

CEREMONY IN THE BELLIARD BUILDING
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SPEECH GIVEN BY JACQUES DELORS

President of the European Economic and Social Committee,
President of the Committee of the Regions,
Elected representatives,
Members,
Representatives of the European institutions,
Your Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Today, when the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions are unveiling this plaque for the building on the Rue Belliard, having originally felt surprised, I am now extremely moved. When the idea was first put to me, I expressed some reservations. Should this honour not go to other campaigners for European integration?

Was it decent to give this privilege to someone still living? Or did this mean that the person concerned had only a few months to live? Fortunately I am not superstitious, but I will nevertheless keep an eye on my health in the coming months.

Since the very beginning of my professional and political life, I have fought tirelessly to achieve concerted action and I have therefore always been happy to take part in debates or seminars when invited to do so by your institutions. Like the members of the European Economic and Social Committee and of the Committee of the Regions, I have always campaigned for a society based on dialogue and participation, to the extent that some people have considered my ideas and my determination to be nothing but idealism. And yet, given the poor performance of Western democracy, the quest for greater transparency and participation remains a viable solution, at both the national and European Union levels.

I would like you to join me in paying rightful tribute to those individuals - in the form of the Presidents of the two institutions - who work ceaselessly behind the scenes to keep the project on track.

Anne-Marie Sigmund has fought superbly to ensure that the voices of those now known as "stakeholders" - the representatives of economic and social life - are heard, speaking not only in defence of their interests, as one would expect, but also to address the major concerns facing our societies today. The issue of civil society has today gained respectability, as demonstrated by this conference on *Living Europe: a new challenge for European society*.

As for Michel Delebarre, he has deliberately chosen devolved action, which means promoting local and regional authorities, as the way to ensure that greater account is taken of the aspirations of women

and men today. He proposes - and translates his ideas into action - that far from being a mass of empty declarations, subsidiarity becomes a reality and sustains our democratic life. Furthermore, whilst it was created more recently than the Economic and Social Committee, the Committee of the Regions is increasingly finding its feet in an international framework that still has the potential to yield great results.

This two-pronged action is all the more inspiring against the current backdrop of globalisation. Many Europeans feel lost in this economic world, in which they believe that neither they nor their leaders are in control of events that nevertheless concern them and impact on their lives. They need their local and regional leaders, as well as their professional and union representatives to close this enormous gap that they find so maddening. They must be able to understand the world as it transforms itself and to voice their aspirations and their needs, including the requirements of democracy or more simply of a society that works properly and offers a higher standard of living.

It is true that this is no simple task in the age of the Internet, which will give people more means for expressing themselves and for engaging in dialogue. And this is something we must, of course, welcome.

Nevertheless participative democracy is underpinned by a number of principles that are timeless, if I might put it that way. It is worth recalling these briefly. Above and beyond complex debates on governance, the basic tenet is that every problem that can be solved at the grassroots level should not go all the way to the top, to disappear amongst wider issues and sets of problems that become distorted.

Furthermore, in the economic and social world, awareness of the opportunities and constraints offered by globalisation should not cause us to overlook the problems it creates for those who feel that they are being treated as nothing but a variable to be adjusted. The general public, in other words, working people, wants to be informed about the changes it must make and wants to have the resources to cope with these changes. The European Economic and Social Committee has the enormous and difficult task of explaining that it is human beings, made of flesh and blood, that are involved and that unbridled and unregulated finance-based capitalism is incapable of building tomorrow's world.

These ideas apply, of course, to the national level, but must also be taken into greater account at the European level. I must reiterate that I am talking here about more than just the Union's institutional rules and regulations and the distribution of powers between Europe and its Member States. Some might say that this would make the decision-making process more complex, but I do not consider this to be the case; although democracy needs people that can find straightforward solutions, it can only be a living and efficient reality if everyone is able to make his or her own contribution to the debate and to collective action. There is undoubtedly a need for fewer documents, fewer unnecessary initiatives and for more public airing of views, more debate and greater clarity.

The scale of the current crisis facing European integration is significant and worrying. This is neither the time nor the place to discuss this point, but I do want to state my conviction that we will not make

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progress unless we return to the values of political, economic and social democracy. This is the project, scattered with pitfalls but nonetheless crucial, that underpins the work of the European Economic and Social Committee and of the Committee of the Regions.

This is why the plaque you are now unveiling could well have stated, "Here stands the home of participative democracy, designed to enhance the closeness, the expertise and influence of European citizens, who are the body and soul of European integration".
