



*European Communities
Commission
Press Release*

20 Kensington Palace Gardens
London W8 4QQ
Telephone: 01-727 8090

November 4, 1977

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Speech by Mr Christopher Tugendhat, EEC Commissioner
responsible for the Budget, to the Cambridge University
Conservative Association, on Sunday, November 6.

THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITY : ITS MORAL IDENTITY AND MISSION

Taking the Community for granted

All too often - and all too easily - we take the achievements of the European Community for granted. Familiarity has not bred contempt for Europe's successes, but it has, I suspect, fostered a considerable degree of complacency.

Thus, for example, we do not often marvel at the extraordinary and profound reconciliation between France and Germany which the co-operation of those traditional foes within the framework of the Community has made possible. Nor do we frequently reflect upon the extent to which that reconciliation has made another major war among the nations of Western Europe virtually unthinkable.

Similarly we rarely express astonishment at the successful establishment of a common market for goods and services throughout the nine Member States. And we only very occasionally congratulate ourselves upon the manner in which, by adopting a common negotiating position in an increasing number of international forums - for example, the Helsinki and Belgrade Conferences - the Members of the Community are now able to exert a much greater influence upon world affairs than would be possible for any one of them acting separately.

The Comparison with 1945

Yet when we look back to the years immediately after 1945 - and to the state of physical ruin and political chaos to which Europe had by then been reduced by seven years of savage warfare - the real and spectacular measure of these and the Community's other achievements surely becomes apparent. Whatever the imperfections of the Community today - and no member of Commission is likely to deny their number or their seriousness - can anyone dispute that its record of success in the twenty one years since its creation exceeds anything that could have been reasonably expected in the almost unimaginably difficult conditions in which its original foundations were constructed?

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It is ironic that, while those who belong to the Community are often reluctant to applaud it, external observers are usually acutely aware of the advantages it has conferred upon its constituent parts. That explains why other nations are pressing so vigorously to join. Having thrown off the yoke of dictatorship, the first major concern of Greece, Portugal and Spain is to be allowed to participate in the benefits which they have no doubt Community Membership offers.

The Comparison with the Contemporary World

It is not, of course, only the achievements of the Community in a historical perspective which have impressed the applicant countries. In addition to comparing the present day Community with the devastated Europe of a still recent past, they also contrast it, to its considerable advantage, with the greater part of the contemporary world outside. And I believe it is very important that those of us who are already citizens of the Community should also endeavour to see it in this wider context.

The Economic Strength of the Community

Viewed against the backcloth of the nations and continents beyond its frontiers, two characteristics of the Community in particular stand out in sharp relief. The first is economic - Europe's, relatively speaking, immense material affluence. It is true that some areas of the globe are even richer than Europe's Member States. Nonetheless, according to the latest United Nations statistics, the gross national product for the EEC on a per-capita basis is nearly 200% higher than the g.n.p. per-capita of the market economies of the world as a whole.

The Community and Democracy

But perhaps an even more striking feature of the European Community when seen in a world context - and the feature to which I mainly want to draw your attention this afternoon - is not economic but political and social - the Community's deeply democratic and liberal character.

We should never allow ourselves to forget that throughout the area which it covers - from Scarpa Flow to Sicily, and from Bantry Bay to Bavaria - the Community is distinguished not merely by the profession, but also by the practice of those democratic ideals based upon respect for the individual which are Europe's most important gifts to human civilization. Free elections, freedom of speech, equality of opportunity, equality before the law, and freedom from arrest without trial are rights which are the common and precious property of all the Community's citizens - and a possession without which their economic affluence, even if it could be maintained, would swiftly lose its savour.

Freedom under Siege

Unhappily, these basic liberties are not enjoyed very extensively elsewhere, apart from a number of obvious examples. In too many regions of the globe the ideals of Freedom and Democracy are under siege. In many parts of Africa, Asia and Latin America freedom is being trampled underfoot. The same is tragically true of Eastern Europe where the instruments of repression seem to become almost daily more subtle and insidious.

Safeguarding the Rights of the Community's Citizens

In these circumstances it is clearly incumbent upon Europeans to recognise their good fortune. Furthermore, it is vital that we appreciate the part which the Community has played in securing it.

Democracy in modern Europe does not owe its origin to the European Community. The roots of European individualism are bedded deep in European history, and all the Member States were fully fledged democracies, most of them very longstanding, before they joined the Community. Nonetheless it should not be imagined that the democratic nature of all the political institutions exercising authority within the Community - whether at local, national or supra-national level - is a purely contingent phenomenon, quite unrelated to the Community's central rationale and purpose. On the contrary, not only has the possession of a democratic and liberal constitution always been a condition of Community membership, but the safeguarding and enhancement of basic democratic liberties has, from the outset, been a major objective of the European venture.

Throughout European history virtually every European state has lived, in varying degrees, on terms of distrust or enmity with its neighbour. Among the many evil consequences of this has been the manner in which it has consistently menaced civil liberties. Even when the suspension of liberty has not been made to some extent inevitable by an outbreak of war, the conditions of instability and fear which tense relations with a powerful neighbour have engendered have frequently tempted national governments to conclude - sometimes with the support of many of the governed - that a broad measure of freedom for the individual citizen is a luxury which their country cannot safely afford.

One of the great and guiding insights of the Founding Fathers - of men like Robert Schuman, Alcide di Gasperi, Jean Monnet and Konrad Adenauer - was their recognition that if leading democratic nations of Europe dared to transcend their ancestral rivalries, and to enter an entirely new relationship, in which each brought the best of its individual traditions to bear upon the construction of a greater whole, then, in addition to eliminating the prospect of armed conflict between them, those nations would also immeasurably fortify the individual freedoms and rights which each of them cherished.

The accuracy of this perception on the part of the Founding Fathers has, I believe, been amply vindicated by subsequent events: not least indeed by the remarkable resilience which European democracy is currently displaying in the face of unprecedented economic problems, and in the face also of a terrifying wave of pitiless and barbarous terrorism.

A new Task

What, however, the Founding Fathers failed to anticipate was that while their policies would be rewarded with success, the attempt of others outside Western Europe to build similarly sturdy democracies would all too often meet with failure.

As I have said, the immediate post war era posed formidable difficulties for those who had to set about building a new world out of the rubble of the old. Nonetheless, it was an era of almost universal hope. Men dared to dream that such national and imperial despotisms as remained would be rapidly removed; that across the world a new and democratic dawn was about to break. It was not to be. Democracy has proved neither inevitable nor ineradicable. And the consequence of this, I believe, is that the Community is now called to undertake a task which, understandably, the Founding Fathers did not envisage. .../

Proving that Freedom Works

In a world in which democracy and freedom are so rare, and so frequently ephemeral, it is increasingly easy for sceptics plausibly to maintain that these are abstract ideals of little practical value. In the face of such corrosive cynicism, which reinforces existing despotisms, and prepares the way for new ones, the peoples of the Community have thrust upon them a very special responsibility. It falls to us, not merely for our own sake, but for the sake of humanity at large, to provide the world with an example and with an inspiration. We must show that freedom and democracy can be achieved in practice on a lasting basis. We have to show that this can be done more easily and effectively when proud nations are willing to forget ancient animosities and to cooperate with their neighbours. And, above all, we have to show that freedom and democracy are justified by their fruits: that freedom under democratically determined law enables men and women more completely to realise their potential, and to live happier, more fulfilled and more useful lives, than is possible under any other system.

To say that we must provide an example is not to suggest that the European way of life can offer a precise and detailed blueprint for others to emulate. The exact constitutional and legal means by which the cause of individual freedom is best served inevitably vary with the circumstances of time and place. But what Europe can and must demonstrate, by virtue of the equality of the life enjoyed by her citizens, is that liberty is a prize so valuable that its attainment, through the establishment of any one of a wide variety of possible constitutional forms, is fully worth the prolonged and arduous struggle which in many parts of the world it will certainly require.

Proving this to be the case is a high and demanding vocation. But if they respond to it, the peoples of Europe will serve the cause of human progress, and, in so doing, arrive at a fuller understanding of their own common heritage and shared moral identity.

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