

EUROPEAN ATOMIC  
ENERGY COMMUNITY

E U R A T O M

Commission

Speech by Mr. Etienne HIRSCH, President of  
Euratom and Chairman of the Interim Committee  
on the European University

Florence, 15 May 1961

---

Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen :

It is a very great honour and a source of deep satisfaction for me to have this opportunity of addressing you in the historic Palazzo Vecchio, on the occasion of the present meeting of the European Parliamentary Committee on Research and Culture and the ceremony which is being held to mark the signature of the agreement for the purchase of the site of the European University. Now that this step has been taken, we can, I trust, look forward to the speedy implementation of the European University project.

I would like to pay tribute to the uniformly constructive attitude which the Italian Government has always adopted towards the question of setting up the European University. I also wish to thank Mr. La Pira, Mayor of this city, which is so highly-prized by all Europeans as a cradle of the arts and civilization. Furthermore, I should like to express my gratitude to Mr. Geiger, Chairman of the European Parliamentary Committee on Research and Culture, who has on so many occasions publicly affirmed the importance he attaches to a project which is so vital for the furtherance of European culture, and who has succeeded in obtaining unanimous support for his views in the European Parliament.

On this occasion, allow me to recall briefly the scope and the significance of the proposals drawn up by the Interim Committee on the European University, which completed its deliberations here in Florence a little over a year ago.

In conformity with the instructions received from the Councils of Ministers of the European Communities, the Committee drew up three separate sets of proposals which mesh together to form a single overall programme.

The first set of proposals involves the development of exchanges amongst existing universities which are and will continue to be the basis of university education in our countries. It is essential that students be given far greater opportunities than they now have of studying abroad for a substantial portion of their university careers. In the modern world and in the Europe of today, anyone who has not spent some time outside his own country in the course of his school and university training is bound to be regarded as something of a provincial. If we are to achieve adequate results, curricula will have to be harmonized, a general degree equivalence system evolved and a wide range of special facilities provided. It is also important to arrange for large-scale exchanges of teaching staff amongst our universities; the introduction of the practice of the sabbatical year would help towards the attainment of this goal.

A second category of proposals is concerned with the development and creation of European institutes for higher education and research. The idea here is to provide students, research-workers and professors from all the member countries with an opportunity of attending specialized institutes with particularly valuable traditions or with modern facilities and equipment not readily found elsewhere.

One possibility will be to develop institutes of established competence and worth, such as the College of Europe in Bruges and other institutes for European studies. Another would be to set up new institutes for advanced research, which are generally acknowledged to be lacking in Europe.

Lastly, the project involves the creation of the European University which is the occasion for our meeting here today. What I have just said shows clearly, I think, that in the minds of the promoters of the European University idea there is no intention of minimizing the prestige of the established universities or their contribution to European education, nor of overlooking the need for the development of specialized institutes.

In the basic conception of the European University at Florence, there is one fundamental feature which is quite unique. Whereas the traditional-type university acts as host to a minority of students and professors from other countries, students and professors will carry out their research work and play their part in the corporate life of the new university in a setting where no one nationality will be numerically preponderant.

Another novel characteristic of this university is that it will not aim at covering the whole span of the work done at a traditional-type university. The students who attend will already have completed three or four years of their studies at existing universities and establishments, and they will have to be up to genuine research work standard when they enter the University. The only degree which it is planned to confer is a European University doctorate.

The new University will not have faculties, but instead a number of departments which will by no means cater for the whole range of subjects normally taught at universities. On the basis of the suggestions made so far, priority would go to those subjects which would benefit from being treated in a European context and for which there is a genuine need, and which would at the same time serve to give fresh meaning to the cultural values by which we set such store.

In conclusion, there is one aspect of this project that I should like to single out for special mention. Far from there being any desire to limit the University to the six member countries of the European Communities, it has always been clearly understood that students and professors from other countries, and in particular those for whose development Europe feels that she bears a special responsibility, would have full access to it. Already a number of countries have signified keen interest in the possibility of participating in the work of the University.

Ladies and gentlemen, you may feel that the practical approach adopted towards the new University, the first official act of which we are celebrating today, falls short of the ambitious spirit in which it was originally conceived, especially in view of the fact that during the initial five-year period it is planned to provide facilities for no more than 500 students per year. In my view, however, the Interim Committee has been well-advised to take heed of the various recommendations for moderate and reasonable action which were made to it from various quarters. It should not be forgotten that our most highly-reputed universities were not created overnight. Let us place our trust in those whose mission it will be to guide the European University in Florence on its way on the basis of the traditional academic freedoms, and to build up from these modest beginnings an institution in line with the demands which will inevitably be made on it and worthy of the ideals to which they are pledged.