

SPEECH BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE COMMISSION, THE
RIGHT HON ROY JENKINS, AT THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE
YOUTH FORUM OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES

22 NOVEMBER 1979

It is a great pleasure for me to be able to address your General Assembly today - the first, I believe, since the Forum began operations earlier this year. It has taken nine years to reach this point, nine years since the Youth Conference of 1970 agreed on the principle of representing young people at European level. Your meeting here this morning represents a major and important step in the process started in 1970 and in the development of the Youth Forum. Now before I speak more generally about the Community and the situation in which we find ourselves, I should just like to say a word or two about the work you have done and about the relations between your organisation and the Commission.

In my letter of June 1978 to your Provisional Executive Committee, I spoke of the "great interest" with which we awaited "the initiatives that the Youth Forum will take and present to the Commission". I am therefore particularly pleased to learn that your first full year of business has been so constructive and so active. We have sought to provide for you a permanent liaison with the Commission to enable you to discuss your ideas, and a number of your reports have been submitted to us. At the same time, the Commission has held talks with the Forum before elaborating policies in fields which particularly concern you. I hope very much that you will continue to furnish us with views and suggestions from the youth organisations.

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It is, of course, far too soon to make final judgments; but, I hope, that you feel as encouraged as I do by the contacts which have so far been made. We in the Commission are confident that the "special relationship" to which I referred in my letter will continue to be a fruitful one. I do, of course, appreciate that you, for your part, claimed "the right to be consulted by the Commission on questions which are of concern to the youth organisation", and I know you gave your Executive Committee a mandate to clear up this point with us. On the other hand, I must emphasise that there are no provisions for such a right in the Treaties; nor indeed is the Commission under any general constitutional obligation to consult particular bodies, be they organisations of employers or trade unions, before framing its policy. Of course, we all talk to each other. It cannot be otherwise. Nor would I wish it otherwise. And therefore we are gladly committed to a regular dialogue with organisations such as the ETUC and UNICE. In the same way, we shall continue to keep in close touch with the Forum on all matters of mutual interest. We value the special relationship that we have with you.

I am pleased to see on your agenda a programme of activities for the forthcoming year. I wonder, however, whether at the same time you should not look further ahead. There is sometimes advantage, particularly in the early stages of development, of examining aims and objectives in a longer perspective. A look forward over the next five years would, I believe, pay you dividends.

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In particular, it would give not only the Commission but also the Council of Ministers and the European Parliament a clearer indication of your long-term strategies and - as this is also important - of your requirements.

Finally, I hope very much that within the rules of your association you will permit as many organisations to affiliate as possible. With a wide and varied membership, the Forum can and should become an even more significant voice in the European debate.

What will be the principal arguments in the debate at the European level over the next few years? What are the challenges? Where should we be concentrating our efforts to find solutions and answers at Community level? It is how we answer these questions, our collective reaction, which will determine the broad pattern of development for Europe and which forms the agenda for the work of the Youth Forum into the 1980s.

First must come the question of energy supply. There can be little doubt that the energy problem, if mishandled, could bring our economy into a state of dislocation, if not collapse, within the next decade. 1973 was the first warning. When it receded, we did not greatly heed it. We continued to go on much as before. If we react to the second warning in the same complacent way, we are unlikely to have a third chance or a further period of respite.

What have we achieved so far? The agreements reached within the European Community at the European Council meeting in Strasbourg on medium-term goals for energy consumption paved the way for the commitments by the major industrialised countries meeting in Tokyo - specific commitments for energy dependence in 1980 and 1985. This represents good progress. We achieved a concerted international response at Tokyo, a response in which Europe had a prominent role. Nevertheless, it remains to translate these words into action. The task is formidable. The test for Europe and the Western world as a whole will be our ability over a limited time-span to break the link between economic growth and the consumption of oil. This is not an inherent or pre-ordained link. It has existed only for about 25 or so years - little more than a tenth of the period since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution. But its sundering is essential. Those countries or groups of countries which fail to do it will find themselves the dinosaurs of the future industrial world.

Over most of the troubled 1970s we have sought without success a dynamic impulse such as was given to our economies in the fifties and sixties, first by the needs of post-war reconstruction and then by the spread of higher living standards to the mass of our people. The investment required for energy conservation and for exploitation of alternative and renewable sources of energy could now contribute such an impulse. It could be a stimulus comparable with the onset of the railway age in the middle of the nineteenth century. It could enable us to find the elusive key to higher investment and lower unemployment.

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Secondly, we should consider some of the demographic trends of the next decades. Europe's share of world population is likely to fall from around 7% to 5% by the end of the century. But it will do this unevenly. Until 1985 about a million more young people will each year seek to enter the labour market than the old people leaving it. These numbers will be particularly high in the poorer regions of Europe, and in these regions the growth of the labour force may indeed continue after 1985. But in Europe generally that year will mark a sharp change of trend. Thereafter we will be faced with an ageing population, and a stabilisation and then diminution of the work force available to sustain the dynamism of our economies and to support this ageing population. These population trends increase the complexity of dealing with our employment problems. In the early years at least the difficulties of providing employment will certainly not be diminished. But in the later years we could find ourselves with a labour force which could be inadequate in relation to the total population whose standard of living it has to sustain.

Thirdly, we should be turning our attention to the revolution in our affairs being caused by the advance of high technology. It is often said that we have no option but to accommodate ourselves to this revolution. I go further. We have to master it. Already it dominates a whole range of industries and services - communications, vehicles, banking and finance, machine tools, engineering, precision instruments. At the moment our major competitors in Japan and the United States are ahead of us, and their lead is increasing. This represents a /challenge

challenge to the European Community which has not yet been fully recognised.

We need a European strategy for advanced industrial technology. Its cost and range are of an order beyond the capacity of any one of our Member States to undertake on its own. Separate national markets, separate national procurement policies and duplicated research programmes are simply not good enough. We should develop a Community-wide research and development programme based on a common procurement policy and an open European market for electronic goods and services based on common standards. This is a matter which must stand as a high priority and I hope that it will be possible to take our ideas forward quickly.

From time to time we read in the press about the imminent decline and fall of the European Community. The self-appointed doctors make their gloomy diagnoses and prognostications, from which we are to conclude that the patient is in a state of galloping consumption - or perhaps, with the agricultural policy, we should rather say galloping production. But I have myself been in a position to observe the patient rather closely over the last year or two, and I can tell you that he is in most ways - though not all - in a sturdy condition.

Let me put it this way. 1979 has been the year in which the European Community inaugurated a new Parliament, directly elected by universal suffrage, and representing an important new democratic force within the Community institution. 1979 has been the year in which we put in place
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the European Monetary System, an instrument of significant present value and great potential. It has already given a substantial degree of exchange rate stability in a world of monetary turbulence - at least, for those Member States who participate fully in the mechanisms of the EMS. 1979 has been the year when we signed the Treaty of Accession with Greece, the tenth Member State of the Community. At the same time we opened negotiations with Portugal and Spain, two more candidates for accession. A Community which new democracies are eager to join has not lost its drawing power. Finally, in the field of trade, 1979 saw the conclusion of major trade negotiations by the Community in the GATT, and a new agreement with the African, Caribbean and Pacific countries, signed at the end of last month in Lome.

The picture is therefore not one of stagnation, but of considerable advance, politically and economically. The same is true, I believe, of the Community in its institutional aspects. Here, certainly, there is no stagnation. Instead, we have seen considerable and, in my view, valuable development in the last few days.

The most significant of these - and perhaps, in some ways, the most unexpected - has been the introduction of regular meetings of Heads of State and Government in the forum now called the "European Council". As you know, the European Council has met on a regular basis since the 'fireside chats' of 1975 and during that period has seen a progressive growth in its importance. This in turn may have led to some devaluation of the role of the Council of Ministers. Perhaps too many decisions have been remitted to the European Council. The Heads of Government, for their

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part are not geared to the practical conduct of detailed Community business. Difficult and sometimes technical discussions cannot easily be taken in an informal atmosphere without risk of misunderstanding, ambiguity, and even subsequent inaction. Moreover, the relationship between the European Council and the European Parliament is not as close as it should be.

This stems from the feature of the European Council which is at the same time its strength and its weakness - that is, its relatively informal status, outside, or perhaps one should say alongside, the institutions formally established by the Treaties. I believe that we need to find a way of bridging this gap between the Parliament and the European Council, and of ensuring that the present vacuum is filled in future by dialogue rather than diatribe.

Nevertheless, subject to the two comments which I have made, I believe that the European Council fulfils an essential role, and is now indispensable in the development of the Community. Without it, 1979 would probably not have seen direct elections, and certainly not the EMS.

I turn now to the Parliament itself. It is early days to be making a forecast as to what will be the effect on the Community of an enlarged and directly elected Parliament. One thing is certain, however. It will not be content with the purely consultative role which was originally assigned to it under the Rome Treaties. Since the budgetary Treaties of 1970 and 1975 the situation has changed. For example, at its budget session in Strasbourg on 7 November the
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Parliament voted substantial cuts in next year's budget spending on the Community's milk surpluses and coupled this with a tax on dairy farmers. At the same time Parliament voted for a big increase in spending on the non-farm policies, notably on regional expenditure. These amendments now have to go back for the approval of the Council of Ministers. What is already clear, however, is that the new Parliament is clearly showing signs that it will use the budgetary muscles which its predecessor had already begun to flex.

I have described the increasing roles played both by the European Council and by the Parliament. Where does that leave the Commission? Some might see us as the soft, yielding corn ground between the upper and nether stones of Parliament and European Council. I reject that view. In a sense the developments that I have described put us in a privileged but also an exposed position, having the right to be heard both in the European Parliament and in the meetings of the Heads of Government in the European Council. Our capacity for initiating and obtaining progress in the Community has therefore not been diminished. On the contrary, it has been reinforced by these developments. It remains the Commission's task to identify what can and should be done in the interests of the Community as a whole. That is a task which we shall not shirk. Indeed, we will need all our inherent strength, all our commitment to the closer integration of Europe, if we are to survive and prosper in the years ahead, as I believe we will. In fulfilling our task, we look forward to the stimulus and cooperation of the Youth Forum and of young people throughout the Community.