



European Economic and Social Committee

**Address by Mr Göke Frerichs
President of the European Economic and Social Committee
at the opening of the symposium on the
"History and Future of the European Union"
on the occasion of the expiry of the ECSC Treaty,
23 July 2002**

Mr Prodi, Mr Gibellieri,

Mrs Palacio,

Ambassadors and Members of the European Parliament,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

including my colleagues from the Consultative Committee of the European Coal and Steel Community and from the European Economic and Social Committee,

I would like to warmly welcome you to the home of the European Economic and Social Committee, which, in addition to its role serving the legislative institutions of the European Union, aspires to evolve more and more as the institutional representative of Europe's organised civil society, this being a prerequisite for the quality and credibility of its consultative function.

This symposium, convened on the occasion of the expiry of the ECSC Treaty, 50 years after it came into force and 35 years after the High Authority of the ECSC was integrated into the Commission of the European Communities, has intentionally been given a title which points beyond the occasion itself.

The history and future of the European Union! That is to be our topic today. Our intention is to provide a reminder and foster a greater awareness that our work, our efforts, our policy only takes on its fullest significance if we know where we have come from and if we have a clear idea of where we wish to go. In the heat of the daily round, we remember all too rarely that we can only build a good future if we are sure of our origins.

This point is particularly topical in the light of the current debate on the future of Europe and the work of the European Convention on the future shape of our Union, and it is necessary, because all too often the impression conveyed is that the work of uniting Europe and the history of the European Union is only just beginning.

The European Union has a history, ladies and gentlemen, and a very successful one at that, which it can be proud to show off. It is unfortunate in my view that our institutions have not yet developed a culture of dealing with this history, of cherishing it and of celebrating and commemorating it when the occasion arises. Our symposium is also intended as a small contribution towards developing such a culture.

In so doing, we are building on a firm foundation which has developed out of the European Coal and Steel Community project over the last fifty years and which has been so successful because it was an ethical project.

It was about bringing peace among the states of Europe, as a prerequisite for the development and prospering of European peoples and societies, which were in need of rebuilding after the devastations of the Second World War. This peace was anchored in action and fact, its durability ensured through institutionalised supranational cooperation.

It was about reconciling former enemies, as a prerequisite for lasting peace. This required a learning process which was facilitated by the joint work to bring about the unification of Europe.

It was about creating solidarity between the nations of Europe, as a prerequisite for the realisation of the common project. This solidarity was sought in joint action and joint solutions to common problems.

Finally, it was about freedom, as a prerequisite for the humanity of Europeans to blossom and for these values to be converted into political action.

Contrary to a widespread misconception today, the European Coal and Steel Community was also an eminently political project. The coal and steel industry, the industrial sector and indeed the economy as a whole - these were the areas that, in the early 1950s, were the paradigm of a political community that, from the outset, showed tremendous potential for future development.

Every sentence of the declaration made on 9 May 1950 by the then French foreign minister **Robert Schuman** – which we consider to be the EU's founding charter – is imbued with this political ambition. For **Robert Schuman**, for **Jean Monnet**, who had conceived the project, for **Konrad Adenauer** and **Alcide de Gasperi**, for **Joseph Luns** and **Paul Henri Spaak**, and for **Joseph Bech**, who spontaneously endorsed the project and did much to make it a reality, the European Coal and Steel Community was, as the Schuman declaration literally says, "a first step in the federation of Europe".

Walter Hallstein, the centenary of whose birth we recently commemorated, who was one of the architects of both the ECSC and the EEC Treaties and later the first president and thus, in a real sense, the creator of the European Commission, pointed out on many occasions that the EEC and ECSC were in every respect highly political ventures. Their aims were political, as were their institutions, procedures and achievements. For it was not coal and steel - or industries and economies - that became integrated, but rather the policies on these issues pursued by the Member States.

The EU's future lies in this historical experience, in the wisdom of its architects, in the ethical principles that have cemented the foundations on which we stand today as we endeavour to provide a democratic constitution for the Union that has evolved since then.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Before I give the floor to the very last president of the ECSC Consultative Committee, allow me simply to say that, as the consultative committee's "younger sibling", the European Economic and Social Committee is proud to carry on its great tradition of closely involving the economic and social partners in the European venture.

When the institutions of the three European Communities were merged 35 years ago, two bodies remained separate: on the one hand, the Economic and Social Committee, representing the various economic and social players within the purview of the EEC and Euratom Treaties and, on the other, the ECSC Consultative Committee. This was in keeping with the consultative committee's specific role in tackling industrial change in the coal and steel sector, not least since the instruments available to it went beyond a mere advisory role.

It is vital that we draw on the consultative committee's experience as we support the process of industrial change in the central and eastern European countries that will shortly be joining the European Union. We also need that experience to drive forward moves to balance out interests on the world stage in such a way that the "European model" is not only safeguarded for ourselves as Europeans, but can also set a precedent in a global context as well.

It is thus a stroke of good fortune that, at the suggestion of the European Commission and with the agreement of the European Parliament and the Council of Ministers, it will be possible to carry on the work of the ECSC Consultative Committee within the European Economic and Social Committee. We intend to draw on the experience of the past fifty years to break new ground - to establish a new kind of structured dialogue and adopt a holistic approach to the problems of industrial change. The European Economic and Social Committee is delighted to take on this fascinating responsibility, and will shoulder it with commitment.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The ECSC Treaty laid the foundation for a Europe that secures peace, balances out economic and social interests and involves the grassroots in the democratic process. For the sake of future generations, we want to tackle the future of Europe in the same spirit that inspired the founders of the European Coal and Steel Community.

I now give the floor to **Enrico Gibellieri**, whom I should like to thank sincerely for his valuable cooperation over the past few months. My thanks also go of course to the bureau and members of the ECSC Consultative Committee – a body that, from tomorrow, passes into history.
