

Statement by Edwige Avice on the aid to the countries of Eastern Europe (22 November 1989)

Caption: On 22 November 1989, Edwige Avice, Minister Delegate for Foreign Affairs, sums up for the National Assembly the measures proposed by the Twelve to aid the countries of Eastern Europe.

Source: La politique étrangère de la France. Textes et documents. dir. de publ. Rohou, Camille. Novembre-Décembre 1989. Paris: Ministère des Affaires étrangères-Service d'Information et de Presse. "Réponses de Mme Edwige Avice, ministre délégué auprès du ministre des Affaires étrangères à deux questions d'actualité à l'Assemblée nationale (22 novembre 1989)", p. 75-76.

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Replies given by Mrs Edwige Avice, Minister attached to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, to two topical questions to the National Assembly

(A) What is the position of the Twelve on the events in Eastern Europe? That is indeed a topical question. The President of the French Republic addressed it in the European Parliament in Strasbourg just this afternoon. I shall try to answer it briefly, although it is a very wide-ranging issue.

From the outset, the European Community has defined itself in terms of a union of the countries belonging to it. The European Coal and Steel Community had a political objective, to end the tensions between France and Germany. The Treaty of Rome was pursuing the same aim when it enlarged the Community. Three years ago, the Single Act set out that objective in precise terms: all relations between the Twelve were to be converted into a 'European Union'. The importance of political cooperation, finally codified, was fully recognised, whilst the foundations were laid for a debate on security, which is ultimately essential for political union.

The new factor is that, in the current upheavals on our borders in 'the other Europe', the Twelve have felt the need to close ranks and speed up their progress towards European union. The decisions expected at the next European Council, on economic and monetary matters as well as on social policy, will turn that intention into reality.

Integration is not inward-looking; quite the reverse. As the President said on Saturday, after the meeting of the twelve Heads of State or Government: 'The existence of a strong and properly structured Community, intent on moving forward, is actually a factor for the successful achievement of freedom.' By speeding up their progress towards union, the Twelve will be better able to offer generous long-term support to their European neighbours seeking their aid, whilst providing a solid and stable foundation for the evolving new Europe.

Later, it will certainly be necessary to overhaul our existing institutions and the relationships between the Council, the Commission and the European Parliament. Discussions on that point are already under way. They will need to be extended to other areas. But there is a time for everything. The priority at the moment, with the dramatic developments going on in Eastern Europe, is for the Twelve to be ready to play their part to the full, and I am glad that you have given me the opportunity to emphasise that.

(B) With the situation in Eastern Europe developing very rapidly, the immediate response of the Twelve was to act together, in a Community framework.

The President of the Republic took the step of inviting the Community's Heads of State or Government to review the latest developments even before the European Council meeting in Strasbourg. The dinner at the Élysée Palace was crucial, and the outcome was very positive.

Firstly, the Twelve expressed enthusiastic support for the reform and opening-up process initiated in the countries of Eastern Europe. The Community is well aware that this is a critical time for Europe. At long last there is a possibility of erasing the effects of the Second World War.

The Community intends to respond to the appeal by countries whose aspirations are clear: liberalisation of the economy, opening up to the rest of the world, the restoration of freedoms, a multiparty system. The Community has a special duty to those countries, because, for them, it acts as a model, a reference point.

The Community's determination to promote the success of the new policies introduced in Eastern Europe as much as possible will be expressed in various ways.

Under the French Presidency, a number of important decisions have already been taken. An initial tranche of emergency food aid for Poland was approved last July and has now been dispatched. In record time, the Community released a 300 million ecu grant for Poland and Hungary. The Minister of State for Foreign Affairs signed the trade and cooperation agreement between the Community and Poland in Warsaw in

September.

The joint committees provided for in the agreement and in the EEC-Hungary agreement will meet for the first time before the end of the year. At the same time, the negotiations for a framework cooperation agreement between the Community and the USSR are coming to an end. Talks with the GDR on a trade agreement have been agreed in principle.

However, given the Eastern European countries' needs — explicit or implicit — we must of course do more. Their need for modernisation and capital equipment is immense. It is for that reason that the President of the Republic proposed the establishment of a bank for the development and modernisation of Eastern Europe. Management training and further training are also vital, especially in the field of business management. To meet that need, the President has put forward the idea of a European foundation whose structures and resources, as well as those of the bank, will be discussed in Strasbourg. The Twelve already agreed to that in principle at their meeting of 18 November last.

The Community has also decided to open up the present major education and training programmes to any Eastern European countries that are interested.

Lastly, let me mention the Community's role as an incentive and example to the other Western countries. At the G7 Summit in Paris earlier this year, the Commission was instructed to coordinate Western aid to Poland and Hungary. As a result of the meetings between the 24, due to end with a ministerial meeting in Brussels on 13 December, a number of Western European and non-European States have agreed to make extra contributions to those two countries. This is a period of historic significance, and the Community has set an example by showing solidarity and creating even wider solidarity between the whole of the Western world, whose values and hopes the peoples of the East now wish to share.