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EUROPE AT THE PARTING OF THE WAYS

Summary of the address by Dr. S.L. Mansholt
at the international conference held by the
Dutch Labour Party in The Hague on 29 April 1963

Dr. Mansholt reminded his audience of his views of the crisis in the EEC, which he had expressed on several occasions in Europe and America. The head of the French State had now given another press conference. This had taught us nothing new, but it could be looked upon as important since it confirmed that the approach to the current crisis in European affairs, which Dr. Mansholt had been advocating since 14 January corresponded more closely and realistically to de Gaulle's attitude than that of people who seek to play down what the General had said and to pass it off as a tactical manoeuvre. The French President had not budged an inch from his original position. Even if he did express himself more politely, there was little comfort to be drawn from this, since no one had ever doubted the capacity for charm of the French in general and of the General in particular. The essential point was de Gaulle's unwavering insistence on the primacy of the national factor, with the consequent rejection of any real integration. Economic co-operation was subordinated to the political and military hegemony of France, and this in turn called in question the openness of the Community and Europe's place in the world. Dr. Mansholt repeated his earlier warning that as a result Europe was at a parting of the ways and that a fundamental decision would have to be taken on the road we wished to tread.

Dr. Mansholt dealt at greater length than before with the problem of atomic weapons. This was after all a political as well as a military question. From the purely military standpoint it need not have caused difficulties within the framework of Atlantic defence: all that would have been needed would have been division of labour within NATO. However, it became a political question when considerations of national prestige led to the attitude that a member reached full stature only if it disposed of weapons of all kinds, both nuclear and conventional. National security and doubts on the solidarity of military allies are put forward by way of justification. President Kennedy can of course be trusted, we were told, but what of his successor? It would need

little effort, according to Dr. Mansholt, to find similar comments reported during the last eighteen years about Truman and Eisenhower as well as Kennedy. And all through those eighteen years there had been half a million American soldiers on European soil as living proof of Atlantic solidarity. After this it was hard not to see in national prestige rather than in security the real reason behind the clamour to be an atomic power.

But this brought us right back to the policy we consider we should be pursuing. Dr. Mansholt found it completely in line with the way things were developing that within the Atlantic defence system there should be joint control over all means of defence. It would require the greatest efforts to find a reasonable solution to this problem. But matters would have to move in this direction, even if the United States Congress took a lot of convincing. President Kennedy was undoubtedly making great efforts to carry this point. He was throwing all his personal prestige into the balance. And it was not making things any easier for him if European countries, particularly France, attempted to build up their own atomic power. Here too, then, we were faced with a choice: should we strive for Atlantic partnership or for a temporary system of coalitions that tomorrow might be regrouped on entirely different lines.

But more was at stake than the question of lasting co-operation or passing coalitions. Dr. Mansholt believed there could be no doubt of the readiness of the Atlantic world to defend itself, and explained why he believed the formula of joint control to be necessary.

While however Dr. Mansholt was aiming at defence of the West, he cherished the thought that it must one day be possible, despite all difficulties and resistance, to reach agreement on disarmament and the maintenance of peace. He had followed the negotiations in the Disarmament Committee at Geneva with as much disappointment as anyone. He had no illusions on the score of easy success. Consequently, he refused to throw away the means of protection, as this would only encourage those with a thirst for power to commit aggression. But the chances of agreement would be indisputably greater if the West had a single joint defence system than if a proliferation of greater

or lesser atomic powers were, for the sake of national prestige, in a position to threaten the world. He would deny no country the right to feel itself a "grande nation". But he must also be allowed to rank peace for humanity higher than national pride.

Dr. Mansholt wished to introduce a modest but not unimportant argument. A start had been made with the merging of national economies in the EEC. The idea behind this was that the Community should be more than the sum of its constituent economies. Did not this apply equally to defence? Would not joint defence also be more rational and more effective than national military forces allied in a coalition? The Community should take stock of the three demands being made on it - not without reflection and not relying exclusively on feelings of national prestige. These were:

further expansion internally,
security against threats of aggression,
responsibility towards developing countries, which would soon have a share in deciding the fate of the world.

The resources of nations and national economies were not inexhaustible. Even a person who, like the speaker, considered these resources to be great ought to warn against a policy based on prestige that satisfied one of these three demands at the expense of the other two.

No matter how we assessed the complex of problems involved in the current dispute about the course to be followed, we would always come back to the political arguments confronting us. Dr. Mansholt felt he had been right in recent months to air his convictions on the political dangers facing Europe, as he had never regarded himself in his present position as an apolitical technocrat. But he was also aware that the political conflict would have to be carried on chiefly by the Governments of the member countries. Their sense of purpose, their imagination and inventiveness, and not least their perseverence, would decide - for good or for ill - the future of Europe. A few days ago a decision had been taken in Germany that would not be without influence on political developments there. There had just

been elections in Italy, and these too would affect future European policy. There would soon be elections in the Netherlands. It was Dr. Mansholt's hope that the next Dutch Government would appreciate that the situation in Europe demanded much of them. More concentration of policy in Community affairs was urgently needed. However much importance attached to the various parts of the economy concerned, pride of place should go to understanding of the political concept of Europe. For at the moment it was this that mattered. Dr. Mansholt could only hope that the large majority which had for many years supported European integration in the Dutch Parliament would draw fresh courage from the will of a new Government and stand out for a Europe of the future, so integrated that even a small country could be great in its midst.