

EMBARGO till Saturday 6th November 1976 10.00 a.m.

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Speech of Mr. F. Korthals Altes, chairman of the VVD (Liberal Party of the Netherlands), at the opening of the first regular meeting of the Congress of the Federation of Liberal and Democratic Parties of the European Community at The Hague, 5th, 6th and 7th of November 1976.

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Mr. President,

Excellencies,

Fellow Liberals,

Ladies and Gentlemen:

The Liberal Party of the Netherlands, the People's Party for Freedom and Democracy, considers it a great honour and a pleasure to be your host at this first regular meeting of the Congress of our Federation and we are very grateful to the Government for giving us the opportunity to meet here at The Hague in this historic Assembly Hall, the "Hall of Knights".

It was here in this Hall of Knights in May 1948 that Sir Winston Churchill moved towards a United Europe with the approval of 750 delegates from Europe and the United States representing 30 countries. It was here that those 750 delegates adopted three resolutions expressing the necessity of political and economic unification as well as cultural co-operation.

It was also in The Hague, in December 1969, that the summit conference of six countries of the EEC decided to open negotiations for membership with the candidates

Denmark, Ireland, Norway and the United Kingdom. The then Prime Minister of the Netherlands, Mr. Piet de Jong, was chairman of that meeting and our fellow liberal Hans de Koster, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs at the time, strongly advocated the expansion of the European Community and he promoted the success of that summit conference just as he did so splendidly for the present Congress.

We liberals of the Netherlands, in particular the members of the European Parliament and our liberal leaders, have always advocated and promoted three main issues in European policy:

- The joining of other democratic countries to the European Community, which resulted until to-day in the entering of Denmark, Ireland and the United Kingdom;
- the election of the representatives of the European Parliament by direct universal suffrage;
- granting this Parliament the legislative power to be executed in the same manner as all Parliaments in democratic countries whose constitutions are based on a liberal philosophy and on democratic principles.

The negotiations decided upon in December 1969 resulted in a European community of not only six but nine countries.

The election of the representatives of the Assembly by direct universal suffrage was decided upon definitely on the 20th of September 1976 through an Act of the European Council.

Liberal and Democratic Parties of eight of the nine countries decided to co-operate closely long before that definite decision. In the beginning of 1975 the Talsma Working Group was able to present a draft constitution for the Federation of Liberal and Democratic Parties of the European Community to the Executive Committee of the Liberal International. This constitution is adopted now by 13 liberal and democratic parties in

eight countries. In March 1975 the party to which Henk Talsma himself belongs, the VVD, was the first party that adopted the constitution by unanimous acceptance.

The Federation has been established in Stuttgart on the 27th of March of this year.

And now seven months later, some 18 months before the election of the Assembly, the confederated liberal and democratic parties of Europe are discussing and preparing an outline for a joint programme. A programme that shall be a joint effort and that must be a liberal and democratic platform. A programme that will give European citizens fundamental issues to vote on, that will give European citizens a clear opportunity to co-determine the policy of Europe and the future of Europe and the Europeans.

Our programme shall be the base for a Liberal and Democratic policy in the community and it must be an appeal to all citizens of the community entitled to directly electing their representatives in the Assembly.

Our appeal must stem from our concept of freedom and human dignity and from the indefeasible right of the individual to unfold his natural gifts to a full scope; our appeal must be based as well on our concept of responsibility, tolerance and social justice.

Our Liberal concept of responsibility and social justice should be our incentive to increase aid to the developing regions in the community such as the Mezzogiorno and South-West Ireland. And our concept of responsibility and human dignity entails that we see as the main purpose of this aid is to enable the citizens in these regions to help themselves by developing themselves.

These same incentives convince us that we should bear great responsibilities towards the Third World. Strengthening the European unity gives room for greater

solidarity with the Third World and consequently we should enlarge our contribution, expand technological aid, and co-operate more closely not only mutually between the rich countries of the community but also between the community and the developing countries, without any ambition for domination.

In accomplishing this tremendous task the community itself must be sound as far as its own economic and monetary structure is concerned. In the draft programme for the general elections of the House of Representatives in the Netherlands on the 25th of May of the coming year that has been discussed the past seven weeks by the local divisions of the Dutch Liberal Party, the frontal attack upon unemployment and inflation is the main issue in the paragraphs on social and economic policy. In our national programme we make a plea for a joint European attack upon inflation that undermines the strength of our economy; we also urge for joint European strategy for developing aid. We believe standing up for freedom throughout the world is characteristic of Liberalism. We wish to do our utmost to enable the people of the Third World to obtain real freedom, and to live free from oppression, free from poverty, free from starvation and misery.

Our Liberal belief on the indefeasable rights of the individual includes the right of every citizen to a healthy environment. We have to acknowledge that there is a limit to environmental pollution and we have to acknowledge our ecological responsibilities of protecting the environment. Though the environment has its limitations it does not recognize political limitations such as frontiers between countries. Therefore the right to a healthy environment for every citizen again forces us to do away with frontiers and thus strengthen European unity and enforce European policy. A policy to which European Government ought to be entitled by the trust of the European Assembly.

And with our liberal programme we wish to win  
the trust of the European citizens on election  
day in May 1978.