policy is possible without a certain stability in the monetary field. A second example is the common agricultural policy, which in fact is one of the few truly common policies the Communities have. It is quite obvious to me that a re-appraisal of this policy is long overdue in view of the threats facing it.
14. There is another point that I should wish to mention here. A fair and credible policy to the outside world will only be possible given sound and coherent policies within the Communities. Whilst it is true that policies have been formulated vis-à-vis the mediterranean and the ACP countries, what good can come of these if Europe itself lacks clear-cut policies in the industrial, agricultural, energy and other fields.
15. Now, let me return to the role of the press. I am aware that it is very risky for a politician to say something about this, but given this audience I can't pass up the opportunity. It is my opinion that there is a lack of information on European affairs. They are not sufficiently discussed in the media. I do not put the blame on your shoulders for it has to do with the

general luke-warm interest in matters European. Yet, the press may be instrumental in breaking this vicious circle.

16. In this regard Mr. Tindemans proposed to make an effort in the field of cooperation between information-distributors, especially between radio and television organisations in Europe, so as to promote the exchange of information and for us to become better acquainted. Mr. Tindemans expressly linked this idea to the European elections.
  
17. I might add to this a proposal of my own albeit not a novel one. Since we have Eurovision-songfestivals and European cup competitions, which are transmitted throughout Europe, wouldn't it be worth trying to promote on a European scale radio and television discussions on European issues or issues that concern most or all of the European countries? I have no illusions as to the size of the audience in comparison with the football matches, but still it may be worth trying.