



## **SPEECH BY CLAUDE ALLEGRE**

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### **AT THE 51st BI-ANNUAL CONFERENCE AND THE 40th ANNIVERSARY OF THE EUROPEAN RECTORS' CONFERENCE**

Bordeaux, 20 and 21 May 1999

After many years of uncertainty, determination and tenacity, we have managed to build a European economic area with a single currency to which gradually all European countries will belong. Naturally, some say: "now that we have a 'monetary Europe', we should create a political one". Yet constructing this political Europe is not so easy. Because, if we wish to go further, a real sharing of sovereignties will have to be accepted. How can one give birth to a European executive without weakening individual nations? If we had already moved forward in this direction, it might have been possible to avoid some of the disorders that have occurred in Europe. It would also be good for us to construct a European trade area. As you know, the United States has arrangements enabling it to close its borders to any product whatsoever in three days. And it does not hesitate to do so when it considers that the national interest is at stake. We have no such measures and, in any event, they would be difficult to introduce. Meanwhile, Europe in its present form, moving constantly forward day by day, is very difficult to operate effectively with its 15-strong membership. I have just arrived back from Brussels, from a European Research Council meeting, where much time is spent correcting communiqués, words and forms of words. When real progress is sought, the unanimous voting requirement highly complicates matters. What is now needed is the 'qualified majority' regulation, as it is known, with weightings to take account of the size of the States concerned. France is seeking progress in this matter and research will henceforth be subject to qualified majority voting but, in other areas, the principle encounters considerable resistance. Meanwhile, increasing pressure is being exerted by the countries of former eastern Europe which are asking to join the European Union. Failure to comply with this request within a reasonable period would, in human terms, be entirely unacceptable and, most certainly, a political error.

Yet if we are unable to make Europe work well with 15 members, what will happen when this number reaches 25 or even 30? In all likelihood, we shall experience a long period in which the construction of 'political Europe' makes only slow progress. Enlargement will occur before the reform of the European institutions is fully complete. The most recent Berlin conference, as well as the Vienna and Cardiff meetings, all bear witness to this, since all were meant to make recommendations for faster progress towards political union and yet could propose only modest steps forward. During these years given over to the delicate task of achieving European political and social union, a Europe of culture, science and education will also have to be built. If our pupils, students and young people are taught to make Europe the subject of

a real learning experience, those inherited past factors that have hindered progress will quite naturally disappear because young people will have acquired a European culture and reflexes. Without disowning their countries, they will understand the need to transcend a purely national context.

For this reason, we took the initiative last year, together with Italy, the United Kingdom and Germany, in holding the Sorbonne meeting on European 'harmonization'. Yet I became aware that some people in Europe did not understand what this expression meant. 'Harmony' is the guiding principle of the orchestra some of whose members play the drum, others the trumpet and yet others, the piano or violin. To each, his or her instrument and differing musical score, yet with 'harmony' the end result. As I see it, Europe is like such an orchestra. If, in future, Europe were to lose the diversity of its culture and range of reactions vis-à-vis the problems we experience, it would be the poorer for doing so. We have no wish, any of us, to lose our identity. In each country, the education system has often been the product of major struggles. In France, it originated in very tough conflict with the Catholic Church and securing secularism was an all-important victory. In other countries, history was different. For this reason, any attempt to "manufacture" Europe by gutting individual nations should be rejected. Neither is 'convergence' an ideal term either because, in physics or mathematics in particular, it implies that, at a certain point in time, uniformity is reached. By contrast, we should 'harmonize' for the purpose of encouraging exchanges, and the blending of cultures between students and teachers, and in order to create the university of Erasmus, this European academic milieu destroyed, as we should never forget, by the Wars of Religion. In considering the career of Giordano Bruno, who died appallingly, burnt in Rome in 1600, I am reminded that he taught in Italian universities, but also at the Collège de France, in Geneva and at Oxford. At that time, teachers were on the move, and Erasmus travelled throughout Europe. Yet subsequently, everything came to a standstill and in France, first of all, with the Sorbonne paralysed for nationalistic reasons and by disciplinary narrow-mindedness as in the refusal to teach Greek, natural sciences, physics or architecture. Indeed, this is why in France we have the dual university/grandes écoles system, which was the result of every opportunity for innovation having to be exploited outside the universities. Thus our Natural History Museum was built as a "Garden for the King", and the grandes écoles for training engineers and, much earlier, the Collège de France, were established for similar reasons because the system could not be changed from within.

I therefore believe that a return to flexibility should be encouraged. The Sorbonne initiative was a way of saying: "let us seek those levels at which reciprocity is possible, without anyone having to sacrifice anything whatever". What, for some, may have been a source of confusion is that Italy, Germany and France took advantage of this harmonization initiative to make changes to their national system. Yet they would have been able to do so without any attempt at harmonization at European level. Our joint approach has been straightforward: we have realized that there exists a thesis system challenged by no-one and an academic title of "Master" which has developed in the industrial world in particular. Our aim, therefore, is to establish a Master's level in France at the stage of five years beyond the baccalaureate. As you know, in Germany and France in particular, and to a lesser extent in Italy, pupils finish secondary education later than in the United States. The United States undergraduate curriculum lasts four years. For us to introduce similar four-year undergraduate courses would be to concede that our secondary education is not as good as American secondary education, which is not the case. We have thus opted for the licence awarded three years on from the completion of secondary education. The two points of possible mutual recognition are thus the levels of licence and Master. At the same time, this system facilitates a closer relationship between the universities and the grandes écoles. While each remains unchanged, transfer is still possible, with the grandes écoles acquiring the university qualification of Master and, in return, extending to students from universities the opportunity to take a competitive entrance examination at licence level. Yet other countries might adopt an entirely different approach,

since these levels are not points of reference as a matter of course. As universities are autonomous and &endash; and more so in some countries than others &endash; they will never be obliged to recognize the qualifications of other universities. Rather than endlessly seeking equivalencies, they will operate with systems of reference in which there will be no formal obligation. To encourage student mobility, we felt it important that courses should be semester-based rather than year-long since, for some students, six months spent abroad can be integrated without any difficulty whatever into their overall curriculum, whereas an entire year may be incompatible with it. We have thus opted for a semester-based system. But universities may choose differently and maintain a course credit system. Any attempt to go further is liable to challenge university autonomy.

The four ministers together at the Sorbonne decided that a meeting would take place in June 1999 at Bologna. Meanwhile, many countries asked to sign the Sorbonne Declaration. In some countries, there was no problem; in others, the ministers did not wish to sign it whereas the rectors did. The Bologna conference is not seeking to reformulate a Sorbonne Declaration on the grounds that one or another country may have been put out by not taking part in the Sorbonne meeting. Instead, the aim this time is to progress further, towards "mobility". European harmonization encourages the mobility of students, by making it possible to see easily how their curricula coincide. We must now pay attention to teacher mobility: it should be possible in Europe for lecturers who teach three months in Bologna, four in Montpellier, and two in Leicester to be subject to normal, rather than abnormal, conditions of employment! They should also be able to maintain their pension and social security contributions, and not experience any break in their careers or have to complete any unduly complex administrative formalities. Universities should also be able to devise interlocking curricula, exchanging groups of teachers reciprocally for six-month periods. This means everyone working in his or her own country to lessen the administrative barriers. In France, for example, it is not at present possible for you to go and teach freely in Italy. Every six years, you are entitled to a single year's sabbatical leave, following which you have to return to your post in France. In this area, the European Union has to make an effort, which should also include increased funding.

This morning, I was in Brussels discussing the principles governing the research programmes and several ministers, including myself, are fighting to uphold application of the subsidiarity principle by making sure that research programmes already existent in all countries are not duplicated at European level. For example, there is no reason why Europe should have a programme on the prion since everyone is engaged in one. On the other hand, European exchanges should be a priority for funding, and programmes such as Socrates and Leonardo which are themselves priorities should not be cut back. Although the pattern has been set as far as the exchange of students is concerned, clearer commitments are needed with regard to hosting them. For example, we should decide that 10-15% of student accommodation in each country is set aside for European students. It should be possible for us to make jointly a certain number of commitments in this area while preserving each other's sovereignty.

What will happen after the Bologna meeting? I think that governments should gradually take a back seat, and that yours should be the initiative in working out the detailed organizational aspects. The impetus and regulations are the problems of governments but, at the Bologna conference, the key players will be the university presidents and rectors. I believe that this will make for a smoothly graduated transition since, next time round, the governments will be

present merely to "give their blessing" to the plan, along with the means for bringing it to fruition. This means that you require a European organization of rectors and presidents, which becomes a strong, permanent and unified structure. Yours is one organization, while another is the Confederation. I have heard that you are thinking of a merger. Whenever one talks of merger &ndash; as in the multinationals &ndash; problems connected with cut-backs in staff and problems of presidents arise! When I am told that it will be in Brussels, I am not convinced that this is ideal. Any such organization should be independent of the European Commission. If the autonomy of university bodies is desired, the same organization should be independent even if it is funded by the Commission &ndash; just as the Royal Society is independent of the British government, although financed by it. What is more, I do not think that it is possible to be simultaneously a university president in office and president of the new organization. You will thus be obliged to establish a rule to ensure that former presidents are those responsible for ongoing board activity. I believe that it is becoming crucially important for your organization to be very rapidly and strongly consolidated so that you can continue to move forward, grow closer, discuss the problems encountered, and thus become a spur to governments by condemning absurd restrictive regulations and calling for increased resources to support exchanges. And you will also make progress on an important issue for scientific and cultural Europe when you originate European projects in the area of research.

In the past, it was said that "universities were centres for research and centres for teaching". Today, a university remains a centre for teaching and research, but it is also a centre for creating businesses and galvanizing the economy. Although all modern economies are going to develop in the university-based sector, I have considerable difficulty in my country in getting people to understand that big research bodies must now organize themselves within this context around universities. The driving force of the European economy will be universities as places that are sources of creativity, richness and economic vitality for countries, and the main players in the economy of the future. For this reason, I think that the Conference of Rectors and Presidents of European higher education institutions is going to become a driving force for Europe.

Such is my message, which is no different from the one I shall deliver in Bologna. After once more providing impetus which gains ground and grows in strength, the ministers and governments should retire quietly backstage and leave the universities themselves to continue with the question of organization.

I should like to mention briefly one final aspect. It seems to me important that, in each of your universities, you attempt to ensure that the entire teaching staff is fully aware of this movement which should not remain the exclusive preserve of university heads. I believe that students are in the process of becoming organized at European level. As student exchanges have to become much more widespread, might I suggest that you consider the possibility of setting aside a proportion of grant amounts for European exchanges? Should we not, in each country, earmark sums for payment at the host destination and not the home point of departure, since the latter procedure gives rich countries an unfair advantage over poor ones. You also have views of your own regarding the organization of European programmes. Are you involved in the discussion about European research programmes, in which much is at stake and ultimately settled? Yet another question requires consideration. If we wish to exploit fully the European dimension, innovative small and medium-sized firms should be stimulated by the research taking place in universities. Why is the United States effective in this respect? Because there is an information and communications system such that a small business in Massachussetts can become aware of a discovery made in California and immediately latch on

to and develop it. Our task is to set up a European network that enables universities and firms to establish cross-border contact with each other.

So much for what I wished to say. I know that your association has a long past now that you are celebrating its 40th anniversary. I hope that you manage to merge with your respective alter egos and if, unfortunately, you do not succeed in doing so immediately, I urge you to pursue your efforts. Union will be achieved eventually. This has been a very 'European' day for me. I began it at the European Council of Ministers in Brussels, and I am going to end it shortly in Paris, at the dinner given by the National Council for Science which is meeting tomorrow. We have already incorporated the European dimension, since in the National Council for Science, which is the scientific council to the government, half the members are European. We have scientists from most European countries in this National Council, whether industrialists or members of a university organization. And in the future, big organizations, such as the CNRS or the INSERM, will have scientific boards which, institutionally, will have to include a certain proportion of European scientists in their membership. Similarly, it is possible simply via a "gentleman's agreement" to ensure that all thesis examining boards have a European member, which is already the case in some disciplines and provides for a tremendous exchange of ideas. This is how Europe should be built. I believe that your organization has provided for all these developments and, as a university person myself, am in no way surprised. It is entirely fitting that academics should have had this resourceful idea 40 years ago before the politicians thought of it. I am sure that this is the frame of mind in which we shall succeed in creating a European academic area.

Congratulations and best wishes for a constructive and successful meeting.

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