

SPEECH TO THE COUNCIL ON FOREIGN RELATIONS
OF WASHINGTON D.C. BY MR. IVOR RICHARD,
MEMBER OF THE COMMISSION OF THE EUROPEAN
COMMUNITIES; 30 March 1982

Mr. Chairman,

It is a pleasure for me to be here today. For whilst I have addressed the Council for Foreign Relations in New York and in Chicago this is the first time I have had the opportunity of doing so in Washington. My pleasure at being here is however somewhat tempered by the reluctance with which I approach the subject of my address. As you know I am listed to talk on the subject of "The Atlantic Alliance - a fractured relationship : Question Mark," which in itself seems to answer the question rather than pose it. For there can be no doubt that whilst relations between the United States and Western Europe have not been broken off they are in somewhat of a battered condition.

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That I feel somewhat depressed over this situation is easily explained when I tell you that for all of my adult life I have been deeply committed to the maintenance and strengthening of the Western Alliance and particularly of NATO and as a good democratic Socialist have been bitterly opposed to the expansionist objectives of Soviet Imperialism. I therefore find it not only depressing but somewhat ironic that the principle strain on the Western Alliance at the present time is disagreement between the United States and many Western European countries over how we should handle the Soviet Union.

But before I look at the specific issues that are placing strains on the Alliance I would like to say something about the current international economic situation as we perceive it in Europe. In economic terms Europe is going through its worst period since World War II; principally as a result of the Opec price rise in 1973

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and 1978

and 1978 we find ourselves in the midst of a major recession. This can perhaps be best highlighted by relating it to the levels of unemployment. In the Ten countries of the European Economic Community there were some 6 million unemployed in 1978; there are 11 million unemployed in 1982 and it is realistic to assume that there will be 15 million by 1985. Our percentage unemployed is now approaching 12% of our workforce. This is having a most damaging effect on European society for all sorts of reasons but particularly because of the horrible memories of the slump of the 20s and the 30s in Europe. The pursuit of full employment became one of the principal goals of most, if not all European Governments in the post-war period. As a result of this in the 25 years following World WAR II the level of unemployment in Europe remained at a very low figure indeed. Most European Governments sought to keep unemployment down to between 2/3% whereas in the United States it was generally regarded

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that a figure of between 5/7% was an acceptable level of unemployment. Not only was full employment in Europe a reality but the two decades before the early 70s saw us experiencing a period of unprecedented economic development. In a phrase Europe was prosperous and at work. Now it is far less prosperous and many are unemployed.

I believe that it is important to recognise the current economic difficulties and of course this applies to the United States who are also not exactly experiencing an economic boom, because I believe it does add additional strains on international relations. For example the European Economic Community is currently in major disagreement with the United States over allegations of the dumping of steel by European manufacturers in United States markets. Similarly we are doing battle with the United States Administration over the marketing of European agricultural exports. The point I wish to make is that 10 years ago when we were all experiencing a measure of economic prosperity neither

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of these figures

of these issues would have been regarded as significant by the U.S. Administration. Equally the consternation in Europe over the present Administration's Budget deficit and the correspondingly high rates of interest would not have been a feature in prosperous times. But given the economic recession many European leaders regard America's high interest policy as having a most damaging effect on Europe. Indeed one senior French leader recently said "The United States through the use of high interest rates is exporting its recession to Europe". So clearly we have to acknowledge that the worsening economic circumstances are placing strains on the Alliance which we did not experience during periods of prosperity.

But can I now turn Mr. Chairman to what I regard as the major problem facing U.S./European relations. We are in my

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view

view facing a major crisis of confidence and this stems from the way we have begun in recent years to perceive one another. If I might somewhat crudely summarise it: the present United States Administration seem to believe that Western Europe has gone soft on the Soviet Union and is an unreliable ally in meeting the threat of international Communism. This is balanced, if that is the right phrase, by the view of many European leaders that the United States Government tends to make highly simplistic judgements, is eager for confrontation and expects its allies to make unnecessary sacrifices. I think that all these elements are to be found in the recent dispute over how to handle the situation in Poland. The demands by the United States that France and Germany should cancel the Siberian natural gas deal was seen not as a constructive proposal to bring effective pressure on the Soviet Union but rather as an action that would only damage Western European interests: French and German commentators were quick to point out that whilst the Administration were ready to demand of

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Europe a major action of this kind there was no suggestion that they would take comparable action such as terminating grain sales to the Soviet Union. In some ways this dispute over the gas pipeline is an excellent example of how the United States and European parties fail to understand the other's point of view. To many Europeans it is a perfectly respectable argument to say that sucking the Soviet Union into increasing interdependent economic relations with the West does not make the West more dependent on the Soviet Union but rather the reverse. In the case of the gas pipeline they would argue it is not a question of Western Europe becoming dependent on Soviet natural gas, which in any event will only comprise a relatively minor percentage of European energy needs, but rather the Soviet Union coming to depend more and more on the foreign currency that the sales of this gas to Western Europe produces. Indeed some European commentators

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have used this

have used this argument in terms of justifying continued sales of U.S. grain to the Soviet Union. They argue that the more one can institutionalise Russia's inability to feed itself and thus increase its dependence on Western supplies is to reduce the Soviet's ability to act against Western interests.

So it seems to many Europeans that whilst there is a dispute on how one should handle the Polish situation both sides have legitimate arguments. It is however when one gets to the level of motive that one gets into more difficult areas. We in Europe read with considerable interest the leaks that took place over the series of meetings Secretary Haig had with his senior officials in the State Department. Indeed I suspect that some of us felt rather superior over the way the Americans seemed to conduct their affairs through media leaks - that is until we remember our own track records in these matters. But the thing that I found alarming about these

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revelations was not that Secretary Haig allegedly described the Foreign Secretary of my country as a duplicitous bastard - after all Peter Carrington is more than capable of looking after himself and in any event given Britain's quaine morality laws it is impossible for a fourth baron to be illegitimate! NO: the really serious allegation if true was Secretary Haig's allegation that on Poland "The Europeans are cowardly". To many in Europe this type of remark explicates precisely what we feel many in the present Administration think about Europeans and it is something that is very strongly resented.

We must acknowledge that when it comes to a question of how do we handle the Soviet Union in the 80s there is a real difference of opinion within the Alliance. And if we are to resolve this difference then we simply have got to acknowledge that we all pursue the same results: we all accept the need to combat and defeat

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Soviet Imperialism.

Soviet Imperialism. We are all committed to the development of freedom and democracy in Eastern Europe. I know that there are some members of the present Administration who are genuinely convinced that if the West uses its economic muscle then it can force the Soviet Union into major concessions over Poland and ultimately to the rest of the satellite countries. This is not however a view that is generally subscribed to by European leaders. For fundamental to our thinking is the belief that whilst pressure for change in Soviet bloc countries must be constant and unremitting, it must be recognised that to achieve change will necessarily be a long and gradual process. Not only do we believe that attempts at comprehensive economic sanctions against the Soviet Union are more likely to precipitate an aggressive over-reaction from the Russians but we also believe that freedom and democracy are more likely to come in these countries through the "dripping of water on a stone" process than through threats

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or sanctions.

or sanctions. I know that many in the present Administration find this view unpalatable and genuinely believe that we ought to be able to deter the Soviet Union from acts of adventurism and to bring about more liberal regimes in Eastern Europe. But the trouble with the real world is that ^{what} one ought to be able to do, and what one can do, particularly in international affairs, is often two quite different things. I very much hope Mr. Chairman that these difficulties and doubts that exist within the Alliance will be given a fair airing at the forthcoming economic and NATO Summits. For I remain convinced that one of the principle strengths of the Alliance is the ability of the United States and Europe to talk honestly and frankly with one another. If we are to resolve these differences then it will have to be done in an open and sensible manner.

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Can I now briefly turn to a matter which I know is of growing concern to people in the United States: that is the growth of sentiments in favour of nuclear disarmament and neutralism in Europe. There can be no doubt that these sentiments have increased rapidly in recent years and they must cause great concern to all who wish to maintain the Alliance. Whilst I don't want to overstate the situation we must recognise that this anti-nuclear and neutralist campaign is not now simply a matter which involves college kids and way-out fringe groups. In the United Kingdom both the Labour and Liberal parties are now committed to a policy of unilateral nuclear disarmament and the anti-nuclear lobby is growing in strength in the SPD in Germany. Support for these policies is also growing in most of the Western European countries. I believe there are a number of reasons for this phenomena. There is the latent feeling that because we have managed to avoid a war in Europe for almost four decades that the threat to peace no longer

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exists. There is the disappearance from the scene of the Atlantic generation both in the United States and in Europe; that generation that put together the Marshall Plan, NATO and similar international organisations which we of following generations simply take for granted. But over and beyond this there is undoubtedly the hostility of the young in Europe towards the United States Government. Given the post-war history of Europe it is astonishing how little effect the contribution that the United States made to ensure freedom was maintained in Western Europe has impinged upon young people. To them the Marshall Plan and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation do not affect their judgement of the American Government to anything like the same extent as did Vietnam and currently the U.S. involvement in Central America. The consequence of this is that anti-American feeling amongst young people continues to grow and this if it continues could gravely affect the Alliance. The anti-nuclear campaign and the attempts to get American bases out of Europe is a

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one-way street because it encourages elements in the United States to believe that this is the authentic voice of European opinion - which it is not - and encourages them in adopting isolationist attitudes. We simply have got to get over to young people the real nature of the ever-present Soviet threat and to create an understanding that the mutual defence agreement which the Alliance has, based on NATO and backed by the nuclear deterrent, remains the vital factor in the maintenance of world peace. We have got to convince people that a policy of unilateral nuclear disarmament and a neutral Western Europe will not bring peace but will almost certainly make war more likely.

But in this regard we have got to acknowledge that we can only win the ideological battle against the Soviets if we can demonstrate that our democratic system is better. Unfortunately to many young people whose knowledge of the Soviet

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Union is extremely vague the Western democracies do not seem to be doing a particularly good job. Some weeks ago I talked to a young unemployed steel worker and when we got to arguing about nuclear disarmament he said to me "I don't want nuclear missiles, I don't want American bases: all I want is a job." It is my firm belief that both in the United States and in Europe the prospect of long-term unemployment facing so many of our young people is a major factor in driving them to extreme political positions. If we give them no hope of a job then we can't blame them if they become "no hopers" in their attitude to society.

It is this need to provide hope that makes one anxious that the economic summit in Versailles, and the following NATO Summit of Western leaders will be fruitful. These meetings provide a great opportunity for our leaders to get the Alliance back on firmer foundations. I hope that as well

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as being able to resolve the political and strategic difficulties we are experiencing they will also be able to come to some broad agreement on how to end the recession. For it is my conviction that if we can achieve an upturn in economic activity and more importantly put our people back to work then we can start to move into a period of peace and prosperity.

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