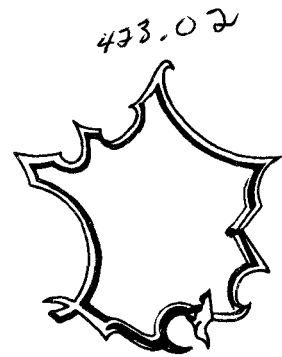


# FRENCH EMBASSY

## PRESS & INFORMATION DIVISION

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### FRANCE'S POSITION ON THE ELECTION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY

*"Elections by universal suffrage will fulfill, when the time comes, an intention proclaimed from the start by the Community's founders.... Democracy in the Community does not restrict or adulterate democracy in our states but extends and enriches it." (Foreign Minister Jean François-Poncet, European parliamentary assembly, January 17, 1979)*

#### I - French Reservations Prior to 1974

The European parliamentary assembly was founded in 1957 by the Rome treaties (establishing the European Economic Community and the European Atomic Energy Community). It is currently composed of 198 representatives appointed by the nine national parliaments from among their own members. The Rome Treaty provides for the election of the European parliamentary assembly by universal suffrage:

*"The Assembly shall draw up proposals for elections by direct universal suffrage in accordance with a uniform procedure in all Member States.*

*"The Council shall, acting unanimously, lay down the appropriate provisions, which it shall recommend to Member States for adoption in accordance with their respective constitutional requirements." (Article 138 of the Rome Treaty)*

An election of this kind was opposed by the French government for many years. General de Gaulle feared that in the absence of a European executive body, a direct election might lead to rule by an assembly system. He therefore sought first to establish a "council of heads of state and government that would meet every four months." This was the principal provision of the Fouchet Plan (1961-1962), which was rejected by France's partners. General de Gaulle's successor, Georges Pompidou, continued to maintain this position. At the Hague summit meeting in 1969, he declared--albeit in vain--"The day we have a true European government, there must also be a European parliament."

#### II - The Obstacle Is Lifted: The European Council Is Formed

In 1972 President Pompidou won acceptance for his idea of convening regular meetings of European heads of state and government.

1) The Paris Summit, December 9-10, 1974: In the course of this meeting President Giscard d'Estaing was able to convince his European partners of the need to institutionalize the summit meetings and at this time he reintroduced the idea of election to the European parliamentary assembly by universal suffrage. *"For Europe this was a date of great importance and for France it marked the accomplishment of a protracted effort."* (Former Foreign Minister Louis de Guiringaud, June 14, 1977) The European Council was inaugurated on December 11 and 12, 1975, and on September 20, 1976 this council signed the final agreement concerning direct elections to the European parliamentary assembly. The new parliament will be composed of 410 members: 81 from France, Germany, Italy and Great Britain respectively; 25 from the Netherlands; 24 from Belgium; 16 from Denmark; 15 from Ireland and 6 from Luxembourg.

2) Parliamentary Ratification: While article 138 of the Rome Treaty does not make approval by national parliaments mandatory, President Giscard d'Estaing decided to ask the French Parliament to ratify the European agreement. The President signed the law of ratification on June 30, 1977. The electoral law of the same date provides for a proportional system with national tickets. In France the elections will take place on June 10, 1979. France was the first country of the Nine to complete all the legislative procedures for the elections.

### III - The Powers of the European Parliamentary Assembly

The parliamentary assembly is the forum of the European Communities. Its formal powers under the Community treaties are limited but real. It has the right to be consulted on major items of Community legislation; since 1970 it has acquired additional powers over the Community budget and may dismiss the Commission, over which it exercises general supervision, by a vote of censure.

France's position is clear: the election of the European parliamentary assembly by universal suffrage must not result in an increase of its power. On November 9, 1976, Mr. de Guiringaud said, *"This assembly is not and cannot be a parliament. The European Council... is not and cannot be responsible to it. The nine governments are and will remain responsible only to their national parliaments, which cannot be divested of their prerogatives by an assembly whose powers are confined to formulating recommendations and intervening in certain aspects of budgetary procedure ."*

On November 21, 1978 President Giscard d'Estaing stated that: *"The powers of the European parliamentary assembly are defined by the Rome Treaty. They cannot be amended except by an amendment to the Rome Treaty.... To amend the Treaty, nine partners have to agree.... I am not in favor of broadening the powers of this assembly until a confederated Europe has been organized and has demonstrated its ability to function."*