The European Parliament at 70: “The voice of citizens and democratic values”

In a ceremony in Strasbourg’s hemicycle, MEPs marked the creation of the Common Assembly of the European Coal and Steel Community in 1952, the EP’s forerunner

EP President Roberta Metsola opened the ceremony and stressed how, in the 70 years since the first meeting of the Common Assembly of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) in 1952, the “Assembly grew from strength to strength”. She said: “The European Parliament has become the only directly elected, multilingual, multi-party transnational parliament in the world. Its 705 directly elected members are the expression of European public opinion (...). Today more than ever – this House stands for upholding the democratic voice of citizens and
the democratic European values."

Her speech was followed by contributions from the prime ministers of the three countries hosting Parliament’s seat.

Belgium’s Prime Minister Alexander de Croo said “today’s European political project is mainly driven forward by visionary citizens, the people of Europe” who demand an EU response to crises such as migration, COVID-19 and energy. The EP is, he said, “one of the most powerful legislators in the world. Today Europeans can be proud of the road we travelled together.” He concluded: “This house represents the catharsis of a long history of violence among European countries, it represents the best in us, Europeans.”

Luxembourg’s Prime Minister Xavier Bettel said: “Seven years after World War II, it was decided to create something together. In those days, people did not have the right to live because they were different; today we live in a territory where citizens are free. He concluded: “I would not have had the right myself to be free during the Second World War: I am liberal, have Jewish heritage and am married to a man. And here I am today, a head of government. This is the European project. You may be different, but that is where our richness lies: in this diversity”.

France’s Prime Minister Élisabeth Borne stressed the role of France in building the European Union, and the symbolic importance of Strasbourg as one of its official places of work. Additionally, she emphasized the commitment of France to a common European future: “Strasbourg is the idea of Europe – Europe that has its past but that also has its common future,” she said. “And we must not lose track of what Europe is, where it has come from and where it is going to.”

Interventions of political groups

In taking the floor after the Prime Ministers, most leaders of the seven political groups stressed that Europe has a future only if it is democratic, and how it is necessary to empower the European Parliament with full legislative rights for the benefit of citizens, with European citizenship strengthening national citizenship. The original spirit of the Parliament was to create a political institution open to, not opposed to, any country. We need, they said, to continue to represent this spirit and adapt it to the time we live in now. The challenges Europe faces were raised by the speakers, who said that it would be useful to rediscover the spirit of 1952 that led to the creation of this institution. Critical and anti-European views were also expressed. But, as President Metsola said, this only proves that pluralism, diversity and democracy exist in Parliament.

The ceremony ended with a performance of Beethoven’s Ode to Joy.

Background

10 September 2022 marked the 70th anniversary of the first meeting of the Common Assembly of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC). Convened in 1952, it comprised 78
appointed parliamentarians from the national parliaments of each member state. In 1958, following the creation of the European Economic Community and the European Atomic Energy Community, the Common Assembly of the ECSC was enlarged and renamed the "European Parliamentary Assembly". In 1962, it adopted the name "European Parliament".

Further information

Video recording of the ceremony
EP President Roberta Metsola speech
Multimedia package
Slideshow: European Parliament - 70 years of European democracy in action

EPRS at a glance: The European Parliament at 70: Origins and long-term trajectories

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