

President

The motion for a resolution tabled by the Liberal and Democratic Group, with request for urgent debate pursuant to Rule 14 of the Rules of Procedure, on the adoption of supplementary budget No 2 for 1980 and the general budget for 1981 (Doc 1-786/80) has been withdrawn.

13. Speaking time

President. — In agreement with the chairmen of the political groups I propose that the speaking time for each sitting be allocated in accordance with the provisions of Rules 28 and 36A of the Rules of Procedure.

Are there any objections?

That is agreed.

14. Deadline for tabling amendments

President. — I propose that we fix the deadline for tabling amendments as set out in the draft agenda, except for the Spinelli and Balfour reports (Docs 1-772/80 and 1-136/80), for which the deadline would be fixed for 6 February at 12 noon, and the Van den Heuvel report, for which it would be fixed for tomorrow at 10 a.m.

I call Sir James Scott-Hopkins.

Sir James Scott-Hopkins. — Madam President, is it not possible, as we are going to divide out speaking time separately on Wednesday between the Spinelli and Balfour reports, to have the vote on Mr Balfour's report during Thursday's sitting? Would that not be the correct way of going about it? There is no problem over translation of the documents, so I suggest that we take the Balfour report and the amendments, if there be any, during Thursday's sitting.

President. — You are proposing therefore that in the case of the Spinelli report the deadline for tabling amendments should be fixed for Friday, 6 February but that for the Balfour report the deadline for tabling amendments should be fixed for tomorrow at 10 a.m. and that the vote should be taken of Thursday.

Are there any objections?

The deadline for tabling amendments is therefore fixed*.

* See OJ No C 28 of 9. 2. 1981.

15. Introduction of the new Commission

President. — The next item is the introduction of the new Commission of the European Communities.

I call Mr Thorn.

(Applause)

Mr Thorn, President of the Commission. — (F) Madam President, ladies and gentlemen, everyone here will understand that I find it difficult to hide what I feel as I stand in this Chamber today. I was elected with you in June 1979 and, with ten years as a Member of this House and four terms as President of the Council behind me, I see so many familiar faces as I look around.

You bring back memories of various stages of a political career, of which this particular moment is undoubtedly a high point.

In my view neither purpose nor degree of commitment should depend on the particular hat one is wearing. What is both new and humbling for me, as I stand before you today as the new President of the Commission, is that I have been entrusted by the governments of our ten countries with the difficult task of presiding over the institution which is regarded as the power-house of European integration at a time when the European venture is plagued on all sides by the myriad problems which have dogged our slow and difficult progress of years past.

I am well aware of the daunting nature of the task which has been entrusted to me. For this reason I would like to begin by paying a warm tribute to my illustrious predecessors, and in particular to Roy Jenkins, who ran the ship with determination and courage for the last four years.

(Applause)

My colleagues — all of whom are present at this solemn gathering — and myself are depending on your support as the elected representatives of the peoples of Europe. We are determined to stick resolutely to the course plotted for our generation by, amongst others, that most illustrious of Europeans, Robert Schuman. We have no alternative unless we want to dash the legitimate hopes of 270 million Europeans.

The Commission would like to associate itself with the tribute which Madam President has just paid to the Community's newest Member State. In particular we would like to welcome the representatives of the Greek people who have come to join you on the benches here. I do not propose to dwell on all that Greece means to Europe and to each one of us. But I

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would like to emphasize that we are all aware of the hopes and the political faith which fired Greece's desire to take part in the European endeavour.

(Applause)

This second enlargement of our Community should be a source of encouragement to us because it affirms the vitality and attraction of what we are doing. It should also serve as a reminder to the institutions of their responsibilities and obligations.

There is no doubt that, initially, the political advantages of enlargement will be overshadowed from time to time by the problems of integrating a less prosperous economy into our Community during a period of world-wide difficulties. I sincerely hope that at such times, and in our negotiations with the other applicants for membership, we will not lose sight of the political goals we share: the creation of a European Union based on law and democracy. We must not disappoint those who are counting on us.

(Applause)

This is particularly important because we are celebrating this happy event, the arrival of a new Member State, in the midst of general gloom. There is no need for me to tell you that our society is in the throes of an extremely serious crisis which is affecting both our economy and our will to succeed. What is worrying is the simultaneous waning of enthusiasm throughout the Community for European union. Its importance and significance are no longer understood, and that is why I am grateful to all those who, like my friend Mr Genscher, stress the vital necessity of European union.

Irrespective of what bench we sit on, we are all aware that the prospects for the 80s are not too bright. The recession is deepening and acquiring the proportions of a catastrophe which threatens not only prosperity but also the foundations of our society. Our very civilization may well be transformed.

I am still deeply convinced that the venture enshrined in the Treaties, the venture which made it possible to reconcile and reconstruct a Europe devastated by war and lay the foundations for its later prosperity, will be our salvation too in the economic and social crisis which is threatening the very values on which our society is based. For, as we all know, it is not merely prosperity and economic health which are in danger.

More than 35 years ago six governments took a decision to act in concert, realising that they would never solve their common problems singlehanded. Today, as these same countries, with their four new allies, prepare to withstand the demands and avarice of the superpowers of the eighties, the motto of 'united we stand' has, to my mind, lost none of its attraction and none of its pertinence.

Madam President, it was at Parliament's express request that it was decided that this would not be a political discourse, even in the tenor of its quotations and references. Since Parliament rightly wanted its first exchange of views with the Commission to be of a political nature, where it could take up political positions, and that in a forthright and critical manner, I would hope that this first discussion would be in the nature of a general exploratory debate, in which I could put before you the programme of a Commission of whose loyal cooperation I can give you the most sincere assurances. That is why I now wish to confine myself so some remarks of a very general nature; I hope that you will understand.

Instead of setting out new goals and objectives, I would simply remind you that the objectives we are pursuing are solemnly entrenched in the preambles to our Treaties. What many people are inclined to forget is that we are endeavouring:

- to lay the foundations of an ever closer union among the peoples of Europe;
- to promote economic and social progress in our countries by common action to eliminate the barriers which divide Europe;
- to secure the constant improvement of living and working conditions for our peoples;
- to remove existing obstacles and promote concerted action to guarantee steady expansion, balanced trade and fair competition;
- to strengthen the unity of our economies and to ensure their harmonious development by reducing the differences existing between the various regions and the backwardness of the less-favoured regions;
- to contribute, by means of a common commercial policy, to the progressive abolition of restrictions on international trade;
- to confirm the solidarity which binds Europe and the overseas countries and to ensure the development of their prosperity.

These are the circumstances in which the new Commission takes up office. There may be doubt as to whether the Commission is a political institution. But it is so by its very nature, by the express wish of the Contracting Parties to the Treaties, and finally by necessity. It is the driving force behind European integration and the guardian of the Treaties. It is the central pivot in the dialogue between the Community's institutions. It has a vital part to play in grasping the nettle of the crisis and in trying to meet the aspirations of the people of Europe.

The new Commission which I wish to introduce to you today combines a wealth of experience with fresh talents. As I introduce my team, I will of course add a few words about the way we have organized ourselves.

There is no need for me to introduce most of my colleagues since they have been answering your ques-

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tions faithfully and to your satisfaction for years. A word about the newcomers — all of whom served their own countries with distinction and devotion before they answered Europe's call. All of them have served as Members of Parliament.

Mr Contogeorgis, who has a valiant political past, comes to us from Greece.

(Applause)

As you know, he conducted his country's accession negotiations very efficiently before he joined us.

Mr Narjes used to hold a senior position on the Commission's staff. He gave up his mandate as a Member of the Bundestag to join us.

(Applause)

Mr Andriessen, formidable like all former Finance Ministers and leaders of political parties, comes to us from the Netherlands.

(Applause)

Mr Richard, a former British MP, won himself an international reputation as his country's Ambassador to the United Nations.

(Applause)

And last, but not least, my old friend Michael O'Kennedy, whose courtesy and efficiency you learned to value during his term as President of the Council, two short years ago, when he sat on the opposite side of this Chamber.

(Applause)

You already know what our portfolios are to be. There has been publicity and comment. You have received a list or will receive one this very afternoon. I would like to confirm that we are resolved — and this, Madam President, is one of the vital points and one of the few points that I am going out of my way to underline with particular emphasis — to work as a close-knit, united team and assure you that the allocation of portfolios reflects, first and foremost, our concern to strengthen internal cohesion and highlight collective responsibility. We are well aware that the social tensions and distortions provoked by the crisis may create difficulties for our Community. This is why we are determined to stand shoulder to shoulder; for us, collective responsibility means solidarity. This is the only way that each of us can make the best use of his experience and talents to further the Community's cause.

It is in this spirit that each of us gave a solemn undertaking before the Court of Justice this morning that we would, in compliance with the Treaties, be

completely independent in the performance of our duties, in the general interest of the Community, and that we would neither seek nor take instructions from any Government or from any other body.

I should like to stress the importance of this solemn undertaking given this morning, which, far from being a mere formality, is crucial to our mandate.

I have been struck by the fact that in recent years, and more particularly since your election by direct universal suffrage, recurring quarrels of form and substance have strained relations between our two institutions. The same point was made at the recent European Council in Luxembourg, which deplored the permanent state of inter-institutional strife. The new Commission's first concern, therefore, was to get to grips with this problem. We did so at an informal meeting held before we actually took up office.

It would be premature to draw any conclusions at this stage. But we have come up with a number of indicators, which I will put to your President without delay. What we would like to do — and there is no time like the present — is to take a close look at what can be done to help us play a more effective part in your proceedings, and by so doing strengthen the dialogue between our two institutions.

However this dialogue must be unequivocal and hardhitting.

(Applause)

Perhaps I can take this opportunity, since the matter is so topical, of referring to the budgetary developments which the Commission has already discussed. This is not the time to go into details, but I feel that Parliament should know where the Commission stands on the 1980 supplementary budget and the 1981 general budget, both of which have been declared adopted by your President.

Parliament is aware of the difficulties which have arisen within the Council. It knows that certain Member States consider that the procedure laid down by the Treaty and by the Financial Regulation has been breached. It is not for me to comment on the Council's position or on the discussions it has held on this matter.

As far as the Commission is concerned — and here I speak for each and every Member — I would like to make it quite clear that we consider both the supplementary budget for 1980 and the budget for 1981 to be legal and hence enforceable.

Where is this situation leading? The issues are two-fold: legal and political. I do not need to tell you that certain Member States have failed to make the payments flowing from adoption of the 1980 supplementary budget. The situation, with regard to the 1981

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budget is less clear and there are still doubts as to the position of certain Member States. The Commission is looking into the matter. But Parliament can rest assured that, if it finds that certain Member States have committed irregularities, it will want the situation rectified. It will obviously keep Parliament informed of developments, in full awareness of the position of the Commission as guardian of the Treaties.

So much for the legal. Now for the political. The Commission considers that today's budgetary problems must be discussed by the institutions, that political solutions must be found. I am convinced that you share this point of view. The Commission has felt for some time that operation of the budgetary procedure could be improved and believes that in this context the institutions have an obligation to each other and more importantly to our Community. Revision of the Financial Regulation will give us an opportunity of discussing and solving a number of these difficulties. But essentially, the two arms of the budgetary authority must endeavour to ensure that the difficulties we have experienced over the last three years do not recur. It is vital, for instance, that the conciliation procedure should live up to its name. The Commission, and its President, is prepared to play its full part here.

(Applause from certain quarters)

Madam President, ladies and gentlemen, in conclusion, you will have noticed that I have purposely confined myself, on this, our first encounter, to assuring you that the new Commission is well aware of what is at stake as it takes office. It is ready and willing to shoulder its responsibilities. It will always do so with courage and determination.

But I would like to make it clear, here and now, that Europe, and hence the Community, is not run solely by 'Brussels', by stateless technocrats far-removed from day-to-day reality. If the Community is misunderstood, if not viewed with suspicion, by many Europeans, much of the blame can be laid at the door of all the governments of the Member States.

(Applause from certain quarters)

If your governments are incapable, as the recent European Council in Luxembourg demonstrated, of defining either the content or the shape of European Union, the Commission declines all responsibility for the delays and the setbacks which the public rightly denounces.

At the same time — and providing you can spot the enemy — I would urge you, ladies and gentlemen to be ruthless whenever we fail in our task. Let me say again that critical vigilance by you, the representatives of the people of Europe, is essential to the life of Europe's institutions.

In a few weeks' time, when we present our programme, you will be able to judge for yourselves whether or not we are lacking in determination or in imagination. Meantime, let us work together to restore institutional peace, and recreate a climate of understanding, mutual trust and cooperation. It is to this end that I stand before you. Thank you for your kind attention.

(Applause)

President. — I call Mr Glinne to speak on behalf of the Socialist Group.

Mr Glinne. — *(F)* Madam President, ladies and gentlemen, the Commission of the European Communities has now been reconstituted after a procedure which has lasted for several months and certainly somewhat retarded the action of that institution of late. The Commission has also increased the number of its Members to fourteen following the enlargement of the Community to include Greece. And now we in Parliament are confronted with a renewed institution with which we shall be obliged, for better or for worse, to compare our respective positions at great length.

I shall be very brief; I would just like to highlight something Mr Thorn said about collegiality. In the present economic situation and with the social circumstances confronting us and the crisis of society, a whole series of reasons and political pretexts militate in favour of a kind of renationalization of certain interests which might properly be defined as belonging to the Community. In my view when it comes to defence of legitimate national interests, the Council, the Committee of Permanent Representatives and the national governments can or should suffice. What we want in particular of the new Commission is that it should reflect in a continuous and intransigent process the spirit and resolve of supranationalism in its detailed work and at the level of basic action. We noted Mr Thorn's reference to this aspect a moment ago.

A further point: the Commission of the European Communities is of course responsible for routine daily management, but it must also engage in a dialogue, on behalf of the Community, with European public opinion.

In respect of both those important tasks I would like to give voice here to a rather keen regret already expressed repeatedly in the past months by other spokesmen of the Socialist group: one small flaw in the Commission, as it is constituted at present, is the fact that its Members are all men. A sense of balance and imperative social reasons should have led to the presence of several women Members in the Commission. We all know that the responsibilities for such