

May 28, 1968

**Speech by M. Jean REY,
President of the Commission of the European Communities.**

Mr. Chairman, Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The first feeling that I should like to express as I speak on behalf of my colleagues is one of gratitude to the Economic and Social Committee; I know that I speak here not only on behalf of the fourteen members of the present Commission of the European Communities but also as the heir to the three bodies which existed for ten years and whose successors we now are. I refer to the Commission of the European Economic Community, and here I thank you, Mr. Chairman, for the tribute you paid to President Hallstein, to whom we are indebted for so much in the construction of Europe; I refer, too, to the Commission of the European Atomic Energy Community and, of course, to the High Authority in Luxembourg which has, no doubt, because of the differences between our Treaties, been less in touch with your Economic and Social Committee but which, had it still existed, would certainly have wished to take part in today's ceremony.

In expressing to you these words of gratitude, Mr. Chairman, for in the last ten years you have helped us a great deal in elaborating the decisions we have had to take, I would like to assure our listeners that the Economic and Social Committee has played the part entrusted to it by the authors of the Treaty. It seems to me to have done this in three ways: firstly, by the serious and thorough Opinions that you have given us and to which you have always devoted very conscientious, very considerable care; secondly, by the institutional place which you have occupied, and I cannot define it better than you did in the speech we have just heard; and thirdly, because — and the fact needs to be stressed — the purely consultative status of your organization has not so far discouraged either its Chairman or its members. Over the years you have continued to work with the same dynamic energy and the same care, even though you may sometimes have wondered whether the work and its results attracted sufficient attention on the part of the authorities who received your Opinions.

We thank you, Mr. Chairman; and as we cannot greet all the distinguished men whom we have met during the last ten years in your Committee, may I at least greet the successive Chairmen, M. De Staercke, M. Rosenberg, M. Roche, M. Giustiniani, the five Chairmen who have followed each other and of whom you are the latest. We thank you all, Gentlemen.

My second observation relates to the speech which you, Sir, have just made; it was full of interest not only with regard to the past and present but also

for the future. You will, I am sure, not expect me to react at this stage to the suggestions you made, although they did not take us completely by surprise since you made some of them when you and the officers of the Committee visited us not so long ago. But I remember one point from your speech which I noted in passing, namely that replies can never be improvised. This is what *you told us*, and so I am not going to improvise on behalf of my colleagues here before we have had time to consider a reply to your suggestions. I do not think, however, that I should be going too far if here and now I said that they look promising. I think that you and we must together work out methods and arrangements whereby we can better use our joint work and consequently take the Opinions issued by the Committee more fully into account.

My third observation — I have four to make — concerns the growing part that the Economic and Social Committee will have to play during the next ten years in the constitutional life of our Community.

Mr. Chairman, we are, as you have pointed out more than once, on the eve of the merger not just of the Commissions and the Councils but of the Treaties themselves. Your Committee rightly attaches great importance to the merger. You have asked to be fully consulted — and in good time — on the plans and ideas that may be thrown up in connection with the merger; I can tell you now, on behalf of the Commission, that you will be consulted, because this is what we want and because we have already so decided. We think that the merger of the Treaties will cause us to review all the functions of the Economic and Social Committee and, naturally, of the Consultative Committee of the ECSC, in relation to the new organization. But there is more to it than that. We are already well into the second period of Community life. The first covered the establishment of the customs union, and in a few weeks' time, on 1 July, this union will be complete. For a long time already we have been in the second phase which is more difficult, more exciting and more important, as it is the period when economic union will be established. For this the Treaty has done no more than give us a few directives. It leaves a great deal — wisely, I think — to the discretion of the Community institutions: the Council, the Parliament, the Commission. Under the ever careful and respected supervision of the Court of Justice, these institutions are left to forge the future common policies. Even more than in the past, this implies economic options, social options and, therefore, political options. The part played by the institution which embodies the broad economic and social interests of the people of Europe will therefore gain in importance.

My fourth observation naturally concerns current events. I am grateful to my distinguished friend, M. Edgar Faure, for having broached them so frankly and I think he was right to do so. Our meeting today would be out

of touch with realities if we did not take cognizance of this vast upheaval which is now affecting all the young people at the universities of Europe and which, by contagion or imitation or for other reasons, is in process of unsettling vast economic and social forces in the Community.

Ladies and Gentlemen, this is perhaps not the time nor the place to say whither we are or should be heading. But one thing is clear and I thank the President of the Council for having said it: we are clearly moving towards changes which will give those who represent the intellectual, economic and social forces a greater part to play in the organization of society and perhaps in its management.

If this be so, and I think we should then welcome it, it must at once be recognized that bodies such as the Economic and Social Committee will in future have a growing part to play at the European level. For if the political authorities, whether in our countries or at European level, are confronted by groups which, taken individually, represent this or that sector of economic and social life, how much greater will be the importance we must attach to a body which is the very place where these sectors meet, where they discuss their problems with each other and not only with the authorities and where, as a result, they can proceed to the confrontations which are absolutely essential?

I am deeply convinced that between the people of Europe and its highest political institutions, which have to take decisions, the existence of a large intermediary body like yours will in future be increasingly necessary. What is happening today can leave us in no doubt on that score. At the same time, how can we fail to recognize that these events give us a greater burden of responsibility? For us it is clear that young people at the universities no longer believe in a purely national framework (and all the evidence that we have from either Berlin, Paris, Rome or elsewhere is in agreement on this point) and no longer believe that this framework can be the extreme limit of their aspirations, their desires and their ideals. How then can we fail to see that these young people will turn resolutely to Europe and pledge themselves to it only if Europe shows them a quite different face? This to me seems obvious!

When I, on behalf of my colleagues, addressed President Poher and the European Parliament in Strasbourg a fortnight ago, I recalled a remark Voltaire made to a Christian of that time: "Make your God greater if you want him to be worshipped". It is the same for us Europeans; let us make Europe more attractive if we want it to appear, to our students, to the younger generation and, to put it more directly, to our own children as an ideal to which it is really worth pledging oneself.

This implies duties for everyone, and it would be improper for me simply to turn my gaze to other Community institutions with the idea that it is they who should show more unity and be quicker in reaching the decisions they have to take. These are collective duties, these are duties for all of us, whether it be our Commission which proposes, the Council which decides, Parliament which gives its opinions and, in the final analysis, judges us. Let us now look into our own hearts and ask if the time has not come to take decisive steps forward in the months ahead so that Europe may seem to be what it has got to be: an enlarged Community, a continent reconciled with itself and a genuine force for peace, social progress, human freedom and generosity in the world.