

Address by the Rt. Hon. Sir Christopher Soames, Vice-President of the Commission of the European Communities, at a luncheon given in his honour by the Brazilian Minister for Foreign Affairs (Brasilia, 30 September 1975)

Caption: On 30 September 1975, at a luncheon given in his honour by the Brazilian Minister for Foreign Affairs, Sir Christopher Soames, Vice-President of the Commission of the European Communities, gives an address on relations between the EC and Latin America. He discusses the challenges of an increasingly complex and interdependent world economy, the need for cooperation between the European Communities and Latin American countries such as Brazil and the potential mutual benefits of such partnerships.

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SPEECH BY THE RT. HON. SIR CHRISTOPHER SOAMES, VICE-PRESIDENT OF THE COMMISSION OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES, AT A LUNCHEON GIVEN IN HIS HONOUR BY THE BRAZILIAN MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS. BRASILIA, TUESDAY 30 SEPTEMBER 1975

Mr. Foreign Minister,

Over the past two weeks it has been both a privilege and a pleasure to visit a number of Latin American countries as a representative of the European Community.

For me it has been a fascinating and thought-provoking experience. In each country we have visited and in our contacts with the regional economic organizations we have had much to talk about. But over and above the details of the matters which we have been discussing, as I have gone along I have found myself more and more interested by what I take to be the fundamental question underlying the whole of our relations.

In the world of today and tomorrow, what do Europe and the countries of Latin America mean to each other - what do we have to offer one another and what should we be seeking to do together?

I should like to take the opportunity which your generous hospitality affords today, Mr Foreign Minister, to offer a few thoughts on this at the end of my trip. I can think of no better occasion to do so, Sir, than under your auspices in Brazil, which is, after all, the largest and most populous of the countries of Latin America, and one which has in recent years set an example of dynamic economic development.

To be frank, we must start by admitting that in spite of all the historic links between our two continents, there is a sense in which we do not know each other well enough.

I suppose that there are two main reasons for this. In the first place, although the countries which now make up the European Community developed extensive economic interests throughout Latin America in the last century, the historical background to your ties with Europe came through Portugal and Spain. And it is true to say that ever since the 17th century, and right down to the present time, the relationship between Spain and Portugal and the rest of the Western European family has tended to be a distant one and rather detached - more a relationship of cousinhood than one of fraternity.

The second reason why we do not know each other as well as we should both like is of course that over the past half century the extent of our mutual involvement has failed to keep pace with the growth of your relations in every sphere with the United States.

What is more, much of your energy in the external field has been concentrated upon the development of your own regional relationships. We, for our part, in the aftermath of our second catastrophic experience of an inter-European civil war, have focussed most of our efforts on building up our regional links and some of us have perhaps tended to assume that, with the passing of

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the age of European world power, nothing very substantial need to or even could be done about the relationship between Latin America and the European Community.

But this is surely not the right view, any suggestion that Latin America and Western Europe could ever afford to apply to each other a policy of benign neglect is profoundly and fundamentally mistaken. It is mistaken because it underestimates the vitality of the peoples of Latin America, the great strides they are making in their economic development and industrialisation, and the political weight they carry in the counsels of the world. And it is mistaken because it makes the same error about Europe, by assuming that with the end of the era of our dominance in world affairs - what an Indian historian has called "the end of the era of Vasco da Gama" - Europe has shed all responsibility and influence outside its own frontiers.

All of this is tired and out-of-date thinking - the product of a period of fatalism and resignation which is now past. To understand what our two continents could again mean to one another, what we could again offer each other, we have to break out of the old preoccupations and preconceptions and recognise the new challenges and the new possibilities that lie before us. And in this process the European Community as such has, I believe, a major role to play. For the Community has neither a colonial past nor imperialist ambition, but it does do 40 per cent of world trade, it is the biggest importer of raw materials, it is an important supplier of technology and its members provide a large part of such development aid as is flowing to the poorer countries. There is plenty here in itself to lead us to care about the fundamentals of our relationship.

But, more than that, both we in Europe and you in Latin America have to face the challenges of an increasingly complex and inter-dependent world economy.

With the spread of industrialisation, with the growth of trade in raw materials and manufactured goods, and with the demand for increasingly accelerated transfers of technology, our stake in each other's affairs is growing. None of us can afford to retreat into purely national or even regional concerns; the damage which we all caused each other in the 20's and 30's by such policies would be nothing compared to the havoc which any retreat into protectionism and beggar-my-neighbour policies would cause in today's much more complex and sophisticated world economy. The capacity of this interdependent world economy to sustain the shocks of unilateral actions must not be overestimated. That would be most dangerous. It is therefore essential that in this inescapably interdependent world we should work together to achieve a new consensus, a new agreed framework for international economic activity. And in this endeavour Brazil and the European Community will both carry much responsibility; at the renewed Paris talks on a dialogue between producing and consuming countries, in the preparations for next year's UNCTAD meeting in Nairobi, in the Multilateral Trade Negotiations.

We must surely all of us, recognise two essential underlying conditions if we are to have any success in dealing with this daunting challenge. First, we need to be clear how much depends on the continued expansion of the world economy, and we must each of us strive in our internal and international policy decisions to

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give the highest priority to furthering it. Without such continued expansion, all the schemes possible to envisage, for transferring technology, for liberalising world trade, for commodity agreements, and the stabilising of export receipts for raw materials, and above all for the more equitable distribution of wealth between developed and developing countries will be seriously prejudiced. If there are not additional resources to be distributed, if there are not buoyant economic conditions in the internal markets of both industrialised and developing countries, if there is not a steady continued expansion of world trade, it is a simple illusion to suppose that we can hope to succeed as we would wish.

The second condition is that we all work for an agreed consensus rather than seeking to impose solutions by unilateral decisions or block votes. In this context we can all welcome the outcome of the 7th Special Assembly so far as it goes. With the benefit of hindsight we may one day be able to say that gathering marked the first sign of a general willingness to turn our backs decisively on the politics of confrontation between the industrialised and developing world. But if this is really to be so it will not be achieved simply by facile rhetoric, but much more by demonstrating that we are capable of working out together practical, constructive solutions to the major problems of our time. For its part, the European Community tables its suggestions for such solutions before the United Nations on that occasion, and stands ready to follow them through in the international discussions that lie before us.

To sum up, Sir, it would seem that the European Community has many and varied shared interests and aspirations with the countries of Latin America in general and with Brazil in particular, and that this will become increasingly evident in the years ahead as the Community develops its economic and political cohesion and as the countries of Latin America come to find their full strength. It is evident that Brazil has both the will and the potential of both human and material resources to exert a major influence in world affairs. And I believe we will increasingly see it as a common interest both for Brazil and the European Community, already linked by a first agreement, to develop a fresh and flourishing relationship, not only for our own mutual benefits, but also in terms of the contribution we both will be seeking to make to a fair and prosperous world.