



the european convention

THE CHAIRMAN

**SPEECH BY
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Charlemagne Prize

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Mr President,

Your Worship,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In awarding me this Charlemagne prize, you have caused me to feel an intense emotion and happiness.

You have made of me a distant and humble disciple of Charlemagne.

I say "distant", because it is some 1200 years since he took on – in the manner of his time – the creation of a European Empire.

And "humble", because the task I am now charged with is simply to draft a lasting blueprint for Europe! It is a task that Charlemagne would have had some trouble in carrying out, since it appears that he failed to master the art of writing, although his extraordinary energy and his skill at arms enabled him to assemble a collection of territories in which Europe could already be seen in outline.

The emotion stems from a childhood memory. The legend by which the figure of Charles the Great was transformed and enhanced, gradually made him into a saint.

In recollection of the quotation from his capitularies where he says that "every father of a family must send his son to school, until such time as he is properly educated", it was a tradition in the schools and colleges of the University of France to celebrate Saint Charlemagne's day.

On that day – 28th January, the anniversary of Charlemagne's death – the schools would hold a feast for their most deserving pupils. I was invited only once, but, along with my classmates, how proud I was!

That feeling of pride comes back to me today, and I thank you for it.

I want to express my deep gratitude to the President of the Federal Republic, Lieber Herr Rau, for his very kind and indulgent words.

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But I have to say that the task that has brought me this prize is not yet completed.

With less than a month to go before the end of our great collective enterprise, I am conscious of the responsibility that weighs upon our Convention: our task is to draw up – for the first time in the history of Europe – a pan-European Constitution.

Our continent has seen successive attempts at unifying it: Caesar, Charlemagne and Napoleon, among others. The aim has been to unify it by force of arms, by the sword.

We, for our part, seek to unify it by the pen. Will the pen succeed where the sword has finally failed?

In the scales of history, will the feathered quill outweigh the bloodstained blade?

I think so, because our success today is based on the free choice of the peoples of Europe to organise their common future.

We shall have the answer in the months to come.

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Although its style and its methods are deliberately modest, our Convention is a major "first". It represents the first constituent assembly on a European scale.

It has to establish a solid and lasting constitutional framework for 450 million Europeans, in what will soon be 25 Member States extending from east to west – from Estonia to Portugal, and from Greece to the north of Great Britain, beyond Hadrian's Wall!

Merely to give you an idea of the scale, I would point out that the Constitution of the United States – the estimable American Constitution – was written for thirteen States with very little history behind them, inhabitants who all spoke the same language and practised the same religion, and a total population of three and a half million: in other words, less than 1% of the population of the Europe we are seeking to unite.

Is it possible to devise a single Constitution for this vast grouping, with all its diversity? Is this realistic, is it reasonable?

I think that our work over the last fifteen months has shown it was difficult, but definitely achievable.

Above all, however, it has been shown to be necessary, and natural. Yes, I say "necessary"!

Woe betide Europe if it remains divided! Woe betide its growth, the flowering of its culture, the drive behind its science and technology, its image and its influence in the world!

But I also say "natural"!

Because Europe is more than just a cooperative of Member States, because people in our countries feel European too, and because sometimes our histories are inextricably intertwined: take Charlemagne himself, crowned in Rome, his eldest son reigned over Aquitaine – it was

Charlemagne's adviser, Alcuin of York, who reformed the monasteries of Touraine; that same Charlemagne is buried not a stone's throw from here, while his father and mother, Pepin and Bertha, are buried in Saint-Denis, at the gates of Paris.

If we are to succeed, I believe that there are three conditions that need to be met.

Firstly, there needs to be a firm commitment to the Union's progress from Europe's politicians. The European Convention, and also public opinion, need to know that that commitment is there. It is Europe's leaders who will carry forward its joint destiny. We need them to send out their message.

To parody a famous quotation, the Convention hears too much talk of what Europe can do for the Member States, and too little of what the Member States are ready to do for the union of Europe.

Next, we need the active support of the people of Europe, support that is difficult to achieve on an abstract subject which does not lend itself to media discussion. That is why I suggested holding a public debate, somewhere in Europe, well away from all the experts, to discuss what is at stake politically in the European enterprise. To my regret, that suggestion was not taken up.

Il est également indispensable de rétablir l'esprit de bonne entente et de coopération qui n'aurait jamais dû cesser d'exister entre les institutions européennes. Nous ne voulons plus entendre à la Convention les critiques négatives selon lesquelles, lorsque l'on propose d'améliorer le fonctionnement d'une institution, c'est pour en affaiblir une autre. La vérité, c'est que chacune des institutions a besoin d'être rénovée et élevée, et c'est la plus démocratique - c'est à dire le Parlement européen - qui gagnera le plus en pouvoir.

Lastly, we need to get general agreement, without any ulterior motives, on the nature of our Union, a union which is destined to outlast the century: the union's nature is a dual one, passed down to us by history: we are a union of Member States, and a union of peoples. Until we have this agreement, we shall continue to dissipate our energies in overly fanciful or reductionist debates.

Our Constitution is not to be the charter for some centralised federal state. Nor can it be reduced to a mere treaty for cooperation between governments. Anyone who has not yet grasped this fact deserves to wear the dunce's cap of the famous carolingian schools!

Europe was born of Greek mythology: its mystery and fascination remain.

However, it must also inspire reason. We shall not build Europe if we are

unrealistic.

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It was fifty years ago that the European enterprise began to turn a vague feeling of European identity into the blueprint for a political organisation.

Let us pay grateful tribute to the founding fathers for taking that bold initiative at a time when memories of two fratricidal conflicts within the space of thirty years were still raw.

Today the question facing the political leaders of this generation is two-fold: How do we add a new political dimension to the European enterprise? How do we build a common area of justice and security on the foundations of the internal market? How do we coordinate our foreign and security policies in response to the expectations of the majority of our peoples, who are calling for Europe to have its own common foreign and security policy?

And how is the greatest enlargement in Europe's history to be turned to its advantage, endowing it with a pan-European dimension, rather than merely upsetting a system designed for a smaller community?

The members of the Charlemagne Prize Committee showed particular foresight in 1950, in awarding their first ever prize to the father of the pan-European movement, Mr Coudenhove-Kalergi. Anyone today, re-reading his speech, is struck, as I am, by his commitment and vision. Now we have to succeed in building a united continent.

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The founding fathers' approach was a political one: economic integration, and the integration of the coal and steel industries, were designed to bind the Member States' economic interests together to such an extent that a joint destiny would gradually emerge.

Unlike a traditional federation, the EU Member States continued throughout this period to exercise traditional sovereign rights such as foreign or defence policy, which were not even mentioned in the founding Treaty of Rome, while the Union was entrusted with economic integration.

The culmination of this integration came with the introduction of our common currency: the euro. It was for that reason that it was awarded your prize last year.

Europe is therefore a dual system, as expressed in the first article of the new Constitution:

"Reflecting the will of the citizens and States of Europe to build a common future, this Constitution establishes the European Union, on which the Member States confer competences to attain objectives they have in common.

The Union shall coordinate the policies by which the Member States aim to achieve these objectives, and shall exercise in the Community way the competences they confer on it."

What ambitions do we have for this union? What is it that we want to achieve together? This is the problem of substance now facing the Convention, a far remove from squabbling about rivalling powers. We have to give a clear answer, which will in effect determine our political enterprise.

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Two possibilities spring to mind:

Either we merely consolidate and expand our Union, in its current state of integration, to include new member countries. This means a large market, the four freedoms of movement – persons, goods, capital and services –, the single currency, and some financial solidarity: in short, an economic confederation. But then, those who want that should say so unambiguously. That level of ambition could represent a common plinth, the first level of the Constitution.

Alternatively, we can take the view that this stage is necessary, but does not go far enough. That Europe must take its ambitions further. That Europe must organise itself better to become a player with a wider audience, and greater significance and respect on the international stage. That Europe must organise its own security. That we cannot use a common currency without coordinating our economic policies better. That we cannot erase the borders between our States without creating a genuine European area of security and justice.

If we accept this second alternative, which is undoubtedly the historic response to the questions of our age, and which according to every survey corresponds to public expectations, a Constitution endowed with stable institutions, some rooted in the identity of its States, and others in the Common European heritage, and capable of fulfilling those expectations, then takes on its full significance. We will then be able to build the upper levels of the European Constitution. It is in this spirit that I have put forward my proposals with the Praesidium, and it is in that direction that we shall continue to work.

Over the coming weeks, let us keep a clear mind, let us try to find the most suitable, and also the most generous response. We must bear in mind the harsh lessons of 20th Century history! Let us not forget that building Europe is the most peaceful and the most promising project ever undertaken on our continent! Nobody should have to bear the responsibility of causing it to fail for selfish or partisan reasons.

Let us fill our minds with Europe!

Europe has a soul. We cannot overlook or forget this. Europe must move away from being a small circle of insiders. It must be returned to politics, to citizens, to public debate.

From that point of view, the Convention has already been a success. Perhaps our debate will end up forming part of the history, and thus the identity, of Europe. Perhaps one day there will even be an Einhard to mention it in a footnote!

We must stand back far enough to gauge the extent of our task, and especially the extent of our responsibility. Our only driving force must be the determination to succeed, because it is vital for Europe that we do succeed!

Thank you very much.

