

SPEECH BY CHRISTOPHER TUGENDHAT, VICE-PRESIDENT OF
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BRITAIN AND EUROPE: LESSONS FOR THE EIGHTIES

The Manchester Literary and Philosophical Society can consider the question of Britain and Europe in the 1980's in an appropriate historical context. When your society was founded just over 200 years ago, only four of the present ten members of the European Community were sovereign states and none had the same frontiers as today. The Americans were fighting to secure their independence and the French Revolution was still a few years away. Since then, the great European empires have risen and disappeared and Europe has torn itself apart in two world wars.

/ Against

Against this background, you can assess both the successes and failures of the European Community in the 25 years since the Treaty of Rome and the 10 since Britain signed the Accession Treaty.

The successes have been considerable. Old enmities have been buried and new friendships forged. The Customs Union and the Common Market have played a vital role in helping Europe to achieve levels of prosperity that stand comparison with North America despite North America's infinitely greater endowment of natural resources. The Common Agricultural Policy has eliminated fears of food shortages, although these are endemic in Eastern Europe. The common external trade policy enables Member States to negotiate as one in international trading matters to defend their common interests.

But there are also important areas in which the Community has failed to come to grips with the need for common policies. Two stand out: the absence of a suitable monetary framework and the lack of a common external foreign policy comparable with the common external trade policy.

/ The need for

The need for progress on the monetary front was highlighted last year by the gyrations of U.S. interest rates and of the U.S. dollar and the effects they had on all European economies, not least our own. Recent events on the other side of the Atlantic suggest that we will have similar problems again this year and that they will be even more difficult to contend with. I have spoken elsewhere on the need for Britain to participate in the European Monetary System and for that system to be further developed. On this occasion, I would only add that it is becoming increasingly difficult to understand why Britain does not do so. On the one hand, the British authorities are following an active exchange rate policy consistent with that required by the E.M.S. On the other, Britain is co-operating with the other European countries in efforts to influence U.S. policy and to mitigate its effects on our economies. Both the internal and external objectives of British policy would be served by full British participation in the E.M.S.

Tonight, I want to put the case for developing a common foreign policy to the point where Europe can react unitedly and effectively to international crises. Twice already in the 1980's - over Afganistan and Poland - we have seen

/ what happens in

what happens in its absence. On each occasion, Europe was unable to respond until after a dangerous delay. Worse, it was thrown into confusion and divisions opened up both between the various European countries and between the European and American wings of the North Atlantic Alliance. If after two such warnings and two such failures, we still fail to take remedial action, we shall be courting disaster. It is bad enough not to learn from the lessons of history; not to learn from those of one's own decade is surely inexcusable.

The foundations on which to build have already been laid. Ever since 1973, the members of the European Community have been developing political co-operation, as the procedure for working together to co-ordinate foreign policy is called. It has worked well in periods of relative calm and notable initiatives have been taken over, for example, the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe, the Middle East, the imposition of sanctions on Iran, Afghanistan long after the invasion and Poland before the crisis. At the United Nations, the Member States vote together more than 80 % of the time. The Common external trade policy provides another basis on which to build. Whether

/ in formal

In formal negotiations in the GATT, in informal ministerial gatherings or emergencies such as the current American attempts to cut off steel imports from Europe, the Member States act together through the Community.

The rest of the world has been impressed and now thinks of us more and more as one. Governments outside Europe make increasingly less distinction between positions of individual Member States and tend rather to ask "what are Europe's intentions and what will Europe do?". They expect us to have a united position and are surprised and, depending who they are, often disappointed when we do not.

Against this background, Europe's disunity and disarray over Poland come as a brutal shock. The doubts and divisions were so great that weeks elapsed before the first Community policy statement could be issued and even then it was immediately disowned by Greece.

The first weeks of a crisis are those in which its pattern is set. It is formed partly in response to what happens in the country or region concerned and partly in response to external reactions.

/ If the Member

If the Member States of the Community cannot react in time, they can have no immediate influence. As a result, those whom they wish to aid morally, materially or diplomatically go unaided and those whom they wish to influence, be it their American allies or the Russians, remain uninfluenced. Not surprisingly, they proceed in their different ways without paying much attention to Europe's particular concerns and interests.

This brings me to my central point, which is that the Member States of the Community have no alternative but to act together if they are to exert much influence on what happens in the world. They are under no obligation to do so. They are perfectly free to pursue as independent a line as they wish. But the scope for a medium-sized European power acting alone to achieve anything worthwhile is now very limited, except in exceptional circumstances. Moreover, the more discordant the points of view of the individual Member States become, the more they will cut across each other and the less anyone of them will be heard. This is as true when dealing with our great ally the United States as it is of the Soviet Union or governments in the Middle East, Southern Africa or elsewhere.

/ I am particularly

I am particularly worried about the effects of Europe's disunity and inability to respond to crises on our relations with the United States. The North Atlantic Alliance is of fundamental importance. Without it we would be lost and the Americans gravely weakened. I fear that if Europe cannot speak with one voice to Washington and find a way of responding more quickly and unitedly to crises, the divisions in the Alliance will be deepened and its effectiveness increasingly impaired.

This is because the United States is simply not prepared to listen to the individual European states putting forward different views, to take them into account and to strike an appropriate balance, before acting. It will generally listen politely enough, but then go its own way, like a traveller who on asking a group of locals for guidance, receives muddled and conflicting advice and decides that he had better back his own judgement. The Europeans themselves then feel resentful that their views and interests have not been fully taken into account while the Americans feel impatient with the subsequent criticism and lack of "follower-ship" from their European allies.

/ Only when

Only when speaking with one voice in support of a common objective can Europe make its influence felt in Washington. When it does so, it has the weight and authority of an equal and a dialogue between equals can take place. As in any such exchange between partners who wish to keep their joint enterprise going, such an exchange is likely to lead both sides to adjust their positions in order to find a common one. For their part, the Americans have certainly been willing to do so as President Reagan's "zero option" speech over the disarmament negotiations on Theatre Nuclear Forces shows.

Such adjustments are very important for the health of the Alliance in Europe. At present, there is a widespread feeling on this side of the Atlantic that NATO is too dominated by the Americans and too subservient to their interests. This feeling provides one of the wells from which the advocates of unilateral nuclear disarmament and those who oppose the strengthening of Europe's nuclear defences through the deployment of Cruise and Pershing Missiles draw their support.

/ Before NATO

Before NATO can recover the popular support in Europe, which it needs, the peoples of Europe must be convinced that the Alliance is one between equals and that they can command as much attention in Washington and influence over the development of American policy as applies in reverse. This can only be achieved if the countries of Europe operate as a unit within the Alliance as General Eisenhower called on us to do 30 years ago.

The Community should also be capable of bringing diplomatic influence to bear beyond the area covered by the Alliance in places where we have interests at stake and a contribution to make. As a major economic power, it would be selfish and irresponsible to cut ourselves off from the rest of the world. In any case, we cannot do so. As the largest participant in international trade, our prosperity, our industries and our jobs depend on access to raw materials and markets throughout the world. Inevitably therefore, we have a stake in the political stability and economic health of those with whom we are linked. In many areas too, those economic links are buttressed by ties of family, friendship and historical involvement.

/ In these circumstances

In these circumstances, it is only natural that the European Community should become involved in the search for peace in the Middle East and in Southern Africa, where a group of three Member States are working together with the Americans and Canadians in an effort to achieve a settlement in Namibia. We are economically interdependent with both regions and have other ties with them as well.

The Middle East Initiative is sometimes criticised both within Europe and elsewhere for allegedly cutting across the Camp David process and scorned for its failure to bring the protagonists closer together. I do not believe the first point to be true. What we are doing should be regarded as complementary to American efforts, not as a rival operation. As for the second point; it is certainly true that we have not succeeded in our principal objective of bringing the two sides closer together. But had it not been for our efforts, when the American approach has sometimes seemed unbalanced, I wonder whether even the most responsible Arab governments would have been able to maintain those good relations with the West, which are so much in the interests of both sides.

/ What should be,

What should be surprising is not that we should be active in the Middle East, but that we are not doing more as a Community both there and elsewhere. I am sure that if any of the great statesmen who controlled their own countries' destinies during the course of your society's history could now be transposed to the Community, they would agree. They would be struck by the imbalance between the degree of internal economic co-operation achieved by the Community and its lack of external political coherence. They might wonder how long the former can survive without further progress on the latter.

This progress must be on a Community basis. In this field as in others the concept of Europe "à la carte" has its attractions, especially for busy heads of government impatient for progress. It means that those Member States which want to work together on something and are ready to do so can move ahead without waiting for others. By the same token, those that have difficulty in relating to a common position can opt out. Obviously, this is much easier than the negotiations and compromises necessary for a policy involving all Ten.

/ But the "à la carte"

But the "à la carte" approach leads directly to the sort of confusion among the countries of Europe and divisions between the European and American wings of the Alliance from which we should be trying to escape. It would mean in the first instance Member States participating only in initiatives that specifically interest them and governments tending to work only with those of their partners with whom co-operation comes easily. Thereafter, the Community would quickly disintegrate into a collection of shifting alliances, which would all too easily find themselves in contention with each other. On some issues some countries would find themselves alone. The gap that the Polish crisis opened up between Germany and some other European countries and between Germany and the United States, provides a glimpse of the sort of dangers that lie at the end of this particular road.

In short, the "à la carte" approach would mean that the opportunity that now exists for developing a coherent set of objectives and the means for working towards them would be lost. So too would the chance of establishing a firm basis from which to bring a specifically European influence to bear upon the world.

/ The Americans

The Americans would draw the conclusion that we are incapable of working together to the extent required to attain our full potential as allies: they might even conclude that as disunited entities, we are most of us not worth a great deal anyway. In either case, those in Washington who argue that there is no point in co-ordinating with the Europeans and that the single-minded pursuit of purely American interests is all that matters would be strengthened. Other governments, whether in Moscow or the Third World, would draw their own depressing conclusions about the need to heed Europe's warnings or to take account of European interests where those differ from the United States. All too often they would decide not to bother about them at all.

This is not the occasion on which to spell out the network of committees and procedures involving ministers and officials that will be needed to reinforce existing Community arrangements in support of a European foreign policy. In any case, it is not necessary. The London Report on political co-operation adopted by the Council of Ministers last October provides an admirable blueprint.

/ It is not the lack

It is not the lack of institutional arrangements that is holding the Community back, nor even a lack of ideas for improving them. The number of reports, plans and proposals for relaunching Europe that has been produced in recent years is very large. The problem is lack of political will.

In recent years, the Member States' governments have displayed an increasing inability to make the necessary compromises to settle divisive internal issues. This can be seen over such diverse questions as the British Budget contribution and how to finance a settlement, fish, the seat of the institutions, the free movement of agricultural produce and the terms on which the Enlargement negotiations with Spain and Portugal should be conducted. On all these matters and many more - some very minor - the stubborn defense of national interests rather than the search for a reasonable compromise in the interest of the Community as a whole is all too often the dominant concern of governments. And as the list shows all are guilty to some degree.

/ David Dilks

David Dilks tells us in his introduction to the Cadogan Diaries that when the League of Nations was formed, Sir Alexander Cadogan warned against establishing a Committee of Permanent Representatives from each Member State as we now have in the Community. He feared they would be so dedicated to the individual national interests as to "become a corps of professional debaters, carrying out their instructions to the letter and developing obstruction into a fine art". In today's Community, alas, such a description all too often applies as much to the Council of Ministers as to the officials.

There are those who claim to believe that progress towards a common approach to foreign policy matters can take place against such a background. The fact of the matter is it cannot. One has only to think of the extent to which so many of the recent thrice-yearly meetings of heads of government have been dominated by corrosive arguments on internal matters to appreciate this. To expect a common foreign policy to emerge from such a background is like expecting to find a rose garden in a desert.

/ That great founding

That great founding father of modern Europe, Jean Monnet, said " the Community exists to find a common solution to common problems ". That was the approach on which its early achievements were built. It is the inspiration to which we must now return if we are to rise to the challenges confronting us in the international sphere. If we fail the Community will, I fear, sink into the same limbo of lingering irrelevance as the League of Nations. The countries of Europe will have nothing to put in its place and will find themselves needlessly weak and disunited in the face of world events.