TOAST BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE ITALIAN REPUBLIC

AT THE LUNCH GIVEN IN HONOUR OF THE MEMBERS OF THE EUROPEAN COUNCIL

(Quirinal Palace, 14th December 1990)
Presidents,
Prime Ministers,
Ministers,

On behalf of the Italian government and the Italian people, it is a great pleasure for me to welcome you most warmly to the Quirinal Palace and to renew my most sincere best wishes for the success of this, the second European Council convened in Rome under the Italian Presidency.

By tradition, inspiration, and the unanimous and enthusiastic support of all Italians - regardless of their ideological, political and cultural differences - for the European integration process, Rome has always been and intends to remain the cross-roads at which the vital events in the life of the Community take place. From the signing of the Treaties in 1957 to today's European Council, and the Intergovernmental Conferences that will begin tomorrow, Italy lies at the heart of the events affecting the whole Continent, with her heritage and her strong European vocation which know neither social nor political bounds.

Today's event, to which your presence lends particular solemnity, marks the end of the Italian Presidency, setting the seal on the activities of these past months, from which I perceive the emergence of a spirit of solidarity, and commonly shared intents that are firmly rooted both in the governments and the public opinion of all the European countries.

This new spirit was demonstrated in August, in the wake of the dramatic flare-up of the Gulf crisis, which we met with a controlled and effective response on a jointly concerted basis: Europe wishes to act on the international stage with one voice and one profile, open to cooperation but also with all the incisiveness and authority that is needed.

And events have proven us right: the epoch-making changes in the Central and Eastern parts of the Continent, the success of the CSCE negotiations, the productive dialogue with the developing countries and the southern shores of the Mediterranean, could never have been possible without the Community as a benchmark, as an authentic beacon in an often stormy sea. We must draw on this for inspiration to pursue the path laid down by the founding fathers, and give the further decisive boost to the constitution of European Union, exalting all the opportunities for supranational action, while respecting the national values without which Europe would not even exist.

Even though our efforts are now being channelled into creating a Community which will be dedicated to ever closer and more constructive cooperation with the Soviet Union and the countries of Eastern Europe, fully appreciating the far-reaching changes that have occurred in the East and thanks to an "open doors policy", the ultimate goal for us is European Union. This will be built up one piece at a time, based on the two fundamental pillars: Economic and Monetary Union, and Political Union. There is a close linkage -- and you yourselves emphasized this at the previous European Council -- between the process of economic and monetary integration, and the political integration process. No economic growth is possible without political cohesion, and political integration is precarious without
a common economic substrate.

Let it not be forgotten, however, that the growth of democracy and the development of the Community and national institutions must necessarily be grounded on a broad popular consensus. Social policy must not be seen merely as accompanying the measures taken to complete the internal Market: it must become one of the Community's fundamental strategies to broaden the consensus, to increase employment, and to raise the living and working standards of millions of our citizens.

One year after the Strasbourg Charter of Fundamental Social Rights, we note that the Trade Unions are particularly eager to have it put into practice, with legally binding instruments. It is my hope that your meeting will be able to send out a new signal of commitment in this direction, and that the social policy can begin to be implemented promptly, even using existing procedures, until these are simplified under the new Treaties.

Democratic legitimacy, the legitimacy of freedom, pluralism and social justice (which has had its apotheosis in Europe during this extraordinary year which is now ending), must continue to be the principle that underpins European Union, and the Community model itself, distinguishing it from all the models of international organizations.

The primary cradle of democratic liberty is the European Parliament, whose role - at the conclusion of the Intergovernmental Conferences -- must emerge strengthened in so many respects: first and foremost, in my view, by giving it a greater involvement in the law-making process.

The national Parliaments, as the depositaries of the sovereignty of individual nations, are being required to contribute jointly towards the construction of the Union. The Conference of Community Assemblies, which we convened in Rome only a few days ago, reiterated this understanding, and that all the institutions representing the public will, to make the invaluable contribution of centuries of experience to this ambitious project.

For this reason, we cannot ignore the demand of the European Parliament to be closely involved in the work of the Intergovernmental Conferences and to be appropriately consulted on their outcome. Italy has been very active in this regard already, consistently with her traditional sensitivity towards the issues of democratic legitimacy. The very fact that the European Council and the Intergovernmental Conferences are being held in the Palace of Montecitorio, which is the home of the Italian Chamber of Deputies, constitutes tangible proof of our feelings in this regard.

In conclusion, I trust that your deliberations will be as enthralling and productive as the preparatory debate has been. The book of the Europe of the future in your hands: I am certain that over the coming days, here in Rome, a new, memorable chapter will be written.