

STATEMENT TO THE PARLIAMENT BY THE RT HON ROY JENKINS

WEDNESDAY, 18 JULY, 1979

My opening remarks, Mr President, are to you.

It is my great pleasure on behalf of the Commission to welcome you to your high office, the highest office which it is within the powers of your fellow Members to bestow. I offer you my congratulations; I offer you the warm and full-hearted cooperation of the Commission in the pursuit of our common objectives; and, on a more personal level, I welcome you to one of the Community's smallest clubs, the union of Presidents, and look forward to working with you in the same spirit of close friendship as I have been able to undertake with your distinguished predecessor. Yours is a great and historic task: to preside over, to guide, perhaps occasionally even to chide a new Parliament, the product of the first international elections in history. And this week the European Parliament, democratically elected by over 100 million citizens of Europe, comes of age. It comes of age, moreover, at a crucial time for the Community, both its institutions and its citizens. While it is fitting that we should celebrate what we have achieved today, it is right too that we should recognise that 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. Our difficulties were great enough a year ago. The prospects for sustained growth and employment were at best uncertain. Now the resurgence of the energy crisis, predictable in substance if not in time, has made us painfully aware of the most important constraint on the future of our economy. We have sustained a major transfer of real resources, of real income, away from us as a result of the recent oil price increases. That is something which we cannot just pretend has not happened. In these circumstances 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 ^{and then} /over as short a period as possible, to overcome our present vicissitudes. I will
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return to these matters tomorrow. 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 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 organisation 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 an 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 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 endeavour to push them forward where a practical and relevant case can be established. Having said that, however, it /is clear that

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 for 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 discussions about ways and means of securing the Commission's maximum participation in and assistance at your deliberations.

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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.

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