

Prime Minister
Gro Harlem Brundtland

Luncheon speech in the honour of the EC - Norway Joint
Parliamentary Committee, Oslo, 7 June 1993.

Ladies and Gentlemen,
Dear Guests,

It is a great pleasure for me to host today's luncheon in honour of the EC - Norway Joint Parliamentary Committee and in particular to welcome the members of the European Parliament to Norway.

Since the Labour Party Government presented a White Paper to Parliament in 1987 on Norway and European cooperation, many people here in Norway have greatly increased their knowledge about the European Communities. The EEA-negotiations were by far the most important vehicle in the process. We are now, finally, very close to the day when this important agreement will enter into force.

The learning process, and the political debate that went with it, led to the decision by the Government, and supported by Parliament, last November, to apply for membership. The learning process also brought forward the fact that our legislation is already, in many areas, more in harmony with EC rules than is the case for many EC member states.

Now negotiating in parallel with Sweden, Finland and Austria, we are pleased to have as our guests members of the European Parliament who one day will have to deal with the outcome of the negotiations. We are pleased that contacts are established. We wish to convey what Norway hopes to achieve by membership and what we see as essential issues for the future.

We all see our political systems being challenged in a world of growing complexity, where goods, capital, services and information move so quickly around the globe. We need to regain control of many of those forces that could previously be dealt with at the national level. We acknowledge that important issues can only be addressed when countries act jointly and when the rules operate at the same international level where the challenges occur.

Common challenges to our modern industrial societies include

- serious unemployment
- considerable pressure on social security systems
- needs for new investment
- needs to improve environmental performance.
- the need to preserve peace in Europe.

Finding solutions to these problems requires more cooperation, more coordination of economic and social policies, improved educational systems and coordinated efforts in the field of

transport and infrastructure. Your visit will hopefully give vivid impressions of how we can contribute in this respect.

No matter how strong the political will, there is no single national path to full employment, monetary stability and low interest rates or environmental excellence.

Norway has been increasingly integrated into the European economy. 80% of our exports go to EEA countries. We depend more on the EC market for our foreign trade than most of the EC member states do.

This interdependence is also reflected in the area of monetary and exchange rate policy. The European Monetary System certainly has experienced serious challenges over the past year. However, we feel strongly that in the case of small countries, unilateral exchange rate arrangements are bound to be more vulnerable than cooperative arrangements, underpinned by mutual responsibility and commitments.

We need a stable and predictable economic environment. The price of turbulence and instability is high, especially for the smaller countries.

Our application for membership of the Community is therefore also based on our wish to contribute in this respect. We see the convergence criteria set out in the Maastricht Treaty as important and as necessary.

Our budget deficit is just above the target of 3 per cent of GDP set out in the Maastricht treaty. Unlike other OECD countries, the Norwegian government has positive net financial assets. We are among the few OECD countries to show a substantial current account surplus. Our estimate is that we will have repaid our entire foreign debt by 1995.

This applicant country, therefore, could become a very healthy member of the Community, a reliable partner whose long-term performance would add to the strength of Europe and contribute to shaping its future.

Norway is the only of the new applicant countries which is member of NATO. Norwegian membership of the EC would mean the addition of our experience and North European perspectives in security debates when they would be needed.

We are now becoming associate member of the Western European. Still, in the overall foreign and security policy picture of European cooperation, we cannot completely compensate for the disadvantage of not being a full member.

In the daily picture of comments and rumor the essential elements I have mentioned are too often pushed aside. Let us neither underestimate nor exaggerate the problems we will face in our negotiations.

The issues which will decide the question of membership here in Norway are not the core issues as seen from continental Europe. These issues, however, will strongly affect the outcome of the referendum on membership which will take place in Norway when the negotiations are concluded.

We need in particular satisfactory solutions for fish, energy and regional settlement, including agriculture. Your presence speaks for a readiness to gather information as well as for pursuing the dialogue we need with the European Parliament.

As parliamentarians you are "hands on" in the strive for solutions which can gather support at the supreme source of democratic legitimacy; the electorate. As elected representatives, we are regularly sanctioned at elections. I believe that much of the uncertainty that has come to dominate the debate on European integration stems from a basic problem of communication. Our interdependence leaves us with one choice, which is also our greatest opportunity; to walk forward together. Our main challenge today is to get this message across more convincingly.

Let us never lose sight of the proportions involved. We will be looking for solutions which will be accepted, solutions that can enable Norway to play an active role within an enlarged Community.

Every experience shows that once a decision is taken, Norway can be relied on as a solid partner in international affairs, fulfilling zealously its obligations. What we need is understanding and good intentions as the diversity of the Community expands to take in the North of Europe. The Nordic countries have more to contribute than the small size of our populations numbers alone indicate. If the Nordic applicant countries become members the EC surface would increase by 50 per cent while the number of inhabitants would increase by a mere 5 per cent.

Though I would not go as far as Lloyd George, who said that God has chosen little nations as the vessel by which he carries the choicest wines to the lips of humanity, I believe our political traditions and our economies would be of value in the Community, and strengthen rather than weaken it as Europe prepares for the next century.

I propose a toast to the members of the European Parliament here represented and to the future of the Joint EC - Norway Parliamentary Committee.