

No. 30/1979

July 18, 1979

STATESMEN GREET THE OPENING SESSION OF THE DIRECTLY
ELECTED EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT IN STRASBOURG

Extracts from the address by Mr. Jack Lynch, T.D., Irish
President-in-office of the European Council at the inaugural
session of the European Parliament on July 18, 1979.

Madame President, Ladies and Gentlemen:

I am honored to share with you the opening of a new chapter in the history of Europe and mankind. You, the members of this first directly-elected European Parliament also constitute the first freely-elected international Parliament, representing some 260 million citizens of the member countries of the European Communities.

I extend to you, Madame President, on behalf of the European Council, and on my own behalf, heartiest congratulations on your election and I wish you every success in your task as President. The holder of this high office has a special role to play in the relationship between the Council and the Parliament.

To the members present here today, I also extend my congratulations. You have participated in a historic election in which substantially more than 100 million electors voted, from the Atlantic to the central plain of Europe, from the Baltic to the shores of the Mediterranean. You have been chosen by these people to speak on the issues which will shape Europe, indeed the world of the future.

Mr. Jack Lynch

For as long as conflict and confrontation remain in any part of the countries that comprise the Community, so long will our hopes and ideals be overshadowed by the same symbols of mourning and destruction. Our task must be to end these shadows and the divisions which are their source. We must strive to end misunderstanding and intolerance of whatever brand - social, economic or religious - and to eliminate inequality and deprivation. I ask you, the members of this most widely representative, freely elected international assembly in the world, to use your great influence and powers to help to root out these disruptive elements which frustrate the ideal of European unity and cooperation.

It is well to recall it was from the suffering of war that the European Community was born. We can argue about finances and policies, about regulations, procedures and structures, but we must never forget that it was to avoid the recurrence of bloodshed and devastation that the Community itself and its institutions, with their careful system of checks and balances, were devised. The Community was created as an act of faith. It is a positive answer to the terrible imperative of Europe's uniting or being destroyed. Its aim was, and is, to sustain peace and advance the prosperity of the people of Europe.

The founder members were conscious of this global perspective when they wrote into the treaty the objective of the progressive abolition of restrictions in international trade and the affirmation of the solidarity binding Europe to overseas countries. That global perspective is reflected in the summit of the world's leading industrialized countries, in which the Community participates. It is reflected in the treaties which the Community has negotiated or is concluding with countries in Africa, the Caribbean, the Pacific and the Mediterranean.

It is reflected, indeed, in the place of the Community as the world's greatest trading bloc whose external commerce has developed more than eight times over between 1958 and 1977 and now represents more than one third of all world trade. As an indication of the importance of our external relations and equally of the goodwill which the Community enjoys in the world, I quote President Carter of the United States: -

"The United States will give its unqualified support to what you in the Nine are doing to strengthen Europe in cooperation, for we see European strength and unity as a boon and not as a threat to us."

That is and must continue to be Europe's role. We must never become inward looking or self absorbed. It must be our aim in the ultimate interest of all peoples to advance world harmony, by example and precept, knowing that peace, like prosperity, is indivisible.

What has been the greatest influence in the Community's development? I believe that its strength has come from the balance and flexibility of the institutions created by the Rome Treaty, by the faith of the member states in the European ideal which that treaty was established to serve, and in the ability of the Community itself to grow and adapt with changing times.

Mr. Jack Lynch

We have seen how the Coal and Steel Community grew into the Common Market, how that market developed through its policies for industry, for agriculture and for trade to the benefit of the people of Europe, how with that ultimate aim, the Community has welcomed first Denmark, Ireland and the United Kingdom, and now Greece, and other countries seeking accession: more recently the European Monetary System was devised and set in motion as a further step towards integration.

We have seen also how the institutions have responded to the need for change. Political cooperation has developed alongside the framework provided by the treaties. The European Council has been established on a regular basis. Now the directly-elected Parliament takes its rightful place in this process of evolution. This ability to adapt and change is one of the most valuable characteristics of the Community, and one which we must never lose.

Jean Monnet saw the Community grow from six to nine member countries. Soon there will be another and soon again two more, making the Community in terms of numbers of member countries twice as big as it was at the beginning. But this larger Community will still be only part of Europe. I would wish to see the Community eventually encompassing more like-minded European countries and so add to its strength. In expressing that aspiration, I do not ignore the many difficulties that lie before us.

Europe's explorers discovered America and Europe's emigrants played major roles in the building of the United States. From their diverse backgrounds and traditions they developed it into the most powerful democratic country in the world - "E Pluribus Unum." Meanwhile in the two centuries since the declaration of American independence, Europe has many times torn itself apart by bitter and prolonged wars. But Europe now has the capacity and the will to put that past behind it forever. The Community's membership now comprises countries large and small, some as industrially and economically advanced as any in the world and others whose proud and great traditions are not yet matched by their economic progress but all, united in the common goal of eliminating inequality within the Communities as a whole.

This Assembly is both an end and a beginning.

It is an end in that it is the culmination of a process which dates back as far as 1957, when the principle of direct elections was enshrined in the Rome Treaty.

This Assembly is also a beginning in that for the first time the people have been given a direct voice in the building of Europe. This step marks the initiation of a new dimension in the process of European integration of which the long-term implications must be a matter for surmise.

This Parliament will be faced - as are the other institutions of the Community - with highly intimidating tasks. I have in mind, the rampant unemployment in all our countries: the energy crisis: the challenge to find an adequate response to the needs of the third worlds: the speed and impact of technological change: the instability created by growing stresses within society itself and the need once again to change and adapt, as the Community has done in the past, to cope with an enlargement to accommodate our friends in Greece, in Spain and in Portugal without damaging the power dynamism or integrity of the Community as we know it.

Commission President Roy Jenkins' statement at the ceremonial opening of the directly elected Parliament.

The following are the substantive extracts:

To sustain the impetus of the European ideal, to withstand the deep-seated problems which now confront us, we - whether Parliament, Commission or Council - shall need all our combined strength and inherent unity.

The first task before this House, collectively and individually, is to carry to the people of Europe those issues which are of concern and of importance to all within the Community. Your concern and your opportunity is to ensure that Community issues, not the narrow lines of national politics, dominate the discussion. It is an opportunity to demonstrate to millions of our citizens that their votes really mattered and to convince those who abstained (my own country comfortably carried off the wooden spoon of discredit in this respect) that the Community and its Parliament are living organs of concern for the issues which touch closely on their daily lives.

To achieve this, it will be necessary for this House to engage itself directly with the major problems which confront the Community and its member states.

I do not hide from this House my view that we stand on the threshold of a sombre decade.

We cannot do other than, on constant policies, predict lower growth, higher inflation and more unemployment. That is a reason, not for supineness, but for the urgent evolution of new policies to mitigate over as short a period as possible, to overcome our present vicissitudes. But what is absolutely clear is that the ability of the Community to survive and to prosper depends on our joint determination to preserve what we have already achieved, to build on those achievements and above all to keep a vision and commitment to make progress towards a greater European unity. That vision - a constant reaffirmation of our will to move forward - matters far more than rather sterile blueprints about the exact form of political organization at which we shall ultimately arrive. It will not, in my view, be something which can be found in the traditional text-books of political science.

We cannot simply look it up under a model labelled federal or confederal. It will have a unique character of its own arising out of a balance between our need for unity on major issues and our strong and even disparate national traditions. But of one thing I am absolutely certain: there is a much greater danger of advancing too slowly rather than too fast.

This House has an essential role to play in this process. Of course, the relationships between the different institutions of the Community are complex and created in a spirit of balance.

No one institution is dependent upon another: each has its prerogatives. Each has its duties. Each has its obligations. Within that balance, it is the concern and the duty of the Commission to act as the motor of the Community, to initiate policy and also to undertake the management and execution of existing policies. We should not only defend the frontiers of Community competence, but also, with a sense both of adventure and of realism, endeavor to push them forward where a practical and relevant case can be established.

Having said that, however, it is clear that this Parliament, resting as it does on a wide popular support and commanding a new democratic authority, represents an important evolution for the Community. It is right that it should exercise to the fullest possible extent its powers to question and to subject to criticism the way in which the Commission exercises its powers and the way in which the Council of Ministers reaches - or does not reach - its decisions.

We need the spur of constructive advice and imagination and we will welcome all your efforts in that direction. It is right, too, that the Parliament, as a major partner with the Commission and the Council in the formulation of the Community's budget, should assert itself in the development of the financial muscle which underlies Community policies. This is an area of potentially great significance for the internal development of the Community where this House will have an essential influence. Equally, it is right that the Parliament should aim to broaden the basis of popular support of the Community's institutions and create a greater sense of involvement in policies.

Against that background the Commission regards it as an obligation and priority to do all within its power to create and to sustain a positive and creative relationship with this House. First, I and my colleagues will make ourselves available to the fullest possible extent to the Parliament and to its committees. We hope to have early discussion about ways and means of securing the Commission's maximum participation in and assistance at your deliberations.

Second, we believe that it is important from the outset that there should be the opportunity for wider and earlier discussion of major proposals which we take to the Council.

Here it seems to us essential that there should be a greater understanding of important issues at a Community level and we would be willing to prepare, where appropriate discussion documents as a basis for Parliamentary debate of broad policy issues in advance of formulating proposals for the Council. Third, the Commission will take the lead in seeking to improve the processes of consultation between the three institutions. We are currently studying how to improve the conciliation procedure which resulted from an earlier Commission initiative.

It is through the development of procedures of this kind that the positive and creative relationship we want can grow and flourish. Our relationship must be based on the special character of our two institutions, each with its responsibilities directly towards the collective interest of the Community. You can count on us to do all in our power to deepen and intensify that relationship. On it will depend much of the future evolution, not only of the Parliament and the Commission, but of the institutions of the Community as a whole.

* * * *
* * *
* *
*

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES

The Honorable Simone Veil, President of the European Parliament.

Dear Madame President,

My warm congratulations on your election to the high office of President of the European Parliament.

Americans have welcomed the first direct election to the Parliament as an historic occasion symbolizing the deep attachment of the Community to the advancement of common European democratic institutions.

I wish you and your colleagues every success in facing the challenges before you.

With best personal regards.

Sincerely,

Jimmy Carter

* * * *
* * *
* *
*

Following is the message delivered to the newly elected members of the European Parliament on behalf of U.S. Speaker Thomas P. O'Neill, Jr.

My heartiest congratulations to the newly elected Parliamentarians on this historic session of the first directly elected European Parliament.

The direct election of the European Parliament is a dramatic progression in the growth of representative democracy and an important step in the direction of greater European integration.

In past years, the House of Representatives strongly supported semi-annual conferences between appointed members of the European Parliament and the United States Congress. Now, in light of your new status as a fully elected representative body, the House of Representatives welcomes closer ties and additional parliamentary exchanges on subjects of mutual interest, including trade policies and economic cooperation.

I extend my sincere personal best wishes on this special and memorable occasion.

