

Statement by Willy Brandt to the European Parliament (18 November 1981)

Caption: On 18 November 1981, at the European Parliament, Willy Brandt, Leader of the German Social Democrat Party, supports the initiative of the German and Italian Governments which recently presented to their partners within the European Communities a draft European act, known as the Genscher–Colombo Plan, which calls for greater political cooperation among the Ten.

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President. — I call the Socialist Group.

Mr Brandt. — (DE) Madam President, ladies and gentlemen, it seems to me that the haggling about quotas and percentages tends all too often to blur the historic dimension of the process of European unification. All too often, we try to take the easy way out and shift the blame onto others to distract attention from the inadequacies in governments' and official bodies' relations with the Community.

From a purely objective point of view, nothing would be more appropriate at the present time than to develop the Community as a means of countering the effects of the world economic crisis. Unfortunately, there is precious little to report in this respect. Many people have by now set their expectations so low that they regard it as a success for the Community even to survive the turbulent times it is currently going through. Of course, no sensible European can have any objection to improvements being made to political cooperation between our governments and between those governments and the Community institutions; nor can anyone object to Community activities being meshed in better with intergovernmental activities. It seems to me, though, that what the President of the Commission has just said serves to confirm the old adage that it is no good putting the cart before the horse.

I am in favour of what is known as Political Union, so long as the resultant institution is worthy of the name. I am not in favour of sticking a new label on an old product.

(Applause)

Substantive shortcomings cannot be compensated for by political window-dressing and this is a point which is made in the Socialist Group's motion for a resolution.

In other words, what is the sense in opposing what the German Foreign Minister and his Italian counterpart are trying to set up? Despite all the disillusionment, why should we not make the point that there were certain risks involved in agreeing to the direct election of a European Parliament? Widening the scope of Parliament's powers and adding to its right of involvement would be not so much a present to the Members of this House as rather a boost to the credibility of those whose thoughts as to how to improve the work of the Community ran to no more than direct elections.

(Applause)

Perhaps the suggestions made by the French Government will help us to make progress — I do not know yet whether that is so, I can only hope so. As regards the suggestion of a development — in certain sectors at least — towards social union, I can only say that some of us were considering this question something like ten years ago. The economic and financial conditions have certainly not improved since that time.

There is no getting over the fact that we must make a better job of what are really the Community's original tasks if we wish to make additions to these in the form of restructuring the budget and reforming the common agricultural policy. The Community must be made to work; after all, our people will judge the Community over the coming years by the contributions it makes and the influence it exerts as regards the safeguarding of jobs and structural improvements. These factors will also dictate the political clout of the Community as a whole and the coordinated policies pursued by the Member States.

I should like to take up a point referred to by two of the previous speakers as well as the Member of the Commission. In a world in which 1 500 million dollars are, objectively speaking, wasted every day on armaments at a time when 600 or even 800 million people do not have enough to eat, it particularly behoves us in Europe to point the finger again and again at the tragically distorted relationship between hunger and arms.

(Applause)

However, as I have said before and as I shall say again, it is not only considerations of peace and humanitarian behaviour which should persuade us to greatly speed up the process of development: there are sound economic reasons — and selfish economic reasons at that — for doing so.

The consultative summit meeting attended a month ago by leading statesmen from North and South in Cancun in Mexico served to strengthen the feeling of mutual dependence on the part of the industrialized and the developing countries. It also served to highlight the willingness to get the long-delayed, so-called global negotiations under the auspices of the United Nations going at last. Incidentally should these negotiations ever get under way, they would also involve the Soviet Union and her allies.

The Cancun Conference showed us the way forward on the two central issues of food and energy supplies. Let me explain what I mean by this. On the one hand, and if I am interpreting the outcome of the Conference correctly, there is now general agreement that the emphasis should be placed in future on encouraging agricultural production in all the developing countries in which the conditions are right. Apart from the United States, which has already done a great deal and still has a lot to do, this is a task first and foremost for us Europeans. In my opinion, the Commission should develop a coherent food strategy aimed at bringing about a step-by-step improvement in local and regional agricultural production, with the proviso of course that, in cases of acute need, special aid should continue to be forthcoming.

On the other hand, there is now a better chance of setting up — in close or not so close collaboration with the World Bank — a financing mechanism designed to make funds available where they are needed so that energy resources in impoverished developing countries can be tapped and exploited. I share the hope expressed by the French President that progress will be made in this field over the coming months.

As regards the other financing problems and the reform of international organizations, nothing new came out of the Cancun Conference.

At any rate, Europe will have an important role to play, but only provided that, instead of suffering a fit of weakness of our own making, we summon up the strength to become a reliable element in a global partnership which sets out to secure the peace and conquer hunger.

Madam President, ladies and gentlemen, may I ask you to allow me just two minutes to say something specifically as a German, and as a German Social Democrat. I should like to ask the Members of this House to pay no heed to the nonsense which has been propagated recently concerning opposition to the concept of defence, anti-Americanism and selfish neutralism in the Federal Republic of Germany.

(Applause)

The Federal Republic of Germany will remain a reliable partner in the European Community and in the NATO alliance, and in case Mr Brezhnev is not aware of this, it will be pointed out to him in Bonn at the beginning of next week, which does not mean to say that we — that is, a lot of us — will be relinquishing our right to think for ourselves.

(Applause)

It is not true that my young compatriots who are gathering in large numbers to demonstrate against war — or rather against armaments — would prefer Russian missiles to the other side's. The fact is that they are against the arms race in both East and West. They are prepared, though, to defend themselves against the suspicion that their activities are being controlled from a certain capital city.

(Applause)

Those who bear political responsibility in our countries are now faced with the problem of reconciling the desire for peace with a practical peace policy. Europe has witnessed worse things in the past than young

Germans demonstrating for peace. But the main thing is that our friends, and especially our friends in the European Community, need not live in fear of a Germany which is struggling to find the right road to peace.

Madam President, only a Community which is active in those fields for which it was originally created will, in the final analysis, be effective externally. It is true that there will be no place at the table for Europe when the representatives of the nuclear world powers meet in Geneva in a week-and-a-half's time to begin their negotiations on strategic weapons based in Europe. Nonetheless, it is up to us to do our best to make clear what we Europeans expect from these talks, including what we understand by the 'zero option' which, if I am correctly informed, the American President will be speaking in favour of today in Washington.

It is very hard for the European public — and particularly the young people of Europe — to have to put up with talk about the extent to which a nuclear war can be limited. Our own European interests and our self-respect are challenged to a dangerous extent by talk of that kind. When I was in Budapest for a few days last week, I saw proof once again that European concern is an integral part of that single identity which transcends political divides on this continent. A specifically European contribution to the maintenance of peace, to the relieving of tension and to the process of disarmament are essential.

We in this part of Europe must move closer together, and the same goes for the Atlantic Alliance, where all those of us who come from Member States of the alliance should endeavour to give more prominence to the European position. But we shall only succeed in doing so if we are prepared to accept more joint responsibility.

I do not think we should simply commit to history the process which started, with some success, in the early 1970s regarding *detente* and cooperation on specific matters. But military balance — a term which is very difficult to define if you wish to take into account global and regional criteria — is not an end in itself so much as an instrument — to be kept to as low a level as possible — for establishing a more durable peace than the vulnerable state of affairs we have at the moment. I should like to say quite clearly and categorically — although I realize this is not an arms control debate as such; that will be coming later — that it is worth asking ourselves whether — as the experts tell me — it would not be possible, by using modern weapon technologies, to render a large proportion of the nuclear weapons in Europe superfluous.

The foot-dragging pace of the second Helsinki follow-up conference in Madrid makes me think it worth pointing out that, despite all the inadequacies, we should not neglect the promising start we made in Helsinki in 1975, but rather build on that base wherever possible. This point is particularly valid in the light of the projected conference on disarmament in Europe, which is precisely the subject of the Madrid Conference. Of course, I fully realize that this project will depend on what is achieved in Madrid, and the same applies to cooperation in economic, technical and cultural affairs as well as specifically human measures, which are an indispensable aspect of the whole.

The European Parliament would be well advised to discuss the Madrid negotiations again at a suitable juncture and to investigate what initiatives could usefully be taken by the Community with regard to the development of practical cooperation and effective measures in the field of arms control and disarmament. I believe, Madam President, ladies and gentlemen, that Europe can indeed be an effective advocate of reason in a world full of tension.

Europe today is not one of the main protagonists in these global tensions, and unfortunately we can hold out no hope of fulfilling such a role in the quest for a world-wide reduction in tension and world-wide solidarity with the Third World. I do believe, however, that the countries of Europe and the European Community bear a special responsibility. I believe that, despite all the setbacks, which we are bound to acknowledge, Europe has the kind of experience of stability and the ways of achieving stability which is needed in the present world situation. As a result, Europe must not isolate itself; we must make use of our experience wherever possible.

(Applause)