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Georges Berthouin

International president of the European Movement

- The European Parliament: "We must get the Parliament to use its existing powers."
- Enlargement: "Enlargement will mean reinforcement."
- Interdependence: "The solution we find will decide whether we have war or peace in the world."

"The European Movement was created 30 years ago after the conference of The Hague, the first major meeting of Europeanists from politics, industry, the unions and cultural affairs. It both mobilizes and provides an institutional shape for the good will of all these people. For 30 years now, this private movement (for it is not a public institution), has been one of the driving forces for European unification. It has not been alone.

Its members are not just from the European Community: They come from eight other countries too. The movement, in fact, groups together 17 national organizations plus a certain number of others, that I call vertical organizations, like the Union of European Federalists, the European League for Economic Cooperation, and so on. It is organized on the basis of the national and the vertical organizations in as decentralized a manner as possible.

The movement also has various international institutions, the most important of which are:

- the federal council, the supreme body of the movement, consisting of representatives of all the member organizations;
- the executive committee, which holds frequent meetings between the (usually annual) meetings of the federal council;
- the international president."

► *Never have people talked so much about Europe before. Because of direct elections to the European Parliament in June, many leading figures and many organizations are giving their opinions and speaking for or against Europe as they understand it. Can I ask you what is being done as regards the European Movement taking part in this election campaign?*

— Our main activities are within the member organizations. We stress the role which the national and vertical organizations should play. At the moment, our international structures are far less active than they usually are or than they will be after the elections for a very simple reason: the voters are going to be made much more aware of what is involved at national level, since the different constituencies are much influenced by national problems. The European Movement has a lot of influence within this framework, varying slightly from country to country in the light of historical, political and other factors.

► *What are the issues you intend emphasizing during the election campaign?*

— The essential issues are the social issues. We have talked about them at international level and the national organizations agree with our conclusions. At the top of the list we shall put unemployment and anything that will help solve that problem. This means new industrial strategies and it means regional policy, regional planning and the European-wide coordination of some social policies. And it also means anything that traditionally affects unemployment, if I can put it like that.

Then there is the problem of protecting the consumer and the environment. Presentation here will vary from country to country, but we feel that these themes are of direct concern to the voters.

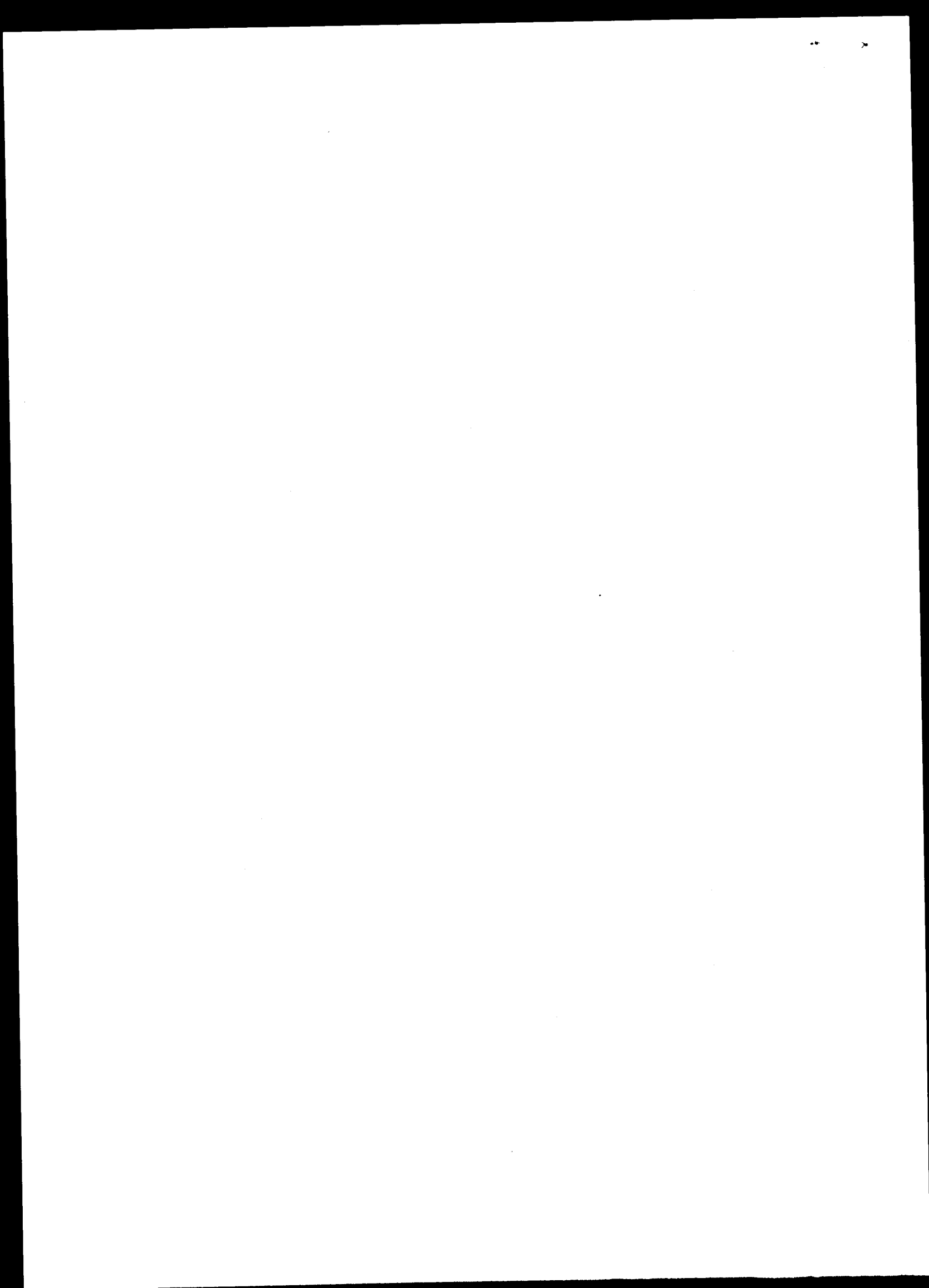
Next but not necessarily in order of importance, there is the problem of opening the EEC to the outside world and first, obviously, to the countries associated to it by the Lomé Convention. We have three ideas here. First, we must modify our conception of aid far more. That is to say that we must encourage whatever will help the developing countries find their own way to economic survival and to development, as aid/charity gives rise to a great deal of psychological and political misunderstanding.

The second idea is to pay much more attention than we have done to respecting the social and cultural structures of the countries concerned. Many of us in the movement are struck by the fact that the high-speed development generated by some aid programmes destroys traditional social structures and that we could well, with this human vacuum which breakneck industrial development creates, be contributing to destroying cultures, civilizations and societies that have established their own balance. This is just one of the lessons to be learned from, for example, the crisis in Iran.

And the third idea is that we feel that it is in the genuine interest of the industrialized countries, particularly the EEC, to find ways of redistributing purchasing power, among Lomé and non-Lomé members, that will make some sort of contribution to expanding industry in our own countries.

► *You have just described the European Movement and outlined the problems it will be stressing in the run up to the elections in June. But Europe today is very different from Europe in 1947-48 when the movement began. A good deal of progress has been made, naturally, but there is less enthusiasm. Don't you think it would be a severe blow to the European ideal if there was only a small turnout at the elections?*

— I think there will be a far bigger turnout than people imagine, the reason being, perhaps, one of voting method. Except in the case of the United Kingdom, most countries of the Community have opted for proportional representation, which means that all the traditional political forces have every interest in showing that they are forces to be reckoned with.



► *People in politics are obviously interested in the prospect of elections to the European Parliament. You only have to look at the newspapers. But certain countries have opted for a single nation-wide constituency. Don't you think this method of consultation is unlikely to get the voters moving?*

— I am sorry that some countries have opted to have one constituency that covers the whole land, as this will do nothing to bring the representative any closer to the electors. We are faced with a *de facto* situation here and we have to accept it. But I deplore it and I hope that, once the June elections are over, the European Movement will take a stand on the future electoral law. As you know, the new Parliament we elect will have to propose a new European electoral law. I hope that its proposals will take account of what I have just said and of the fact that I regret the situation.

The UK is an exception here. The method the British have chosen is perhaps nearest to the ideal system. They have opted for regional constituencies, a means of bringing the representative closer to his or her voters. And what I know of the selection procedure leads me to expect that the people standing in the elections will have been chosen by people in the regions, and not by party headquarters, whereas the selection and the order of candidates on a national list are inevitably the work of party headquarters. The UK has, to my mind, something approaching the best system here.

► *But, on the other hand, in the UK, in a more restricted framework, the system will be a majority one?*

— That is true. And that is why, in view of a certain lack of enthusiasm about one or two of the national systems, it seems reasonable to suggest, broadly speaking, even when the constituency is the same as the national territory, that proportional representation in the first election would lead the parties to do their utmost to get the best results and therefore to attract their traditional supporters to the polling booth. This should help cut down considerably on abstentions. Obviously there are no legal problems if the turnout is too small, but the moral and political authority of the European Parliament could suffer.

► *You said the political and moral authority of the European Parliament. What do you think about the current debate on extending its powers?*

— Personally I think this is a bit extravagant and I am not taking it very seriously. I should like to answer your question by referring to something you



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said just now about feeling there is less enthusiasm today than there was 30 years ago or than there was in the '50s when the European Community was in its infancy. I think the public feel that European unity has been partly achieved, and I think that the outside world thinks that Europe is far more united than it really is. But the apparently waning enthusiasm is the result of a success. There's nothing like a successful political project for dampening enthusiasm. If it succeeds, it merges into everyday life and you forget it and think about something else. So one of the reasons for the decline in enthusiasm, to my mind, is the success of what we set out to do 30 years back.

This brings me to what I wanted to say in answer to your last question. We have made considerable progress with our institutions. We have very complex, very sophisticated institutions, with their federal, confederal and intergovernmental sides, which have been operating for a quarter of a century. The problem at the moment is not so much one of fighting to increase the power of the institutions as to decide whether they are going to use the powers they already have. I think the European Parliament, and the Commission, indeed, have been somewhat reluctant to use their powers in recent years.

The European Movement has taken a stand here. Our first battle cry and the subject of all the advice we gave both in public and private was that, before embarking on a discussion of extending the Parliament's powers, the aim should be to get it to use the powers it already has. And the powers it has, as things stand, are considerable. Look at the wrangle there was between the European Parliament and the Council of Ministers over the Community bud-

get. This shows that, without going beyond the Treaty of Rome, it is possible to make political choices (at regional level now and maybe in other sectors later on) without any institutional or constitutional changes. So I think it is bad tactics to be seeking more powers when existing ones are put to little or to bad use. If the existing powers are properly used, then everyone will quite naturally see the need to extend them. But asking for more when the Parliament doesn't use what it has tends to seem (and I don't mean to those who are against Community-type European unity, but to many reasonable people) an exaggerated and unjustified demand. I believe in gradual change in this field, since most of the progress we have made with our institutions has been achieved through hard work, treaties and political negotiation over a period of 25 years.

► *The forthcoming election is certainly a good thing and the first advantage, as we said just now, is that it is making people talk about Europe. But this is only a passing event and it would be a good thing if people went on talking about it afterwards. So what does the European Movement intend doing to help get European ideas and European policy off to a fresh start? Are you interested in trying to go a bit further than the current state of affairs, for example? It is a good thing to bring together large numbers of eminent people and a certain European elite, but don't you want a larger membership?*

— That is a key question that my friends and I are also wondering about. To my mind, the European Movement will have an essential part to play after the June elections. I have already visited 10 of the member countries of the movement, the nine EEC countries and Spain. I have met most of the political leaders and all the heads of government and I can see that they too have reached the same conclusion. Our European institutions must always be the object of requests from outside. This kind of thing will give the movement its second wind. And this is why we are studying a fairly basic reform of the European Movement, which will first give it the chance of greater authority by pushing up membership. The target I have proposed is an ambitious one: one million members in the 17 countries. It is both a slogan and a very specific goal which several countries are already trying to reach and they are using the European election campaign to enlist recruits.

Furthermore, I intend suggesting having at the head of the movement an executive committee that is as collegial as possible. I shall have the help of

leading political figures to select a number of topics and to get the whole of the movement mobilized, and to present them to the institutions just as political movements do to public institutions, so that the rate of European development can be constantly maintained.

So, once the elections are over, the movement is going to be making an even greater effort to ensure that this passing event that you mention in fact has its effect. One of the reasons for the advantages that many people see here is that, in certain countries, the distance between the voter and his or her representative will be so great that an intermediary will be required, and the movement could well be this intermediary.

► *One particular topic that is going to be increasingly in the public eye is enlargement. Nearly everyone is pro-enlargement, although there are one or two exceptions. The majority of the political parties and governments and a large section of the general public desire enlargement at political level. But, economically speaking, there are problems, particularly in some of the countries of the Community. I should first like to ask you whether you think enlargement is a good idea, and then whether it is likely to increase or detract from the internal cohesion of the EEC?*

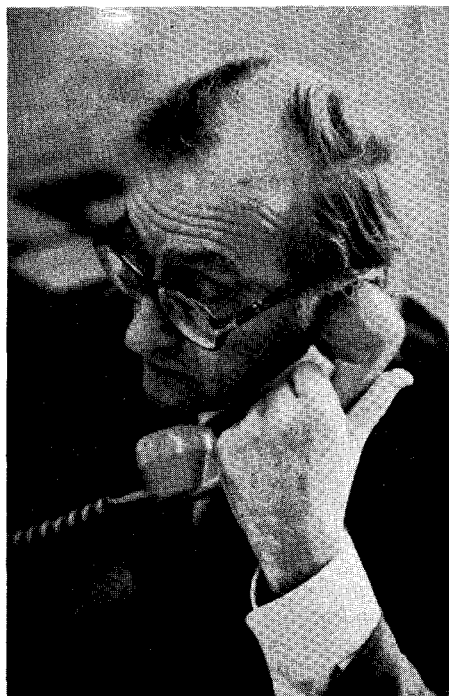
— Undeniably, it is a good thing, and I think that the three applicants and the nine governments have made a clear political choice along the right lines. So politically speaking, I would say that enlargement is a matter of course. But economically speaking, there are problems facing both the applicants and the present members, just as there were when the original six expanded to become nine. The aim of the negotiations that have taken place with Greece and that are scheduled to take place with the other countries is to devise the machinery and define the transitional periods that will enable the problems to be dealt with. The aim of the negotiations is not to decide whether to enlarge or not, but how to enlarge without provoking any economic or social disaster in one or other of the countries concerned.

And personally, I am convinced, contrary to popular opinion, that the jump from nine to twelve will strengthen the Community. For the three new members, joining the EEC is a basic necessity in all fields, far more so perhaps than it was for Denmark, Ireland and the UK. Look at Spain. Compared to the general view in the nine, Spain's conception of Europe and its institutions is much nearer the ideas of the

founders. And my personal conviction is that, once they have joined, they will be among those asking for the Community to be strengthened rather than in the camp seeking to change the EEC into some vague free trade area. From this point of view, I think enlargement will mean reinforcement. There will be a reinforcement of our attitude to development problems too. I think the three new members are perhaps more aware than either the six or the nine of what the problem of development means. This could well mean that, on their behalf, we shall be meeting requests for quite large loans and transfers. But at the same time, it will, I think, lead us to transform the Community's attitude to the problem of development, particularly in Africa, in a very positive manner. Spain, Portugal and Greece will help us avoid having the mentality of a rich man's club.

A third important point is that, for economic, political and social reasons, these countries will help us see certain parts of the world better than we do now. I am thinking particularly of South America here, both the Spanish-speaking and the Portuguese-speaking parts. If we can get a better grasp of the problems of South America then I think we will come nearer to having a positive global conception of the problems of developed/developing country relations.

► *What you have just said about enlargement, which you feel should*



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mean a trend towards reinforcement of the Community, is extremely interesting. You also mentioned the favourable consequences for the developing countries. Do you think the European Movement could bring up a topic like interdependence during the current election campaign and that this is a subject that is likely to be important in the future?

— I don't know whether interdependence will come up much during the election campaign. Naturally, the political parties standing try to deal with the immediate concerns of the voters. But the big topic which everyone will have to discuss after the elections is interdependence. This is in line with what the founders of the European Community meant when they said that the attempts to unite Europe were a contribution towards peace. I think, that unless we can solve the problem of interdependence, we will endanger world peace. I think that today, for the first time since the end of World War II, peace in the world is in danger and the solution we find for the problem of interdependence will decide whether we have war or peace. And I am not just saying this for effect.

I think that in many regions, the structures of the European Community and the Lomé Convention are considered to be perhaps the most effective way of organizing interdependence on a world scale. In our Community, as in Lomé, we have managed to get two principles generally thought to be opposed to exist side by side. On the one hand we have a respect for national sovereignty, a very important thing for the developing countries, as it is often the best political arm in negotiations, and on the other we have the development of a multinational territory. In Lomé, we have found a way of organizing interdependence between the countries of the Community and 56 other countries and, at the same time, we have institutions that respect the regimes and independence of them all. This is where we may find solutions for the whole world. It means, for example, that communist countries should be able to live harmoniously in a system of this kind without feeling that any world-wide cooperation endangers the political and economic choices they have made. We are the only ones to have found a practical and institutional way of getting these two contrary notions to co-exist. I don't know what the movement will decide about this, but it is a matter of priority for both our deliberation and our proposals as far as I am concerned. I should be surprised, in view of what I know about the men who run the European Movement, if this were not generally accepted as a priority. □ Interview by A.L.