

Speech from Vice-President Vredeling to the Atlantic Club in
Washington

Deadline 8 September hours

I think you are well aware, ladies and gentlemen, that in the political world from which I come, it has been presumed for many years that there is a distinction between "Europeans" and "Atlanticists" in the political context.

According to this distinction, Europeans are supposed to be people who, generally speaking, like to regard Western Europe as an independent, perhaps even somewhat inward-looking authority alongside, and in a certain sense opposed to the superpowers. Atlanticists, on the other hand, are supposed to be more geared towards close contacts and collaboration between the European Community and the United States.

It should be clear that I am here today, in my capacity as a member of the executive of the European Community, first and foremost as an European. The fact that, despite this, I feel at home in the company of the Atlantic Club, I attribute to my growing conviction that the United States and Western Europe have more need of each other. I shall make no attempt to gloss over the ~~contracts~~ between American and European interests;

conflicts

they are substantial,

they are substantial, but in my opinion they can and must be reconciled.

Bearing this in mind, I should like to discuss with you some of the major problems of the day, problems which concern your society just as much as Western Europe and for which we must seek common solutions, solutions which will probably be just as important for the world as a whole as for our two continents.

The first of these problems is that of energy supplies. I can distinguish two developments in this sphere which have taken place since the oil crisis. Firstly, the race for oil supplies which has been intensified to ensure the building up of stocks - a race in which your country has so far participated zealously and not without success. In the longer term, the second development which I should like to mention appears to be of greater significance: this is the growing interest in other types of energy, in which context the main focal point of attention is, of course, nuclear energy. Let me remind you of the European summit in Bonn in July of this year which discussed deliveries of uranium. Discussions centred upon the role of Euratom, which is, in my opinion a most important facta. This means that conditions for deliveries, processing and distribution will be determined permanently at European level.

Thus bilateral contract

Thus bilateral contract between Australia and the United Kingdom on deliveries of uranium was recently cancelled by the European Commission, thereby providing clear proof that the European Community really can act with authority. The conditions to which I referred will be laid down via Community agreements, which will considerably restrict individual Member States' opportunities to deviate from general policies.

I should also like to make another observation in this connection. The reluctance which has been shown recently in the United States to make use of nuclear power as a source of energy supplies is totally in accord with my own doubts in the area.

But let me add that we should not ignore the fact that this reluctance has, in the main been made possible by the relatively comfortable position which the United States has created for itself in the sphere of traditional energy supplies.

This reservation does not detract from our appreciation of the attitude of the United States' Government, which has not allowed itself to be enticed, without a murmur, along the road to nuclear energy supplies which is still a very dangerous one. I am not in favour of ruling out completely the use of nuclear energy, but we can never pay too much attention to the problems

of disposing of

of disposing of nuclear waste and the frightening prospects of the proliferation of nuclear weapons, since these are problems of apocalyptic proportions. We must not allow energy supplies to become increasingly dependent on nuclear fuel, unless these problems are solved. If ever there was a need for cooperation on a world scale, it is here. For a start, let Americans and Europeans try to come to terms with each other.

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The second subject I want to discuss with you involves the international monetary system which has been marked by such instability, uncertainty and imbalance. We should not assume that the economic crisis will be over as soon as a solution has been found to our monetary problems. But it is certainly true that unless a solution is found to the monetary crisis the economic crisis will never be overcome. The attempt to achieve European monetary union and stability is of decisive importance, provided that it is accompanied by simultaneous and cogent measures which provide a structural solution to the economic crisis and come to terms with its social consequences. The blind belief that only by monetary means can things be put right is, I feel, out of place here.

Meanwhile, still on the

Meanwhile, still on the subject of monetary policy, I am not in favour of a return to the Bretton Woods system which constituted the mainstay of international monetary transactions in the 1950s. This system was always too exclusively dependent on the American dollar, at least after the collapse of the English pound and when the economic balance of power in the world changed, it was this exclusive dependency which caused it to break down.

In view of this, it is also of interest to the United States that, at the present time, after so many setbacks, the monetary integration of the Community seems to be speeding up again. During the last six months, the European Heads of Government have taken decisions of principle in Copenhagen and Bonn, the implementation of which will be an important step in the right direction. A strong European currency, together with the dollar and the Japanese yen, will constitute the foundation for a world-wide economic and monetary system.

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As the third policy area in which good cooperation between Western Europe and the United States could be of world-wide significance, let me refer to the promotion of minimum standards

for working conditions

for working conditions and the social protection of workers, particularly in the third world. There are still so many people who have to earn their daily bread under pitiful conditions. Child labour and forced labour are still far from being a thing of the past throughout the world.

The European Commission is preparing, under my responsibility, proposals to ensure that the provision of aid and above all the granting of preferential treatment to developing countries should be subject to the application of minimum standards in order to render such abuses impossible and also to lend additional support to those third world countries which, of their own accord, take the social protection of their workers seriously.

Mind you, these minimum standards are not intended as a barrier with which we can try to protect our market against the competition with which the poor countries, thanks to their low wages, threaten the Western economies. The temptation to implement these standards in such a way is naturally great in the present period of economic crisis. There are certainly some people in the Western world, both in Western Europe and in the United States, who would like to succumb to this temptation, but I should like to warn you against such a move. We must, as far as possible, offer the third world the chance to improve its place in the world economy by increasing its production.

The minimum standards

The minimum standards do not, therefore, exist to ensure our competitiveness, but simply in order to offer support to the great number of those who, beyond our frontiers, still have to struggle for a decent existence. Our aim is not protectionism, but protection.

You know that the ILO in Geneva has done a valuable job in preparing and formulating the minimum standards. We feel that this organization should also play a role in ensuring the application of these standards in the future. It is for this reason that I do not wish to avoid the subject of the relations between the United States Government and the ILO.

I am aware of the difficulties which forced your Government, in November of last year, to withdraw its support from the ILO. In a way I also understand these difficulties. I too sometimes feel out of sympathy with the political line which the ILO takes from time to time in subjects outside its own province. Of far greater significance, however, is the fact that in collaboration with the ILO, we can carry out important tasks, for example, in drafting and applying the minimum standards to which I referred.

Western Europe cannot

Western Europe cannot do without the partnership of the United States in this connection. It would, therefore, be of great political importance if the United States Government could see its way clear to rejoining the ranks of the countries which support the ILO.

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Lastly, whilst speaking you about the possibilities of strengthening cooperation between the United States and the European Communities, I do not wish to ignore the question of the defence of Western Europe, although this topic does not come within the sphere of competence of the European Commission. Since the failure to establish the European Defence Community it has no longer been part of the programme in the context of the European Community.

It would be unrealistic to act as though this meant that all the associated problems were dead and buried. Although the European Community may not concern itself with its own safety on a formal basis, there are still points of contacts between its activities and defence policy. This applies, for example, to the production of defence materials.

How can a policy

How can a policy be drawn up for the Community's aircraft industry which does make any mention of the production of military aircraft? And how can a Community shipbuilding policy be set up if the production of naval vessels is not discussed? An industrial policy which does not cover the production of defence materials and thus of military research and development is only half an industrial policy and one which would not appear viable.

And furthermore, in Western Europe where cooperation is constantly on the increase how can a Community foreign policy be set up without defence playing a part? And an increasingly Community oriented approach to Western European foreign policy forces itself upon us automatically. Indeed, it was, mainly for reasons connected with foreign policy that Spain, Portugal and Greece were encouraged to apply for membership of the Community. Similar foreign policy considerations led the Community to accept these applications in principle.

Should the European Community deal with its own security policy, too? I realize that the political climate is not yet ripe for such a development, but I also realize that in the future, when we are taking decisions concerning future political cooperation, we cannot avoid entering this sphere, particularly if effective cooperation with the United States is to continue.

The choice of topics

The choice of topics which I have discussed with you has been somewhat arbitrary, and, in any case, limited, but, I hope, still convincing enough to establish once and for all that Western Europe and the United States of America are equally concerned with opposing any move to portray their interests as conflicting.
