

EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

Speeches

by

Mrs Louise WEISS

Oldest Member

and

Mrs Simone VEIL

President

Strasbourg, 17 and 18 July 1979

This publication contains the speeches given by
Mrs Louise Weiss, Oldest Member and Mrs Simone Veil, President
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universal suffrage.

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SPEECH

by Madame Louise WEISS

Oldest Member,
presiding

Ladies and gentlemen, elected representatives of Europe, the stars of destiny and the paths of the written word have led me to this rostrum, and given me, as President for a day, an honour of which I would never have dared to dream and the greatest joy a human being can experience in the evening of life : the joy of a youthful vocation miraculously come to fruition.

I spoke of the stars of destiny. Allow me to add my political friends, who, familiar with my thinking, have enabled me to gain the confidence of the electors of my own country, France. I spoke too of the paths of the written word — the paths of the pen and of the Law, which in biblical times were one and the same. As a journalist, writer, and film director, whose words and images have remained at all times faithful to her beliefs, I feel, at this moment, as though my experience throughout this century and my travels throughout the world were destined to culminate in my meeting with you today : I come to you as one who loves Europe and, with your forbearance, I shall try to give expression to the fears and hopes which torment and inspire our collective conscience.

Our peoples hear us today : the two Americas, Asia, Africa and Oceania hear our words. How proud I am to be a European ! Let us together safeguard our most precious asset — our culture and the fraternity it brings us. I ask for your agreement, *votre accord, Ihre Zustimmung, il vostro consenso, Uw akkoord, Deres tilslutning, combaontu*, that this historic day should not end without kindling a new light in the firmament of our civilization as it embarks upon a new era. May that flame be kindled by you, here in Strasbourg, the symbolic metropolis of the reconciliation of our continent !

First, let us see ourselves in our true light in the world today as it makes the difficult transition from the age of steel to the age of the atom : on our little

promontory of Asia we find ourselves caught up in an agonizing process of change from societies of conspicuous consumption into societies of a new kind, compelled to reckon with the contradictory demands of birthrate and leisure, employment, security and threatened shortages of raw materials. Here in Europe switches and dials have replaced the strenuous labour of man. Elsewhere, man still ekes out his existence in economies of survival, or, worse still, of penury. Despite the manifold threats looming over it, Europe has a duty to continue to assist the disinherited of this world. Such is her burden still, but let us never lose the conviction of being both heirs and testators — heirs of a vital spirituality and testators of that spirituality to future generations.

Children, tomorrow? Whoever thinks of home, be it small or large — and the European home is immense — conjures up, if only through the shelves of a library, the memory of his ancestors. The more recent among them are familiar to us; those who are more distant tower majestically above the mists of history.

Honour to Charlemagne, Karl der Große! He brought the Iberian Peninsula into Europe, reconciling the Latin and the German genius. In 786, at Attigny, a small township of the French Ardennes where his palace stood, he had Wedukind, the King of the Saxons, baptized, while Irish monks were reclaiming the banks of the Marne. (By a happy chance, the youngest Member of this Assembly is an Irish lady who bears the illustrious name of De Valera.)

Then came the Middle Ages. The historians of Europe are magnificent in their erudition and powers of synthesis, but the usage of this rostrum and the spirit of this Assembly clearly prevent me from naming them all. Honour to Pope Urban II, to whose impassioned appeal Europeans as dissimilar as the English Richard the Lionheart, the German Frederic Barbarossa and Saint Louis, King of France, inspired by the same faith, responded over many years!

And honour to Dante, of Italy! His *Divine Comedy* represents the sum of European Christendom of his age and is coloured by reminiscences of Islam.

Then came the Renaissance. It is impossible to mention all the humanists, by definition Europeans.

Honour to Shakespeare, of England, who, from the ramparts of Elsinore, washed by the tides of Denmark, left an eternal question which haunts us all: 'To be or not to be':

O Constancy! be strong upon my side.
Set a huge mountain 'tween my heart and tongue.
I have a man's mind, but a woman's might.
How hard it is for a woman to keep counsel.

Honour, all honour, to Grotius, citizen of Holland and internationally acclaimed progenitor of Human Rights! Then came the European age of the Enlightenment. Honour to Voltaire, the defender of Calas and the Chevalier de La Barre! Honour to Kant, the philosopher of Königsberg who brought method to metaphysics! And honour to Goethe, of Germany, whose name has become synonymous with the culture we must perpetuate to enable us to forget our mortality:

Du mußt herrschen und gewinnen,
Oder dienen und verlieren...
Die Tat ist alles.

The great French Revolution, spiritual heir to Grotius, formulated the Rights of Man with even greater impact. The Rights of Man! How shameful, then, the concentration camps, psychiatric hospitals for the sane, and hooded judges sentencing blindfold prisoners! How shameful the genocides for which the whole earth mourns, but which still go unpunished!

Let us now pick up again the thread of history with Karl Marx, the champion of the workers. Once again, a son of Israel left his fiery mark on Europe but this second great Karl did not see his work fulfilled. He did not live to see the millions of homes, schools, hospitals, research and social insurance agencies, linked by busy motorways, which bear witness to the concern preoccupying the workers we all are — a concern that every European may live better, with his every need catered for by the community. Had he been able to contemplate these achievements, would the author of *Das Kapital* have moderated his dialectic? Who knows? Angel or devil, a fanatic only remembers those facts which suit him. I am well placed to speak on this: I came from a Protestant family of Alsace, and our pastors condemned the papists with such fury that I have been a liberal ever since.

Honour now to Ferdinand de Lesseps! Europe unanimously applauded the inauguration of his canal on a great day for mankind in the desert between Asia and Africa.

But let us move on, and pay reverent homage to Victor Hugo. In 1849, presiding over a peace congress in Paris, he proclaimed his hopes for a European union, the idea of which had begun to take shape in French minds after the downfall of Napoleon:

You will have many more quarrels to settle, interests to discuss, arguments to resolve ; but do you realize what you will substitute for men-at-arms, guns, lances, pikes and swords ? A little wooden box which you will call a ballot box.

Marguerite Hugo, the great-granddaughter of Victor, was a classmate of mine.

Now, among the more dazzling offspring of Zeus and the nymph Europa, I shall name my contemporaries, who, for many of you, already seem like forbears.

Enter our Pantheon, O patriarchs of the Court of Justice of The Hague, whom I knew in the prestigious aura of your old age ! Enter, founders of the League of Nations, pioneers of a European Federation whose constituent text was hacked to pieces by innumerable commissions, sub-commissions, committees, and sub-committees, colloquies and seminars — those sacred bodies of international powerlessness ! Enter Gustav Stresemann. I remember you, flushed with emotion, when you arrived at Cornavin Station to represent Germany at Geneva and speak for her at the rostrum of the Reformation Hall. With your bright eyes, your stiff collar and your determined energy, your willpower braved the insults hurled at you. This determination stood by you, right up to the signature of the Kellogg Pact, when I saw you again, pale and wasted, warned by your heart not to over-exert yourself : but you did. Enter Aristide Briand. I can still hear your organ-like voice. I remember your feline gait, your silver locks, and the cigarette-end which smouldered endlessly between your lips, masking from your onlookers the majesty of State with which, suddenly, you were not averse to shine. In 1931, in Berlin, I translated the words that Chancellor Brüning spoke to you, after a disappointing meeting, in a lobby which the official interpreters had deserted : 'Tell Monsieur Briand that, failing an immediate Franco-German understanding, events of which he can have no conception will be unleashed on the civilized world !' With his dreamy Celtic benevolence and the trust in human nature which stemmed from his Socialist background, Aristide Briand failed to understand this warning.

A few years later, the second world war broke out. It preserved our freedoms, but not beyond the Wall. And the tragedy endured of a Europe doubly undermined by an economic war, with its complex strategems, and an ideological war, concealing a thirst for power. None of our European democracies was big enough to remain isolated. Enter Konrad Adenauer, of Cologne — lofty as the spires of its cathedral, teeming as the waters of the Rhine — under the outward appearance of a Christian paterfamilias. Enter also the unforgettable third Charles — enter Charles de Gaulle. To you both we owe our presence here. Konrad Adenauer, the General entertained you in his home, on that austere plateau near Alésia and Verdun, trampled by the invaders of France

through the centuries. The name of our third Charles was never expressed in the Germanic form I have used. His bearing seemed to be inspired by a famous device : 'King I cannot, Prince I will not, Gaulle I am'. The passer-by who contemplates the Cross of Lorraine at Colombey feels bidden by many calls. Memorable June 18th ! The pink granite Cross of Lorraine stands four-square weathering every storm. At times it is wreathed in clouds which fuse the leader with his monument. Their great arms stretch out in command, their heads merge in the spheres of action and the horizons of thought.

Enter now Paul Valéry. Each morning, in the small hours of dawn, the spirit suffused your lean body. Often your dark blue gaze fixed itself on Europe. Long before the second world conflagration, you explained to me one day, as you stirred the sugar in your coffee, that the fate of Western civilization would be decided on the Yalu river dividing China from Korea. I had never heard of that river. Two decades later, the Yalu was to be the Rubicon separating President Truman from General MacArthur.

Enter Richard Koudenhove-Kalergi. The successor of your Pan-European Movement, in this Assembly, is a Prince of Habsburg. Do you remember, Richard, the lectures we delivered together in the Middle West ? We were three Europeans, the famous English Labour leader, Arthur Henderson, having joined us. From time to time, spurred by a touch of sombre humour, Arthur would exclaim : 'I say, can you tell me where to find a proletarian ?' We had to explain our respective national views on the quarrels which prevented the battered Europe of the Treaty of Versailles from recovering. Our audience, cast in the rôle of a tribunal, was to hand down its verdict. Soon we found ourselves merging into a single culture, so compelling that, to the disappointment of the outside world, we stood together as companions striding towards a common goal despite incidental differences of opinion. We were unceasing in our expression of gratitude to the soldiers of the New World, enamoured of freedom, who had stood by us in our fight to preserve our own liberty. We were not to know then that they would do so a second time. Such was the price of our common survival. Today many other sacrifices are called for.

Enter Robert Schuman and Jean Monnet. Robert Schuman, who with his laconic manner cleared up so many of the internal contradictions of our Continent. William the Silent, of Holland, was a constant spur to Schuman, teaching him that one need not hope in order to venture, nor succeed in order to persevere. Jean Monnet ! The Reaper who waits for us all has now carried you away. I met you in Bordeaux in 1914, unknown, but already a prophet in your youth. On the day of your funeral, all Europe crowded into the modest little church of Montfort-l'Amaury in the Yvelines. The little sala-

mander, which you chose as your emblem, will yet emerge unscathed from many a conflagration !

Let me recall, too, Albert Einstein and so many other eminent refugees. And you, too, the victims I have known and loved, slaughtered in our fight for the recognition of each individual and for the rights of our liberal peoples : the German, Walter Rathenau, the Italian, Giovanni Amendola, the Romanian, Ion Duca, the Austrian, Engelbert Dollfuss, the Czech, Jan Masaryk.

Enter, all of you ! Soon our Assembly will bid welcome to Greece, already associated in thought with our tribute. There is not, at this hour, one descendant of those blond and barbarous Cimmerians that once threatened Hellas who has not scaled, or sought to scale, the steps of the Acropolis, temple of Pallas-Athene, our Goddess of Wisdom, whom we have so often and so flagrantly disobeyed. Such is Europe. Let those who come after us remain true to the cult we render to our forbears ! Ladies and gentlemen, elected Representatives of Europe, let us rise to our feet and in solemn tribute to our heroes, observe a minute of silence.

But reverence for our ancestors must not paralyse our action nor turn our eyes from the future. Let us beware of becoming the classical image of our own selves. History moves on. Trends change. What was impossible yesterday will be possible tomorrow. In any case, you will not be starting with nothing behind you. Over ruins on which the dust had hardly settled, Winston Churchill expressed the hope in 1946 that the European family would come together again. In the early fifties, after Robert Schuman's declaration of 9 May, it became clear to six of our most highly industrialized countries that a Common Market, based on a customs union and financial adjustments, would raise the standard of living of producers and consumers alike. It was a correct assessment, but experience showed that it stood in need of constant review. And so it was that the Six of the Common Market signed those extraordinary Treaties of Paris (1951) and Rome (1957).

Perhaps, — thanks to his audacious plans for cooperation at a time when victors and vanquished were settling their accounts — the first begetter of the Coal and Steel Community is Émile Mayrisch, from Luxembourg, whose activities conferred on his country an international stature : Mayrisch, the man of empire and ruddy complexion who, as early as 1921, introduced me, with my European commitment, to his peers, the industrialists of the Ruhr.

The Six have become Nine. They will soon be Ten, all full participants in those organs of consultation, decision and execution now at work in this very city, in Brussels and in Luxembourg. Without those institutions, without the spirit of cooperation which they have shown, without the wealth of information brought together to balance the obligations and benefits of each, you

would be hampered in your work. For the past twenty years, they have been building the infrastructures which will enable your Assembly to take over from the former Assembly of the Communities, whose eminent President, Emilio Colombo, is with us today, and to assume its distinctive image with the added distinction of universal direct suffrage. Emilio Colombo has guided this Assembly to its present prestige : he worked closely with Alcide de Gasperi, the third instigator of the Treaty of Paris. And due tribute should also be paid to the courageous Paul Henri Spaak, from Belgium.

I say universal suffrage, for women have had in it the full share which was theirs of right. They would not have had this share when, in France, I led the struggle for their equality in an atmosphere so redolent of a bygone age that our opponents could argue successfully that women's hands were made to be fondled and not to place ballot-papers in ballot-boxes. Without rejecting those fond attentions, European women have nonetheless made use of their ballot papers, and here they are now, in many a government building, firmly in the seat of power. I warmly welcome those of them who are here with us, for they are conscious, though not in a divisive spirit, of the task they face.

I would remind you, who seem to me so young, of the work of an Estonian aristocrat which appeared during the dark years of the armistice when our continent was recovering its breath before the second world war. In his *Spektrum Europa*, Count Hermann Keyserling described himself as a Westerner by the colour of his skin, a European by education, a Balt by birth, Russian and German by blood, and a Frenchman by culture. I see him still, that true European, an immensely tall, ungainly figure with a mass of hair, an indefatigable talker commenting under the gaslights of Saint-Germain-des-Prés until three in the morning, for the benefit of the young woman I then was, on what was a premonitory work. It opened with a broadside directed at each of our peoples : the Briton, half-lion, half-wolf, but an inoffensive gentleman once his aims were secured ; the German, for whom things were more important than people, and who therefore could not resist a certain collective nostalgia ; the Italian, who looked on the theatre and the stage as an end in itself ; the Frenchman, incapable of understanding that others might wish to be different from himself, and wedded to his definitions like a savage to his fetishes. I will spare the others. But however loud his criticisms, he was lost in admiration for the wealth, variety, and strength of the contribution made by our nations to their common culture. Consequently, taking his analysis a stage further than the impulsive Hugo, he came to the view that to require of Europe that it should unite, like the United States or Russia, was to misjudge its essence and, in practice, condemn it to ruin. Away with the melting-pot ! It must unite in a different way. Each of the nations of which it was composed would preserve its language, its style. A new, exemplary form of unity would develop, while the nations, complementing one another, would

live on within it, their vigour intact. If, on the contrary, things went badly, all we could expect was what some would gladly have seen — a Europe in complete disintegration.

This gives you some idea of the concern with which Hermann Keyserling would have watched over the Treaty of Rome, identifying himself with the protests of its guardians against the distortions of the Common Market, which range from concealed tariffs to indiscriminate imports, manipulations of exchange-rates, and many other odd stratagems, the reports on which I have carefully perused. Yes, there have been stratagems and pressures, even secret instructions designed to break up our Market, but it has survived, having been born not of chance but of necessity.

And you yourselves, my cherished Europeans, you must allow that your election campaigns have often appeared weighed down by underlying partisan thoughts rather than uplifted by European concerns. When you hazarded a reasoned argument, you almost invariably lost your way in the maze of European institutions. The faithful emerged from your meetings, their heads buzzing with such technical terms as compensatory amounts, green currencies, compulsory or non-compulsory payments and even GATT or SALT — a buzzing which might interfere with *your* sleep but not theirs. You translated those terms into trucks, poultry, jobs, allowances, internal security — of the other security, not a word! — and you knew that unfortunately you could not speak as masters, because of your dependence on creditors who would have the last word when it came to settling your debts — those poisoned flowers that spring from the ground of social change forced on us by our own progress.

That is why, whatever verbal shafts (including my own) are let fly against the present European structures, we must in all justice come back to expressions of praise and gratitude. They have done as best they could in a climate of abstraction and suspicion — abstraction that lies outside what is human, suspicion that lies below what is human. They have spared us the worst: unilateral subjection destructive of our national traits. The support of your Assembly will give them new life, provided that it does not itself succumb to sterile party strife. As the bearer of hopes it cannot disappoint, it will not succumb.

I now turn eagerly to the future. For what poor reasons should your Assembly look back fixedly on the Treaties of Rome and Paris? Without infringing them, it could, by virtue of its moral sovereignty over European public affairs, tackle those crucial problems which transcend them, which are of even greater importance than these of currency or energy. I see three such problems.

The first is a problem of *identity*, not of identity in the sense of similarity, but of identity as a deep perception of one's being. The low turnout in the elections which have brought us here proves how urgent a problem it is. A Europe without Europeans is inconceivable. I said so in this Chamber when I received Chancellor Helmut Schmidt, the recipient of the prize awarded by my modest foundation, presided over by Monsieur Pierre Pflimlin, the Mayor of Strasbourg, who is with us today, and Monsieur Braun, President of the Human Sciences University of this city. I repeated it in Paris, in the Senate, when, under the chairmanship of Mr Alain Poher, I received from the eminent Gaston Thorn of Luxembourg, the Robert Schuman Gold Medal, awarded by the FVS-Stiftung in Hamburg. The Community institutions have produced European sugar-beet, butter, cheese, wines, calves and even pigs. They have not produced Europeans.

There were Europeans in the Middle Ages, during the Renaissance, in the Age of Enlightenment, and even in the 19th century. We must recreate them. Our young people have already set about the task, rucksacks on their backs, oblivious to frontiers. Already twinned towns have produced a body of men and women to whom past conflicts are anathema and who know their fate is bound up with that of the continent. But on the whole, schools and universities do not follow suit, in spite of exceptional achievements such as we have seen from Monsieur Brugmans, at Bruges, in Belgium. Exchange professors distill their wisdom, thanklessly taking care not to pose as champions of a Europe without which they would have remained at home. A few dreamers have imagined textbooks for schools which would turn our common past into a game played by children. Lies do not bear fruit. On the contrary, what we must do, in all the schools of Europe, from the most modest to the most sophisticated, is to explain that after centuries of conflict and bloodshed, a new era of understanding has dawned based on the highest common factor, of our culture.

Once I have rejoined you on the floor of the House, I will put forward a draft proposal that seeks to define this common factor, and with it, our distinguishing national characteristics. All our professors and teachers, schoolchildren and students ought to be associated in this task. It would lead to the awakening of a European consciousness, to which your election campaigns were only a prelude. We shall have it then at last, our European University, not in one or several establishments for uprooted youngsters, but everywhere and manifold. The creation, already called for, of a European Academy, of a European Philharmonic Orchestra, is a further necessity. Add to this European sports teams, physical education being a part of general education. No, we must not be content to remain the classical image of ourselves. A ball sometimes travels further than a shell.

The second problem is the *birthrate*. The way things are going, there will soon be no more Europeans. — So why this Assembly? The statistics on the subject seem to be doubly frightening the way they are put and the reality they point to. When experts tell me that German women give birth to only 1.4, and French women to 1.8, of the 2.28 children required, I start at the thought of thousands of babies in pieces and then I experience the anguish of the long statistical agony of our civilization. How to revive it? How to rejuvenate it? We shall only succeed if we act together.

Like all of you, I have reflected on the age-pyramids. I have even been as far as Niigata, in Japan, opposite the Chinese coast, to talk to Professor Ogino about the results of his method. When I was young, social taboos condemned women attracted by the so-called masculine professions to heavy personal sacrifices. The others knew that they would have to cope unaided by their families with the burden of maternity, at that time uncontrolled. Those taboos are dead, so dead that I perceive, in the assistance and respect which society, having changed its views, gives these women now, a kind of personal revenge. Assistance is essential, but believe me, the purchase of children, a course which our distraught governments are embarking upon by granting allowances and tax concessions beyond what their budgets can stand, will not change the pattern of the age-pyramids. Money is no substitute for either love or hope. If Western women no longer want children, it is because they consider them useless, and even a hindrance both to work and to leisure. For opposite reasons that produce the same results, Slav women in Russia also take care to avoid children. A collectivized child is no use to his family, and a great burden in a society where penury holds sway. It is not the assistance given to European women to encourage childbearing which will change their minds. The attitude implies that the child is a burden, a risk, even a misfortune, but never an investment. Of love, needless to say, there is no question. What is more, schools encourage children to criticize, to abandon respect for their parents. And beyond the Iron Curtain, to inform against them.

I appeal to an instinct drawn from the depths of time. Why were fertile women blessed of old? Firstly, the child shared in the labour of the family; secondly, he took care of his elders; thirdly, he passed on his inheritance. Today a child is born: firstly, his parents, impatient and worried, wonder what they will do with him; secondly, they do not depend on his assistance, their old age being taken care of by the State; thirdly the family inheritance is no longer passed on, but is frittered away, as we all know. This is not to say that the desire for a society of leisure does not also come to us from the depths of time. With the exception of those with the privilege of power or knowledge — the conquerors and the creators — free men have never worked more except in order to work less. At all events, if our jeopardized Europe wishes to

perpetuate itself, it must be prepared to face a profound moral transformation. It is surely reasonable to believe that, once they have acquired leisure, perceived the interdependence between the active phase of life and a contented old age, and satisfied their natural desire to hand down their possessions, married couples will be willing to enhance through children their zest for life. There is nothing to stop us from conceiving a different ideal, born of a faith in ourselves. The answer lies in our soul — the answer to the question of Europe !

Identity, birthrate. We now come to the third problem, which may, if you so will, prove a matter for your supreme authority — that of *legality*, of the Rights of Man. Those rights came to grief in Europe when the League of Nations broke down and our continent was overrun by the National Socialist dictatorship. They found refuge in the United States, first in San Francisco and later in Manhattan. There, they sank into oblivion. Tryants are welcomed with full honours in the Glass Palace and appointed to committees which supposedly concern themselves with improving the lot of the poor. International casuistry goes so far as to refuse to recognize as victims the boat people, adrift today on dangerous seas without provisions or destination, simply because they left their country 'voluntarily'.

Those responsible for the genocides with which we are familiar ought to have been expelled from the United Nations Organization. Who has demanded their expulsion ? Nobody. Is this surprising ? If we term democracies those countries in which the opposition has neither fled underground nor been imprisoned, there are fewer than thirty at Manhattan, among the 150 or more frequenters of its palace, all of them signatories of the Charter. What an organization, as Charles de Gaulle exclaimed. To lay down the law is not an obligation : but to lay down the law and pretend to enforce it while in reality betraying it is a crime. It will be for you to condemn this crime. It is for you to set the example !

But this law will itself have to be thought over again in the light of the unforeseen privileges engendered by the tolerance of our liberal societies. In its own name, this tolerance has given way to fanaticism and abuse of power. The concentration of technical power leads to excesses which neither Grotius, nor the revolutionaries of 1789, nor Marx himself had anticipated. From the outside, a handful of sons of the desert can destroy a civilization to which they owe their wealth, while Europe, even impoverished, unceasingly proclaims her solidarity with the underprivileged of our common Vale of Tears. From inside a few faceless men without clearly defined moral responsibilities can hold at their mercy until wind, cold, ignorance and paralysis ensue, masses of other anonymous men, their brothers. Europeans have a fear of privilege, even if it be the privilege of machines. In a spirit of respect for

the philosophy underlying Human Rights, new conceptions of property, labour and the exigences of culture must be sought.

Identity, natality, legality : Europe will only recover her aura by rekindling their flames — the flames of conscience, of life, and of law. You, the elected representatives of Europe, have tinder in your hands.

You may rest assured that I have made this speech, so little in tune with convention, in full awareness of the nuclear danger which hangs over us. Overburdened with weaponry, our planet turns on its axis, engaged in a third world war, now hidden, now brutally apparent — insidiously multiform. The documents I have seen fail to convince me that disarmament has begun otherwise than on paper ; nuclear science has, indeed, become widely accessible. The danger is now so great that it outstrips our anguish over it. If they were fully conscious of the risk, couples would have no children at all. Already, some peoples with more imagination than others have become like rats and built huge underground cities proof against blast and radiation. Already, shelter instructions are in circulation. But there is still a chance, which your moral authority as Europeans, united against a possible cataclysm, can strengthen. This chance resides in the fact that it is men, not weapons, that kill. Arms are not invented or brought out of hiding of their own accord. No, it is men who kill ; and if we, the Ten, have not yet made plans to live beneath the earth, allow me to entertain the illusion that this is not through any lack of funds, but because our spiritual concepts forbid us to despair of human nature.

Ladies and gentlemen, elected representatives of Europe, acting as your hostess rather than as your President, I want, after the fashion of my pretty great-granddaughters, who at this very moment are ranging the world by land, sea and air, to say thank you for your attention, *Merci pour votre attention ! Danke ! Grazie ! Dank U ! Tak ! go raibh maith agaibh !* Thank you, and, in my incomparable native tongue, I would add : du fond du cœur !

SPEECH

by Madame Simone VEIL

President

Ladies and gentlemen, you have done me a signal honour in electing me President of the European Parliament, and my emotions on taking the chair are deeper than I can put into words. First of all, I should like to thank all of those who voted for me. I shall endeavour to be the President they would wish me to be. True to the spirit of democracy, I shall also seek to be the President of the whole Assembly.

Today's sitting is being held in a setting with which many of you are familiar, but it is nonetheless an historic occasion. This doubtless explains the presence of the many distinguished guests who have accepted our invitations. I am sorry that I cannot mention them all by name, but on behalf of each and every Member of this House I bid them welcome.

We are highly honoured by the presence of many Presidents and Speakers of the Parliaments of associated and other countries, representing the nations of five continents. By coming here today, they have shown how much importance they attach to relations with our Parliament, thus lending invaluable support to our democratic enterprise. We greatly appreciate your acceptance of our invitations and your gesture of friendship and solidarity, and I should like to convey to you our special thanks.

Yesterday evening I expressed the gratitude we owe to Louise Weiss, who so ably guided our first steps. I should like to add, with your indulgence, one further word and mention her outstanding contribution to the struggle waged in the cause of the emancipation of women.

It is my duty, but also an honour, to pay tribute to the previous Assembly, and more particularly to its presidents, who presided over it with such great authority. I should particularly like to stress the honour due to President Colombo who so ably filled this chair, and earned universal esteem for the manner in which he discharged this difficult task.

In its work ever since the first European Community, the Coal and Steel Community, was set up, and particularly since the establishment of the single Assembly of the Communities in 1958, the European Parliament has played a major and increasingly important part in the building of Europe. However new a departure its election by direct universal suffrage provides, our Assembly is first and foremost the heir to the parliamentary assemblies which have gone before it. It follows on in the path traced by those who have sat in this House from the time when, a generation ago, the European and the democratic ideal were brought together.

Its beginnings were modest and discreet, in keeping with the limited powers conferred on it by the Treaty of Rome, but through the growing political influence it has gradually acquired, the European Parliament has consolidated its rôle among the institutions and in the building of the Community. It was this growing influence which led to the signing of the Treaties of 21 April 1970 and 22 July 1975 which strengthened the Assembly's budgetary powers. Furthermore, through a number of practical arrangements, the part played by the Assembly in the exercise of the Community's responsibilities has been given sharper form and wider scope.

We in the new Parliament will not lose sight of these achievements of our predecessors. None of us will forget their contribution to the attainment of the hopes of the founding fathers of the Community for an ever-closer union between the peoples of Europe.

While we cannot forget the substantial achievements of the Assemblies which preceded us, I must now lay full emphasis on the fundamentally new departure that has been made by the European Communities in having their Parliament elected for the first time by direct universal suffrage.

For this is the first time in history, a history in which we have so frequently been divided, pitted one against the other, bent on mutual destruction, that the people of Europe have together elected their delegates to a common assembly representing, in this Chamber today, more than 260 million people. Let there be no doubt, these elections form a milestone on the path of Europe, the most important since the signing of the Treaties. It is true that the electoral systems still vary from one Member State to the other — and this was laid down in the Act of 20 September 1976 on the election of representatives to the Assembly by direct universal suffrage — and it will be for us to draw up a uniform electoral system for future elections. This is a task to which, along with you, I shall devote my energies.

Whatever our political beliefs, we are all aware that this historic step, the election of the European Parliament by universal suffrage, has been taken at a crucial time for the people of the Community. All its Member States are

faced with three great challenges : the challenge of peace, the challenge of freedom and the challenge of prosperity, and it seems clear that they can only be met through the European dimension.

Let us begin with the challenge of peace. In a world where the balance of power has enabled us so far to avoid the suicidal cataclysm of armed conflict between the superpowers, localized wars have, in contrast, proliferated. The period of peace we have enjoyed in Europe has been an exceptional piece of good fortune, but we should none of us underestimate its fragility. Is there any need to stress the novelty of this situation in Europe, whose history is a long chapter of fratricidal and bloody wars ?

Like its forerunners, our Assembly has, whatever our differences, a fundamental responsibility for maintaining this peace, which is probably the most precious asset in all Europe.

The tension prevailing in the world today makes this responsibility an even heavier one, and the legitimacy bestowed on our Assembly by its election by universal suffrage will, let us hope, help us to bear it, and spread this peace of ours to the outside world.

The second basic challenge is that of freedom. The frontiers of totalitarianism have spread so far that the islands of freedom are surrounded by régimes in which force prevails. Our Europe is one such island ; let us welcome the fact that Greece, Spain and Portugal, with traditions as old as our own, have joined the ranks of the free countries.

The Community will be happy to receive them. Here too, the European dimension should help to strengthen that freedom whose value is too often not realized until it has been lost.

Finally, Europe has to meet the great challenge of prosperity, by which I mean the threat to the living standards of our peoples posed by the basic upheaval which, over the past five years, the oil crisis has both sparked off and revealed in its full dimensions. After experiencing for a generation a rapid and steady rise in living standards without precedent in history, every country in Europe is now faced with a kind of economic warfare which has brought the return of that forgotten plague, unemployment, and jeopardized the rise in living standards. This upheaval is leading to far-reaching change. In our different countries, everyone is fully aware that change is inevitable but at the same time fears it. Everyone expects guarantees, safeguards and reassuring action from the governments and elected representatives, at both national and European level.

We all know that these challenges, which are being felt throughout Europe with equal intensity, can only be effectively met through solidarity. Beside

the superpowers, only Europe as a whole is capable of taking the necessary action which is beyond its individual members in isolation. However, in order to take effective action the European Communities must unite and gather strength. The European Parliament, now that it is elected by direct universal suffrage, will in future bear a special responsibility. If the challenges facing Europe are to be met, we need a Europe capable of solidarity, of independence and of cooperation.

By a Europe of solidarity I mean solidarity among peoples, regions and individuals. In the relations between our peoples there can be no question of overriding or neglecting the fundamental national interests of each of the Community Member States. However, it is undoubtedly true that, very often, the interests of all are better served by European solutions than by persistent opposition. While no country can consider itself exempt from the discipline and effort now demanded at national level by the new economic constraints, our Assembly must nevertheless continually press for a reduction of existing disparities since a deterioration of the situation would destroy the unity of the Common Market and, with it, the privileged position of some of its members.

Social solidarity, in other words the smoothing out of economic and sometimes financial inequalities, is also required if regional disparities are to be reduced. The Community has already taken practical and effective action in this field. It should continue to pursue this policy as long as the results are in proportion to the expenditure.

Policy must also be adapted in order to redress not only the situation in the traditionally depressed regions, but also that of regions considered up to recently as strong and prosperous but now stricken by economic disasters.

Finally, and most important of all, solidarity between men must be fostered. Despite the real, and indeed remarkable, progress achieved in this area over the past few decades, much remains to be done. However, at a time when all citizens will undoubtedly be required to accept the fact that the rise in the standard of living must come to a halt or progress more slowly, and also to accept a brake on the growth of social expenditure, the necessary sacrifices will not be made unless there is a genuine reduction in social inequalities.

The principal objective of the measures to be taken in this field, both at Community and national level, is employment. Our Assembly must consider in depth the new situation where demand is increasing at a greater pace than supply. This is producing frustrations, and a combination of measures such as productive investments, the protection of the more vulnerable European activities and regulations on working conditions will be necessary in order to improve the situation.

Our Europe must also be a Europe of independence. This must not be an aggressive or independence liable to end in conflicts, but Europe must determine the conditions of its development in its own way. This is particularly true in such matters as monetary and energy policy.

Of note in the monetary field is the major political significance for Europe of the recent setting up of the European Monetary System, designed to restore stable monetary relations within the Community, which has been affected over the past few years by the instability of the dollar, even when this was foreseeable.

In the field of energy, dependence on the oil producers is a major handicap for Europe. In order to restore the conditions which are essential for our independence, the Assembly might be well advised to call upon the European Governments to proclaim in this House their desire for cooperation and concertation — a desire which is belatedly beginning to become apparent. We must also further promote energy-saving measures and the search for new forms of energy.

Finally, the Europe which we advocate must be a Europe of cooperation. The Community has already established, in the field of relations with the developing countries, a form of cooperation which is in many respects exemplary. A new step in this cooperation has recently been taken through the latest negotiations with the associated countries. The Community now hopes that the new Convention of Lomé will be signed by all the countries which took part in those negotiations.

Although the new world economic situation necessitates a strengthening of this policy of cooperation, it also requires us to take account of the growing disparities evident among the developing countries themselves, depending on whether they are producers of raw materials. Within the framework of this selective cooperation, Europe must be able to obtain the raw materials necessary for its activities, to offer its partners equitable revenues and balance the necessary transfers of technology with safeguards ensuring that its industries can compete under equitable conditions.

Because it has been elected by universal suffrage and will derive a new authority from that election, this Parliament will have a special rôle to play in enabling the European Community to attain these objectives and so prove equal to the challenges facing it. The historic election of June 1979 has raised hopes — tremendous hopes — in Europe. Our electors would not forgive us if we failed to take up this heavy but infinitely rewarding responsibility.

The European Parliament must exercise this responsibility in all its deliberations.

I should, however, like to stress the extent to which, in my view, this new authority will prompt Parliament to intensify its action on two fronts : firstly, by performing its function of control more democratically, and secondly, by acting as a more effective motive force in European integration.

The directly-elected European Parliament will be able fully to perform its function of democratic control, which is the prime function of any elected Assembly.

In particular, given the powers conferred upon it by the Treaties, the European Parliament has the task of authorizing the budget on behalf of the citizens of the Community. Henceforth in the Community, as in all the Member States, it is the Assembly elected by the people that adopts the budget. The budget is the most important act over which this Parliament has specific powers, being able to amend it or reject it in its entirety.

I want to stress the importance of the budgetary dialogue at its various stages, from the drawing up of the draft budget right through to its final adoption. This is a complex and lengthy procedure, involving deadlines and a 'shuttle' between the Council and the Assembly, but this complexity and two-way traffic are counterbalanced by the opportunity to make our voice heard.

However, this can only hold good if certain conditions are met : the first is our presence throughout this process, as our presence is essential. Secondly, our strength will clearly be all the greater if we are in agreement among ourselves and take care not to indulge in demagoguery but keep our feet firmly on the ground.

The first task on the programme of this Parliament will be to take the first reading of the preliminary draft budget for 1980, which we are to examine very shortly.

In a more general appraisal of the exercise of the budgetary powers of the directly-elected Parliament, it seems to me that one point deserves emphasis. A responsible Parliament should not confine itself, when drawing up the budget, to the adoption of a given volume of expenditure, but must also examine the collection of revenue. This is perfectly consistent with the democratic calling of this Parliament. History teaches us that the world's first parliaments stemmed from the authorization to levy taxes.

The urgency of this consideration is heightened by the fact that, during the life of this Parliament, the European Community budget will reach the ceiling of 1 % of VAT revenue laid down in the Treaties for the collection of own resources. In the years to come, the problem of revenue must thus remain in the forefront of our minds, and this Parliament, representing as it does all the citizens and thus all the taxpayers of the Community, will neces-

sarily be called upon to make a leading contribution to the solution of this problem.

Parliament must also be an organ of control of general policy within the Community. Let us not be deluded into believing that the strictly institutional limitations on its powers can prevent a Parliament such as ours from speaking out at all times, and in every field of Community action, with the political authority conferred on it by its election.

Our Parliament must also be a motive force in European integration. This is particularly true at a time when, as I already have mentioned, Europe's prime need is a further measure of solidarity. This new Parliament will make it possible for the views of all Community citizens to be voiced at European level, and will at the same time more effectively impress upon every sector of society the need for a solidarity transcending immediate concerns, however legitimate, which must never be allowed to mask the fundamental interests of the Community.

We are, of course, aware of the existing allocation of powers in the Community, which confers autonomy on each institution. The Treaties attribute the right of initiative to the Commission and legislative power to the Council. The autonomy of each of the institutions, which is so necessary to the proper functioning of the Communities, does not prevent these institutions from essentially working together with one another, and it is within the context of this cooperation that the fresh impetus provided by the newly-acquired legitimacy of this Assembly must be turned into an effective driving force.

Our Parliament will therefore play its part in promoting European progress most effectively by strengthening cooperation with the other institutions. It should do so not only when its advice is sought — and here there are no limits that apply — but also under the new conciliation procedure, which should enable Parliament to participate effectively in the legislative decisions of the Communities.

The voice of our Assembly, confident in its newly-acquired legitimacy, will be heard by all the Community authorities and, more especially, at the highest level of political decision-making. Here I am thinking in particular of the European Council.

As is only natural and normal in a democratic assembly such as ours, we differ on the programmes which we wish to implement, on the ideas which we wish to advocate and even on the very rôle we are to play.

Let us, however, avoid the error of turning our Assembly into a forum for rivalry and dissent. Too often in the past, public opinion in our countries has

gained the impression that the European Communities are hamstrung institutions, incapable of reaching decisions within the necessary time limits.

Our Parliament will entirely fulfil the hopes which it has raised if, far from being the sounding-board for the internal divisions of Europe, it succeeds in articulating and bringing home to the Community the spirit of solidarity that is so necessary today.

As far as I am concerned, I intend to devote my entire time and energies to the task before us. I am not unaware of the fact that, although we are the offspring of a common civilization and are fashioned by a culture that drew nourishment from the same sources, we do not necessarily have either the same idea of society or the same aspirations.

However, I am convinced that the pluralist nature of our Assembly can serve to enrich our work and not act as a brake on the continuing construction of Europe. Whatever our differences of temperament, I feel that we share the same desire to achieve a Community founded on a common heritage and the shared respect for fundamental human values. In this spirit I invite you to embark in fraternal fashion on the work that awaits us.

At the end of our term of office, I trust that we shall share the feeling that we have advanced the cause of Europe. I trust that, above all, we shall have fully responded to the hopes that this Assembly arouses, not only among the people of Europe but also among all those throughout the world who prize peace and liberty.