

ADDRESS OF WELCOME BY DR GUIDO BRUNNER,
Member of the Commission of the European Communities,
TO THE CONGRESS OF THE FEDERATION OF EUROPEAN LIBERALS AND DEMOCRATS,
Brussels, 18 November 1977

1. This Congress is a milestone on the way to the first direct election of the European Parliament. On behalf of the Commission of the European Communities, I am here to wish you every success with your work. As the Liberal Member of the Commission, it is a particular joy to me that the European Liberals and Democrats are in the van. They were the first political grouping of importance to set up as a European Federation, in Stuttgart in March of last year. They were the first to engage in European programme debates, at The Hague Congress last November. And here in Brussels today they are the first to meet to agree a campaign programme for the elections to the European Parliament. This is pioneer work which will act as a spur to all political movements in Europe.

2. Direct election is going to give a new dimension to the European unification process. What used to be the affair of States and Governments is now to be the affair of the man in the street. We need this democratic impetus, for Europe has been losing momentum in the last few years: it is time to speed the pace. And we are convinced that the electorate know political and economic stability in Europe, and the security of us all, can only be achieved together. They want to ginger up the ditherers and doubters, they want visible progress towards European Union.

3. Yet it is still not certain that polling really will take place, as planned, in June 1978. The eyes of Europe are on London, for in this session at Westminster it will be determined whether the deadline is to be met. And so I appeal to the Conservative and Labour Members to endorse proportional representation, for that offers the only possible basis for all shares of political opinion to be fairly represented, and the only chance for European elections at an early date.

4. Direct election of the European Parliament only makes sense, of course, if the individual citizen knows what he is about. That is something the parties must bring out in the election campaign. The Liberals have always stood up for the individual, and on this occasion too they will stand up for individual freedoms and safeguards, for equality of opportunity and scope for self-fulfilment in the economy and in society, for tolerance and the protection of minorities.

I want to list just three things, three quite concrete, practical things, we should press for.

First,

In Europe too we need comprehensive, effective protection of fundamental rights.

True, the EEC Treaty contains provision for certain rights, such as freedom of movement and freedom of establishment, and the Court of Justice of the Communities bases itself throughout on the general principle that fundamental rights must be respected. But with European Union ahead we Liberals cannot content ourselves with that. For so far as the individual Community citizen is concerned there is considerable legal uncertainty from case to case. We have no European Constitution, and a European judicial tradition only of very recent date. Even the fact that all the Member States have ratified the Human Rights Convention is cold comfort: the Convention seeks only to safeguard a minimum standard, and injured individuals have no right to sue direct in the Court of Human Rights. So the man in the street cannot tell whether he will be safeguarded against encroachment by authority in the Europe of the future to the same extent as he is safeguarded in his own country. Is it right that such uncertainty should prevail in the name of European unification? Surely not.

So we must press vigorously for:

- . a catalogue of European human and civil rights to be drawn up forthwith by the first directly elected European Parliament;
- . entitlement of the individual citizen to sue direct in the European Court of Justice if he considers these rights to have been infringed.

Furthermore, we should seek to have protection of human and civil rights not diminished but extended, with infringement of European fundamental rights becoming liable to criminal prosecution, as in American law, where "conspiracy against fundamental rights" is a criminal offence. This is undoubtedly worth looking into.

Secondly,

Discrimination against women in the European Community must be done away with.

Some may say that equal rights is already a recognized legal principle, both in domestic and in Community law. But in practice it is pretty often a dead letter. The facts speak for themselves. In Germany there are 14,500,000 men gainfully employed, but only 9,500,000 women. In the Paris area the female employment ratio is 40%, in southern France only 26%. Female unemployment is rising faster than male, by 20.3% this year compared with 9.2%. 51% of women in employment in Germany are not fully trained or qualified, compared with only 27% of men. And one last figure, from Belgium: something like 60% of women students are in the arts faculties, and only 4.5% in the sciences.!

To Liberals this is all wrong. Of course there are old-established conservative attitudes to be overcome, and this takes time. But there are practical steps we can take to speed the process. To name a few:

- . equal status for women in social security must be a reality in all the Member States by 1980 at latest. A Commission proposal to that effect is before the Council now;
- . all Community workers, men and women alike, must be able to take time off from their work for purposes of child-rearing;
- . considerably increased facilities must be provided in all the Member States for qualified occupational counselling of women.

And thirdly,

Away with the Anachronism of frontier checks within the Community!

The fact that they still continue even though customs duties have been abolished is a standing irritant to the ordinary man. The justification given is that there are still differences in value-added tax and excise duties: unfortunately, European fiscal harmonization has been no more than inching along. Well, we are not going to put up with that any longer. Approximation of consumer taxes, on petroleum, tobacco, alcohol and so on, now rates top priority. And as an interim measure we must call for:

- . travellers' duty-free allowances to be doubled by the end of next year, and
- . checks on travellers' personal effects to be abolished by 1982 at latest.

I have confined myself to outlining three Liberal demands I consider particularly important. As can be seen from the draft programme before us, the Federation is thinking in terms of a good many others as well. You have set yourselves an ambitious task in planning to agree the campaign programme by Sunday. I hope and trust you will succeed.