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The National governments of the member states of the Community have a clear moral obligation to do everything in their power to ensure that Direct Elections take place as planned in May or June 1978. This obligation arises not merely from the solemn undertakings that have been given by the Heads of Government, but also from the fundamental rights of Europe's citizens. As the Community develops, and as the European Budget for which I myself carry responsibility grows in size and significance, the need to honour the basic principle of no taxation without representation becomes increasingly apparent. A national government which obstructs direct elections will be depriving its own citizens and those of the rest of the Community of a right which has hitherto been regarded as the cornerstone of Western Democracy.

As well as being a moral necessity, direct elections have a practical importance. At present, one of the Community's major problems is the widespread suspicion that those responsible for formulating its policies are either bureaucratically isolated from the outside world on the one hand, or too susceptible to pressure from organised vested interests, particularly among producers, on the other. I do not believe that these charges are justified. But the fact that they are often made undeniably hinders the Community's progress.

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To take a topical example, can anyone, whatever their views on the merits of the Common Agricultural Policy, doubt that much of the public discussion of the recent sales of butter to the Soviet Union would have been calmer, more rational, and more constructive, if at the back of many people's minds there had not been the belief that European farmers have too much, and European housewives, too little influence over the decisions of the European Commission?

Not the least of the merits of a directly elected European Parliament is that its existence would greatly allay anxieties of this kind by offering an institutional guarantee that the consumer's voice would be fully represented in Community policy making.

Yet despite the pressing need for direct elections, there is some uncertainty about the British Government's willingness to take the steps necessary to make them possible.

I know the Prime Minister is genuinely anxious to fulfil his commitment. But the big battalions of hard-line anti-Europeans are wheeling their field guns into position, determined to intimidate the Government into an early surrender, or, failing that, to blow to pieces in the House of Commons any Bill which Ministers bring forward.

In such forbidding circumstances, the Prime Minister and his colleagues will require much political courage to press ahead. I very much hope that they will, and in so doing deservedly earn the gratitude of peoples of all the member states.

But they will need the help of the Conservative Party, which has *already done* more than any other to *advance* the European cause. The Government cannot hope successfully to defy a large section of the parliamentary Labour Party without Opposition support.

At present we do not know what system of election the Government will recommend. But there are two points which should be borne in mind even at this stage. First, it is important to recognise that any method of voting which is introduced for European Elections in 1978, is likely to be temporary since there is agreement between the member states to introduce a uniform system of election throughout the community as soon as practicable. Second, if, as seems possible, the British government espouses some form of proportional representation for direct elections, it mustn't be forgotten that the arguments used, rightly or wrongly, against proportional representation at a national level have little or no application to a multi-national Assembly from the membership of which no executive has to be formed.

These two considerations, and the urgency, for the reasons I have stated of holding direct elections as soon as possible, mean that Conservatives, and the other opposition parties, should, and I am confident will, be ready to consider giving their active support to an electoral scheme which does not necessarily represent their own first preferences.