

Opening Speech by Mr. Mario Soares

Majesty

President of the European Parliament

Representative of the President of the Council of the Union

President of the European Commission

President of the European Communities Court of Justice

President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe

Delegates

Fifty years ago, under the presidency of Winston Churchill, the Congress that took place in this city marked the beginning of the great adventure of European construction. Europe, tired of the horrors of war, amidst the ruins and the generalised suffering, uncommonly weakened, demanded peace and wanted to launch itself into reconstruction and development. In order to achieve that goal, Europe understood that it needed to establish links between countries previously at war, based on generosity, equality and respect for the freedom and human rights of the European citizens. That need became even more pressing as new antagonisms were starting to appear, dividing the victorious group of countries, and a new totalitarian threat was starting to tower above Europe.

Fifty years later, the European Movement meets again in The Hague, not so much in order to commemorate a happy anniversary we are justly proud of or even to bask in the progress achieved, but rather to prepare the future, at the dawn of a new era.

Europe is no longer artificially divided by the iron curtain and has experienced a long and propitious period of peace, despite the recent conflicts in the former Yugoslavia. The progress achieved by all the European countries regarding democratic pluralism and development is enormous, human rights are generally respected, the concern for sustainable development, justice and quality of life of

the general population is common to all peoples. The European Union is clearly attracting the countries that, so far, have not joined the Union. The Council of Europe - operating until now as a kind of antechamber of the Community and as the European conscience regarding human rights - already has a membership of forty States, sworn to uphold human rights and work for peace.

All these factors represent considerable progress, are extremely important and cannot be underestimated.

The European Union has taken another decisive and historic step forward with the adoption of the single currency - the euro - solemnly established by the Council in Brussels on the 2nd of May. The Economic and Monetary Union, thus into its third stage, will be, I believe, the necessary force behind the European construction. For that reason, the arrival of the euro should be greeted with enthusiasm by all pro-European people. It represents and symbolises the collective will to go forward. However, it is not enough on its own. It has become urgent to restructure and redefine the Union's institutions, ensuring they have adequate decision-making mechanisms, as a pre-condition for its gradual extension to the other candidate countries. The Europe of Citizens has to be created, educating the coming generations about a true European citizenship, capable of overcoming national selfishness, or even nationalistic principles, to move towards a Political and Social Union, with common foreign and defence policies, to support the European social model, which has to be defended from the attacks of neo-liberalism and to affirm the European identity taking into account the diversity of its different cultures.

We all know that the way ahead is not an easy one and may be full of stumbling blocks. Inside the common European space 18 million unemployed people coexist with 50 million people below the poverty line, many of them immigrants. We must not forget also the excluded and outcast of our societies. It is a shameful state of affairs that our welfare societies should acknowledge and eradicate. In order to achieve this it is necessary to stimulate the European political will so that

it can encourage European construction. A collective will, strongly encouraged and supported by an European public opinion aware of what is at stake, capable of effectively lobbying the political decision makers, in particular the Governments and the Parliaments. It is this role that the International European Movement cannot refuse.

The world needs Europe and expects a lot from European universal humanism. Only a united and strong Europe, protective of its ethical, political and social values, can - at a time of globalisation of economies, knowledge and information - help to balance the influence of other world development leaders, like the United States, so that they do not give in to the dangerous temptation of domination, or Japan, among others, in order to contribute to the establishment of a new order, in a strangely deregulated and unsafe world, at the end of this millennium.

The great problems that face humanity today can only be solved in a global context: the ecological attacks on our Planet, threatening human life; the demographic explosion; organised crime, with the growth in drug trafficking as its best example; the ever increasing difference between rich and poor countries and the people who have access to knowledge and the ones that don't; the terrible damage that today's speculative capitalism is capable of, since it has no face and no allegiances but to profit itself, harming, with complete impunity, defenceless nations and populations. Only a united and strong Europe can contribute to the resolution of these global problems, which can be solved by today's science and knowledge, if the political will is there.

The diversity of European nations, languages and cultures is one of Europe's greatest assets. The European construction is original in the way it respects that diversity. No other political endeavour has ever done it in history. But it is only through the Union that it can be acknowledged and maximised, so that it can influence international events in a way that no single European country could ever do. This is the added value obtained with the Union and its main purpose of existence.

On the other hand, Europe cannot behave as a besieged fortress, isolated and defending itself from the outsiders. It should be an open, influential Union, capable of owning up to its historical responsibilities in our World. Therefore, and so that it continues to have moral authority, it should be able to integrate immigrants from other continents, who come to Europe looking for work and better conditions to fulfil their aspirations. It should respect their cultures, languages and religions, and ensure they enjoy the same rights and have the same duties granted by the European Convention on Human Rights.

The establishment of the European Union was not to oppose anybody, since its main purpose is the consolidation of peace, based on justice, freedom and the respect for others and their differences. It is based on democratic pluralism, law abiding States and the utmost respect for Human Rights. The European Union can thus establish an authentic Atlantic partnership, in co-operation with the United States and Canada, based on equality and mutual respect. It should also have a role in upholding peace and contributing to development in the Mediterranean as well as solidarity based co-operation with all Continents and Peoples, not forgetting Africa and Latin America, for whom it has historical responsibilities and where it left profound and long lasting roots.

Dear Delegates,

I trust that, during the next two days, our collective thought provoking and awareness raising work will be fruitful and will be up the task left to us by our Founding Fathers of the European Movement. It is not an easy road to follow, but it is possible. It is outlined. It is feasible. Today we start from a solid base and it is up to us to widen it. We must not give in to scepticism or stop believing. We must appeal to the coming generations of Europeans so that they ready themselves for taking over our task. We also appeal to the media to understand, support and spread our message, which is also theirs. We appeal to the idealism of the Peoples, States and Nations of Europe still outside the Union, stating our solidarity and our sincere desire that they join us, as soon as it becomes possible.

We are an 'opinion' movement and we want to remain so, supported only by the idealism, political will and generosity of our militant members. We feel, however, that we need to go further than that and promote the creation of an Europe of Citizens, capable of raising above national selfish interests, based on a true European citizenship, able to give a new impetus to the political and social construction of an enlarged Europe. It is for that purpose that we work. That is the main reason for the European Movement's existence and the ultimate goal of the Congress which we open today.

The Hague, 9 of May 1998