



Provisional edition

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Official report of debates

Address by the Prime Minister of Malta

Mr Olivier REVERDIN (Switzerland, President of the Assembly)*: (...) Your Excellency, would you be kind enough to come to the rostrum. We are very happy to have among us the Head of Government of the youngest of our member states.

I call the Prime Minister of Malta. (*Applause*)

Mr George BORG OLIVIER (Prime Minister of Malta): May I in the first place offer my congratulations to you, Mr. President, on your election to this high office. It is indeed a great pleasure for me to be the first Minister to address this Assembly under your chairmanship.

Mr. President, distinguished colleagues, twenty years ago the dream of many a man of vision throughout the centuries started to take shape. Emerging from the horrors and ravages it had suffered for six long years, torn and battered by fratricidal war, free Europe solemnly renounced war and, inspired by the man who had so greatly contributed to its survival, pledged itself to the pursuit of freedom, justice and prosperity in unity. The pledge given in London on 5 May 1949 is now subscribed to by eighteen European nations and joins together over 300 million people in what has become a valid instrument for the maintenance of peace and the furtherance of economic and social welfare in Europe and the world.

We are celebrating together the 20th anniversary of the birth of a new Europe and of a new brotherhood of nations. Looking back over those eventful years, we cannot but be thankful for what has been achieved; and I feel it my duty to express my deep appreciation for the work done and for the results recorded by the various organs and bodies which together make up the Council of Europe. As a result of their labours, not unaccompanied by a greater understanding between the member governments, we are witnessing the gradual evolution of a structure of co-operation never before seen in Europe and have, perhaps, by our efforts shown to other nations the benefits of regional co-operation, not as an alternative to a wider international co-operation or in competition with it, but as complementary to the role of the United Nations at world level.

I wish, on this occasion, to echo here the voice of the Committee of Ministers and pay a special tribute to our Secretariat without whose generous efforts, under the inspiring leadership and guidance of the Secretary General, it would not have been possible for the Council to have done so much in such a relatively short time. Equally deserving of special mention are the various bodies, committees and subcommittees who have given us the benefit of their technical advice and who laboriously do all the spade work.

My admiration for this Assembly and my appreciation of its useful work prompt me

In this report:

- speeches in English are reported in full;
- speeches in other languages are reported using the interpretation and are marked with an asterisk (*);
- speeches in German and Italian are reproduced in full in a separate document.

readily to accept the honour and privilege to address this distinguished gathering, afforded me by your predecessor whom, I know, we shall always remember with respect and affection. Your direct knowledge and experience of the daily needs and of the aspirations of the people of Europe, your critical judgment and unfettered advice, your vision and your practical approach, my colleagues, have been invaluable. Yours has often been the first move, the seed of many a fruitful initiative, and you have been a source of inspiration and a motive for action both for the Council and for the member governments. It may be truly said of this Assembly that it has become the most important single exponent of democratic and progressive ideas in Europe.

To this Assembly, my country owes a special debt of gratitude: I refer to your concern over the economic situation of my small island, and I thank you very sincerely for the attention that problem has received through the work of your Committee on Economic Affairs and Development and for the time you have devoted to the committee's report. We in Malta now hope that the Assembly's resolution on the Maltese economic situation – especially the references to the advantages that could accrue from participation in certain activities of OECD and to Malta's current approach to the European Economic Community – as well as the recent deliberations of the Committee of Ministers in connection with that resolution, will find a favourable response.

I am also gratified by the decision recently taken by the Assembly to undertake a study of the proposition that the seabed and the ocean floor beyond present national jurisdiction should be reserved exclusively for peaceful purposes in the interests of mankind whose common heritage it is. And I am pleased to note that on the invitation of the Legal Affairs Committee of this Assembly, my country's Permanent Representative at the United Nations – who has piloted this initiative with energy and enthusiasm – will address that committee on the subject next month.

I wish also to take this opportunity again to express the appreciation of my government for the Council's decision to organise in Malta the Xinth Exhibition held under its auspices. We are looking forward to welcoming visitors, especially as many of you as may find the time to come to Malta for that occasion.

On our part, we have endeavoured to contribute what our limited resources could offer and to participate in the activities of the Council of Europe as fully as our size and our abilities permit. Although we only became a Member in 1965, soon after the attainment of independence, we have done our best to make up for lost time and have since signed or ratified a fairly large number of the Council's conventions and other agreements. As we proceed with the process of legislative adjustments we shall be in a position to accede to those conventions in greater measure. Above all, we can be counted upon to extend our unstinted co-operation and to help to the best of our ability in the promotion of a better understanding between nations, the maintenance of peace and stability, and a deeper and wider unity of action and of purpose in Europe.

The progress made by the member states of the Council of Europe since 1949 has been very impressive. It has at times been called miraculous. But it is also true that there is no room for complacency. The achievements in material well-being should not be allowed to make us less sensitive to the need for a closer association. Europe is still a long way from its goal and its influence on world affairs has regained little of its former importance. It would seem that, both in our self-interest and for the welfare of mankind, greater efforts and a more generous spirit of collaboration should be forthcoming. Indeed, it is the fear of many that unless we move more rapidly into a closer relationship we might stagnate into a feeling of individual self-satisfaction and miss the ultimate objective.

Looking around us we still find a world which has lived far too long in a state of tension; a world which has not ceased to be afflicted by wars; and though these have been limited geographically they have in many instances threatened — and some still threaten — to escalate into global conflict. We have created such powerful means of destruction that we could wipe ourselves out of existence in a few terrible hours. The balance of power has been replaced by a balance of terror. It is a horrifying thought that man might survive only because the alternative could be complete obliteration.

We also find a world in which the larger part of the population is still destitute and where thousands of innocent people are daily dying of starvation while vast resources that could greatly alleviate their suffering are being applied to armaments. And as those armaments become obsolete for the countries that produce them, they serve to encourage regional conflicts and civil wars and become instruments of further suffering and destruction.

Europe, though relatively prosperous, is still divided. People still cannot move freely from one part to another and not only families but even nations are still torn apart. Ideas and knowledge cannot be usefully exchanged and freedom and democracy are the prerogative of less than half the population of Europe. For its defence and also for its industrial development Western Europe still depends on outside help to an unhealthy degree.

These are disquieting facts; and although we can draw some comfort from our own past attainments it would seem that the spirit of regeneration and the desire for a closer association which had characterised the first decade and a half following the last world war has lost much of its ardour. The present activities of some of the more important European movements are little more than a holding operation aimed mainly at preserving the status quo; and it seems likely that some time will have to elapse before the necessary momentum is regained.

In matters of international politics the voices of Western European countries, often heard in dissonance, no longer carry the weight they were accustomed to exert in the council chambers of the world. Individually, none of them is any longer a first-rate power and their influence on world affairs has abated accordingly.

In the field of economic and industrial development the smaller countries of Europe cannot keep pace with modern technological advancement and sophistication; even the more developed countries are lagging behind. At the moment,

Europe is threatened to be overrun by vastly superior and better organised industrial forces. If adequate steps are not taken to enable the indigenous industries to withstand the onslaught, those forces will increasingly play the industrial tune in Europe.

I do not wish however to sound defeatist. On the contrary, my confidence in Europe is great. I firmly believe that Europe can, if it wills, regain the political and economic autonomy it enjoyed in the past and its rightful place in the community of nations. But it is also my belief that this can only happen if we revive and strengthen the will to unite and if we do in fact unite.

There is little in the world today to which Europe has not greatly contributed: in culture and in the arts, in the sciences and in industry, in the recognition of the dignity of man, and to quote from our Statute, in "the spiritual and moral values that are our common heritage and the true source of individual freedom and political liberty and the rule of law", in all these, the imprint of European man is unmistakable. But Europe cannot live by its past alone. We live in a changed world in which the powers that rule its destinies have grown beyond the reach of any single European nation. Europe too must find the way to grow bigger if it is to compete and to have a more decisive say in its future and in that of the world.

In particular the resources of the individual countries of Europe must be pooled and utilised more efficiently, and the machinery for the exchange of new ideas and acquired knowledge needs to be improved. In an age which has amply shown the advantage of large combines and industrial complexes we must provide the necessary stimuli and the proper environment in order that European industry may grow sufficiently to partake in those advantages.

Mr. President, the Council of Europe has been more fortunate than some of the other European movements. The events of the last years have had, if at all, only a marginal effect on the work of the Council. In spite of serious differences between some of its Members, the Council of Europe has managed to remain true to its principles and objectives and also kept up the momentum it had gathered in previous years.

This may have been due, at least in part, to the absence of deliberative and executive functions which could encroach on the sovereignty of member states. As an instrument of unification, in fact, the Council of Europe mainly relies on the force of persuasion. It harmonises differences and promotes collaboration. It draws attention to the inadequacies, deviations and delays, and recommends lines of action; but it does not impose a common will. Its role consists largely in promoting a brotherly understanding and co-operation and seeks to provide the means for this end.

In a sense these are limiting factors. I suggest, however, that it is precisely for these reasons that the Council of Europe could be more instrumental in paving the way to further progress towards European unification. Our efforts within the Council should be therefore increasingly directed at that aim. What appears to be an immediate need is a revival of the desire and the will to become a united Europe. If that is so, none is better equipped than this Assembly and its members to bring home that need to the peoples and parliaments, and to the governments of Europe.

The Council of Europe could also be instrumental in furthering co-operation and better understanding in the context of a wider Europe embracing both East and West irrespective of the ideologies and political systems they may have chosen to adopt. We may disagree with some of these systems and ideologies and we may even not like them, and we certainly all believe that individual freedom, political liberty and the rule of law are the principles which form the basis of all genuine democracy. But it is not for us to say how others should govern themselves or how they should choose to live. We must raise our voices in condemnation when a system of government is imposed through outside intervention and when even mild attempts at a liberal

reform and rightful aspirations to some measure of freedom are crushed by external force. For there can be no compromise on basic issues or on the fundamental rights of all peoples. But, by the same principle, neither can we impose our will on others.

What is for us to find are ways and means by which even opposing political systems can co-exist not in mutual fear but in mutual respect or even tolerance. The precedents of history show that systems and institutions which do not, or no longer correspond to realities tend to change or to fade out completely. Our role is that of seeing that the necessary changes are accelerated, and we can help bring that about by seeking further contacts in the various fields of human needs and endeavours where such contacts are possible. We should not wait to be approached and we must also be prepared for rebuffs and disappointments. The alternative to co-existence is fraught with danger.

Until the lamentable events of last August this policy had given good results. Some had even forecast an end to East-West tension. The events in Czechoslovakia have shaken us back violently to a more realistic assessment of the position. We have suffered with the gallant Czech people and we have, of course, also given serious thought as to what could happen to us. In a way it is good that we should have reconsidered our position and realised the need for continued preparedness, but it is equally important for us that we should not abandon the policy of détente, though perhaps we should pursue that policy from a position of greater strength. Above all, we must show in as convincing a manner as possible that we have no ambitions beyond that of changing Europe, possibly the whole of Europe, into a place where men and women can live a fuller life as Europeans. It must also be clear that we seek to achieve this through a deeper understanding of one another and closer collaboration.

I venture to go a little further; for these needs transcend the boundaries of Europe. Material progress and the enhancement of life can have little meaning except in an orderly and peaceful environment; and such is the interdependence of nations and of regions on stability in other countries and other areas, that none can afford to be self-centred. The situation in the Middle East and the war in Vietnam are two typical examples.

I have earlier suggested that Europe could help this cause better if it were more united in purpose. But in the long term, even a united Europe could do little to stem the tide of events if the ever-widening gap between the wealthier and the poorer countries of the world were not somehow narrowed. Just as in our domestic policies we seek to establish a more equitable distribution of wealth and to smooth out other inequalities between the various sections of the community, so also should we, and for much the same reasons, do something about the poverty-stricken areas of the world. In our own countries we do not tolerate poverty, illiteracy and disease. We cannot remain indifferent to the appalling living conditions of such a large part of the rest of the world.

I do not wish to belittle what Europe has done for the less developed countries of the world; and I appreciate that Europe too has its problems and its under-developed areas. The fact is, however, that a lot more remains to be done. The position is morally intolerable; it is also one for which Europe is not entirely blameless. The former colonial powers, in particular, who have in the past been more intent on exploiting the regions they controlled than on preparing the inhabitants for an independent existence, should now at least ensure that the rapid growth of these regions to political independence is matched by an accelerated rate of economic development.

And if self-interest is more convincing than moral duty, need the countries that can afford to give more in terms of aid be reminded that, unless they do so, they might have to spend more on armaments? We take material comfort and freedom from pestilence for granted. But starvation and disease have a very different meaning for men who have it on their doorsteps. The situation is enough to breed spontaneous revolt; if, in addition, men are blinded by political theories and nationalistic feelings, and if they are encouraged by military aggressiveness and ambitions, the spirit of revolt can grow into civil wars and regional conflicts, and possibly even into total war.

I have tried to summarise some of the things other more influential and more able men have said before, in the full knowledge that I could add little to what is not already known. But the issues are so vital that they can bear repetition, especially from the representative of a country which has experienced the cruelties and deprivations of war and which is so small that, even if it wished otherwise, it could have no other aspiration but to live in peace and no greater desire than to see peace on earth. I have also felt that on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of a memorable day in the history of Europe we should not only recall our past achievements but also reflect on what remains to be done.

(Applause)

Mr Olivier REVERDIN (Switzerland, President of the Assembly)*: Thank you very much, Mr. Prime Minister. We are extremely happy to hear the official representatives of member states from time to time and to be made aware of their problems.