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EAST-WEST RELATIONS AND THE EUROPEAN RESPONSE

The European response should be a strong one.

For post-war Europe has evolved in an atmosphere of conflict. We have had conflict in ideological, political and economic terms. We have had peace, but peace in the shadow of nuclear armaments and with the most powerful military alliances in the world facing each other in a state of constant preparedness across the East-West divide in Europe.

This East-West dimension has coloured our political perceptions, and made itself felt also in regional conflicts far from the dividing line that still runs through our Continent.

The nuclear age has at the same time fundamentally changed our concept of national sovereignty, underlining the interdependence of peoples and nations in the areas of economics, environment and security in a new and awesome manner. Can we now see the contours of a world community which will not necessarily be based on a precarious balance of terror between East and West? Our ability to devise a relevant European response and foreign policy is indeed being put to a real test.

The United States and the Soviet Union are engaged in a new, more open and indeed more meaningful political communication, covering the vital agenda of disarmament and arms control, human rights, regional issues of conflict as well as bilateral matters. In this situation of progressing dialogue and political achievements some are today tempted to say: "Don't disturb the superpowers. Let them define and chart the further course of détente without interference."

Europe must not take it for granted that the present positive developments will continue. Indeed, we must be prepared for disappointments and setbacks. Above all, we must avoid a situation where focus on European reservations creates obstacles to making the most of an historic opportunity to break down the barriers dividing East and West.

The indisputable fact that the superpowers have been the engines of progress and change in East-West relations must not make us hesitant or passive. We should rather be encouraged to actively seize and consolidate positive trends in and for Europe. We recognize that the present leaders of the United States and the Soviet Union have little more than half a year left to negotiate new agreements. Thus, the real challenge now lies in laying a foundation on which the process of détente can develop its own momentum becoming as independent as possible of the superpower leaders governing at any given time.

In formulating our European response, we must ask not only

how we can contribute actively and constructively to the East-West détente. Let us also ask ourselves how we can apply the positive trends to other major problems facing the international community. And let us ask ourselves how the current political "thaw" can be used to strengthen and upgrade international cooperation in general.

Many years of mutual distrust must be broken down and replaced by cooperative strategies. In addition to arms control and disarmament efforts these strategies must include a political process of détente which is conducted by means of dialogue and cooperation in the political, economic, cultural and humanitarian spheres. In developing contacts and cooperation in the fields of economy, technology, ecology and culture, Europe should be the main engine of progress.

We must seek a balance of conventional forces at the lowest possible level, as Felipe Gonzales strongly underlined in his introductory statement. Parallel efforts must be made to reduce the remaining nuclear arsenals in Europe. We must also limit the potential for engaging in offensive military operations, partly by reducing the number of such weapons and working to establish nuclear and chemical weapons free zones in Central Europe. These are areas in the East-West dialogue where European countries must have a leading role.

It is of vital importance for the process of building confidence in Europe that ordinary citizens see results of the East-West dialogue in terms of human rights, human contacts and the development of cultural relations. We are still waiting for some of the "glasnost" which is emerging both internally in the Soviet Union and in important aspects of Soviet foreign policy to make itself felt in the CSCE negotiations as well. So far, there has been too little change in the Soviet Union in areas related to the human dimension of the détente process. A possible follow-up conference on human rights and human contacts in Moscow could also give a positive impetus to human rights developments in the Soviet Union.

Through bilateral contacts and constructive participation in the Helsinki Process, Europeans can strengthen cooperative structures in Europe and give new impulses with regard to arms control and disarmament, to the safeguarding of human rights and to cultural and economic cooperation. An agreement between the European Community and Comecon which opens the way for normal diplomatic relations between Eastern European countries and the Community would be an essential element in the development of East-West relations.

The ongoing dialogue inspires hope that solutions will also be found to regional conflicts in various parts of the world. The dialogue helps to open new channels of communication in otherwise deadlocked situations - not only in Afghanistan, but also in areas of conflict such as Central America, the Middle East and Southern Africa.

Our response will be one of strong support. We can add to the force of this trend both by taking independent initiatives

and by providing economic, professional and humanitarian assistance to countries which will thus be given a chance to make a fresh start.

Over the years, a great many regional conflicts have been assessed and dealt with in an East-West context, although they may have been primarily due to internal political, economic and social background. If superpower rivalry in the Third World can now be replaced by mutual restraint and a determination to find practical solutions, a highly complicating factor to world peace will have been removed.

Our European response should also be an effort to revitalize the North-South dialogue and to secure a far-reaching and lasting improvement in the general climate of international cooperation.

Growing political trust, additional disarmament measures and détente will also have a positive impact on dialogues concerning the economy, ecological considerations, the environment and human rights.

The World Commission on Environment and Development has addressed a number of the problems and challenges facing the world community which can only be resolved through international cooperation. These not only include threats to the environment and the ecological balance. These problems and challenges also include the imbalances and stagnation in the world economy, unmanageable debts incurred by developing countries, unfair distribution of wealth and opportunity. Poverty and starvation. An arms race that does not make the world a safer place. And the dangers that are involved in all the regional conflicts.

The environment recognizes neither national frontiers nor indeed the East-West divide. Perhaps the threats to the environment, and thereby to our own children, and the knowledge that these must be dealt with collectively by all countries, can convince nations to turn to binding multilateral cooperation. We warn against the consequences of present development trends, but also point out the enormous potential which exists and which can be utilized to chart a new course. We are approaching a threshold in the world's development which will determine our future prospects for survival. This has to have consequences for the international network of cooperation.

These East-West and wider perspectives call for an assertive European and social democratic response, nationally and within regional and broader international cooperation, a response that complements and stimulates the superpower relationship. These perspectives call for a European response within and across traditional political and economic affiliations. It is in our interest and it is our responsibility to promote improved relations between East and West, and to work for a better organized world community. This would be a European response which clearly is in keeping with our socialist ideals and traditions, and which would be much easier to achieve if we now see an improved atmosphere also for democratic socialism on the European scene. We can be more hopeful and take on a more active European role within the socialist family.