

*Ch. President*

PRESIDENT'S STATEMENT AT OPENING OF EEC/ASEAN MINISTERIAL  
CONFERENCE : Brussels, Monday 20 November 1978

---

441.2 (300)  
Speech file

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the Commission of the European Communities I should also like to welcome you to this meeting at Ministerial level between the Association of South East Asian Nations and the European Communities.

That we live in a world of profound and rapid change, political, economic and technological, could not be more evident when we look at our two regions. Our generation has seen how, in Western Europe, the determination to banish war has given birth to a process of economic and political unification, the ultimate limits of which, whether in degree of integration or in geographic extent, cannot be foreseen. The same period has transformed our region's relationship with South East Asia from one predominantly colonial to one based on equality and mutual respect, while within South East Asia itself past dissensions have been put aside and ASEAN has emerged to herald a future of increasing prosperity deriving from cooperation among its member nations.

The question to which we have to address ourselves in the next two days is how to bring the European Community

/and ASEAN

and ASEAN closer together through the substantial possibilities which exist for economic cooperation between the two regions.

Our meeting will also give us the opportunity to consider the North-South relationship and to discuss the progress towards a more just and equitable world economic order which will secure for the developing countries a larger share of an expanding world economy. This is important to all of us and I am sure that the positive approach of our meeting can be an example of cooperation between developed and developing countries.

We have certain things in common :

- We share the same values and have much common history.
- Both groups of countries have learned that regional cooperation offers them a greater chance to shape their own economic and political destiny than they would have as individual nations, and to promote the economic well being of the people, and to ensure peace in the region.
- For both ASEAN and the Community the ability to negotiate as a group with the outside world has become one of the most important features of our two organisations.

The Community has always been in favour of regional cooperation: we firmly believe that such cooperation contributes significantly to the economic development of the individual countries of a grouping, and promotes political stability among and beyond them.

From the formation of ASEAN we in the Community have always sought to treat with ASEAN as a region since we

/from our own

from our own experience have learnt than an external stimulus can often support internal cooperation. When therefore in 1971 an ASEAN delegation came to Brussels to discuss relations with the Community, we were pleased to have the opportunity to discuss problems on a region to region basis. Similarly we welcomed in 1972 the formation of the Special Coordinating Committee of the ASEAN Nations which was charged with developing ASEAN's trade relations with the Community, and also its executive arm in Brussels, the ASEAN Brussels Committee consisting of the five ASEAN Ambassadors accredited to the Community. We have had a good relationship with these Committees over the last five or six years, and I feel sure that this has significantly contributed to the decision to hold today's meeting.

of Intent

In the Joint Declaration/which was signed on the accession of Britain, Denmark and Ireland, the Community undertook to extend and to strengthen trade relations with the Commonwealth countries and other neighbouring developing countries in Asia. As a result it was agreed in 1974 between former Vice President of the Commission, Sir Christopher Soames and ASEAN Ministers to form a Joint Study Group between ASEAN and the Commission. Its aim was to intensify the dialogue between ASEAN and the European Communities, and to serve as the mechanism through which to explore together all possible areas of cooperation. Since its creation in 1975 the Joint Study Group has gone a long way towards meeting those aims and this meeting is in many ways the culmination of its work. The discussions there have been on an informal basis, and have allowed both regions to have a much better understanding of the problems each faces, and were the inspiration for the establishment of contacts at the political level as well.

/Last November

Last November the first meeting of the ASEAN Ambassadors in Brussels, the Permanent Representatives of the Community Member States and of the Commission took place, thus adding a new dimension to our institutional links. We believe that this was a valuable innovation as it brought another Community institution into the process of cooperation between our two regions.

Now we are at the third stage in the development of our institutionalised relationship. We all attach great hopes for, and importance to the success of our deliberations in the next two days. We realise that the practical results of our cooperation have not yet fulfilled our hopes, in spite of the efforts of the Joint Study Group, but this meeting should create the basis for more substantial cooperation in the future.

We have the basis on which to do so. Between 1973 and 1977 trade between the two regions has grown two and a half fold despite the economic recession, and in the last two years ASEAN has had a trade surplus with the Community. These figures show, I think, that the Community has been successful both in resisting protectionist tendencies and in fulfilling the commitments we have entered into at various international meetings.

We in the Community firmly believe that the maintenance of open trading conditions and the expansion of international trade are essential for the health of the world economy. Our two regions rely heavily on international trade, and its continued expansion is necessary to us both. The more we can trade with each other the better for all concerned.

/ But

But cooperation between us goes wider than trade. Today we have the opportunity to set our relations on new, wider and more solid foundations. Success is of the highest interest to us both.