

STATSMINISTER GRO HARLEM BRUNDTLAND

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Thirty years have passed since the American Women's Club of Oslo awarded me a scholarship which helped me considerably in going to Harvard University. My master's studies at the Harvard School of Public Health brought me into contact with medical colleagues from many countries, introduced me to the American educational tradition, which at that time was much more participatory than in Norway, and aroused my interest in the influence of environmental factors on human health. In this way, the scholarship awarded by this Club was to have far-reaching implications for the later development of my personal interests and my world view.

I experienced the American society in the early 1960s as being strongly influenced by the civil rights movement. It was the time of President Johnson's Great Society and of the early stages of the Vietnam war. Ralph Nader's name appeared frequently in the headlines, and his book about the American car industry, "Unsafe at any speed", helped to shape the attitudes of people who later came to play important roles in the field of environmental and consumers protection.

My own views on general social issues were influenced by the American health service system, which was so markedly different from that in Norway, which already then covered the whole population. Your health services offer probably the best quality services in the world for those who have best rights to benefits, while lack of services and insecurity for many families still is a fact of life, - and the focus of a big debate about your future system - and its total costs to society.

The year at Harvard was not my first stay in the USA. When I was ten years old, my family spent a year in New York, where my father held a Rockefeller medical research fellowship. When we were to return to Norway, I tried to arrange for my closest American girl friend to come and see me in Norway, but her family wouldn't let her. Norway bordered on the Soviet Union, they said, and it seemed much too dangerous to go there. This was at a time when the Cold War was at its height and atmospheric nuclear testing alarmed millions throughout the world.

Most families in Norway have some kind of personal ties with the USA. After all, no other country except Ireland experienced a comparable exodus of its sons and daughters to the United States. One quarter of the Norwegian population immigrated to the USA in the nineteenth century. My own experience is thus only a fibre in the fabric which has been woven by people and time between your country and mine.

I believe this sense of close kinship is also shared widely in the United States. This has helped to determine policy for decades and also takes such agreeable form as the recent invitation I received from President Clinton to come to the White House on 17 May this year.

My visit to the USA will also include trips to Chicago and Madison, Wisconsin, one of the strongholds of early Norwegian settlement in the USA.

I shall be making this trip at a time when the issue of Norwegian membership of the European Union is debated all over the country. I would like to make it clear that if Norway joins the European Union, it will not mean a downgrading of our relations across the Atlantic. On the contrary, it will help to strengthen the Atlantic ties between the USA and the EU. We will not change our views on

the necessity of close relations with the USA if we become full members of the EU.

The need for continued Atlantic ties is most obvious in the field of security policy. During the entire post-war period, Norway's exposed strategic position in the north has underpinned the Atlantic and Western European orientation of our foreign policy. Early post-war experience in Europe helped to shape the important decision which made us a founding member of NATO. This decision marked the end of the policy of neutrality which had prevailed since the union with Sweden was dissolved in 1905.

Our NATO membership proved to be the appropriate answer to security challenges for several decades. The Northeast-Atlantic, the Norwegian Sea and the Barents Sea form the approaches to and outlets from Russia's Kola Peninsula.

It goes without saying that the dramatic changes in the former Soviet Union and the fundamental improvements in East-West relations have generally had a very favourable impact on Norway's situation. Nevertheless, it is our NATO membership that has enabled us to pursue a policy of detente in the past and one of active regional peace-building today.

Norway's long border with Russia is 194 km long. For a thousand years this has been a peaceful border. During the past couple of years we have held higher hopes that the border would also become more open, allowing people, goods and services, news and cultural impulses to pass more freely. We intend to work tirelessly to realize these goals, so that we can look back on the past more than 70 years of separation as a historical aberration.

We have the deepest sympathy for the Russian people, who are currently going through a very difficult period and who may have become somewhat disillusioned. This is why now we must demonstrate that we are partners and friends and that we do

not intend to exploit Russia's temporary weakness during a time of great hardship.

Our NATO membership enables us to act with confidence in our relations with Russia, which is still the most important military power in Europe, and which retains major military assets close to our border. This situation is not likely to change in the foreseeable future, but we do not envisage concrete threat from Russia at present.

There are 100 operational and roughly 60 obsolete nuclear submarines close to our borders, but an almost complete lack of storage and handling facilities for nuclear fuel. The problem of nuclear dumping, to say nothing of proliferation of warheads and nuclear material is alarming and may affect a number of countries.

This situation is such that we cannot and should not try to deal with it as a bilateral issue. We need the continued backing of our American and European partners. Neither Norway nor any other country can solve these problems alone. The recent White Paper on the nuclear situation in the North estimated the cost of cleaning up the nuclear problems in the Barents Region to be 200 billion US dollars. My point is that inaction will affect us all, not least due to the dangers of proliferation or theft of nuclear material.

By making the situation in the North an issue not only for Norway and NATO, but also for the European Union, we believe that we will have access to a wider range of policy instruments than that offered by the military aspects of security.

However, security is only one reason why I believe that Norway's interests would be best served if we become full members of the European Union.

When the referendum in 1972 ended in rejection of Norwegian membership of the EC, we knew little about how the petroleum sector would develop in Norway or how the other EC countries would react to these new possibilities on our continental shelf. As regards fisheries, national jurisdiction did not extend beyond the twelve-mile zone, and even within such zones, the six EC countries showed only a limited understanding of the dependence of our coastal population on fisheries resources.

Apart from these issues, general economic indicators suggested that the Norwegian economy was likely to develop in a more favourable direction than that of other EC countries at the time. The EC was a trading community which had by and large achieved its original purpose of removing sources of potential contention between France and Germany.

The main reason why Norway did not join the Community in 1972 was that the EC was insensitive to essential Norwegian requirements. I can well remember when Prime Minister Nordli, together with Minister of the environment Brundtland, visited Brussels in 1976 - the first Norwegian visit to Brussels at this level since the referendum. Gaston Thorn, who was member of the Commission and Prime Minister of Luxemburg, said with tears in his eyes that the Norwegian no had been his toughest political defeat and that he realized that the EC side had not listened to what the Norwegian Prime Minister had told them about the need for special arrangements.

We shall hold a new referendum before the end of the year to decide whether or not Norway is to become part of the most effective system of regional cooperation in the world, which before long is likely to include about twenty countries.

Not only are all these countries faced with the same kind of challenges; the challenges are actually the same. 20 years in active politics have taught me that democratic governance in a single country is subject to severe limitations.

Europe is ridden by unemployment. True, - some countries are facing more severe difficulties than others, but the European economy has become so integrated by the economic actors themselves that it is necessary for political authorities to work on the same level. Without coordination of policies and common priorities, measures taken in one country can easily be nullified by measures taken by other countries.

Environmental problems originate in one country and degrade the environment of another. Acidification in Norway is a good example of a problem that cannot be remedied by the afflicted side alone. Political authority in Norway alone can do very little. It has taken almost 20 years to achieve agreements which will help to reduce the problems in an effective way.

Exchange course changes may abruptly change the outlook for trade and threaten employment. The knowledge that courses might fluctuate opens up for speculation and hampers investment conditions. States may also use exchange rates as an economic weapon to the detriment of other states. Stable exchange courses, and later perhaps no exchange at all will thus help employment and investment.

Drug trafficking and organized crime are common problems throughout all of Europe and can best be combated if we join forces. These are only a few of the many examples why it is time to lift democratic decision-making to the level at which these common problems occur.

The ambitions set out in the Maastricht Treaty are not such that can be easily realized overnight. Many of them are complicated and difficult to understand and some may seem far removed from the problems people meet in their daily lives.

In many countries there has been insufficient debate about the reasons underlying the Treaty, and many people feel

alienated by the European political processes. The creative potential of Europeans will not be unleashed within a distant and technocratic perspective.

Europe will need a variety of means of political cooperation tailored to its own needs - some supranational, others international, national, regional and local. The debate about subsidiarity, - which means that decisions shall be taken at the level of the Union only when national or local decisions are inadequate - needs to be filled with meaning so that people see that they are not being disempowered, but rather that EU cooperation offers additional opportunities for democratic activities.

Subsidiarity should underpin our continuous effort to deal with our respective challenges at the level where they can most efficiently and legitimately be solved.

Europeans base their identity on their belonging to a region inside a nation state. This must not, however, blind us to the limits of what we can achieve at home. In today's Europe, there is a danger of resurrecting old-style patterns of power politics which have a poor record as a guarantor of peace and prosperity in Europe.

This is alarming in a world of growing complexities, where goods, capital, services and information move so quickly around the globe. All these challenges defy containment behind traditional borders. The nation state alone can no longer cope. Nuclear weapons, pollution, information technology and a global economy have all rendered aspects of nation state autonomy redundant. In fact, the concept of integration has become the recipe for survival of the nation state. As we approach a new century, an intensification of international cooperation is the only means whereby Europe will be able to assume the global role which is inherent in its potential.

These are realities common to all countries, and this is the basic reason why Norway applied for membership. Southern Europe was included in the 1980s and with the prospect that Central and Eastern European countries may follow as soon as they and the Union are ready, we see an incomplete Europe if the Nordic countries should remain outside.

The European Union may soon comprise Arctic areas, vast and sparsely populated expanses where conditions differ from those prevailing in the centre of Europe. The inclusion of Norway, Sweden and Finland will add several new dimensions to European cooperation and diversity. If the three Nordic applicant countries join the European Union, the total territory of the member states will increase by 50 per cent. The total population will, however, only increase by 5 per cent.

The inclusion of three Nordic countries will strengthen the efforts to promote further cohesion in Europe. As regards Norway, our main request in the negotiations has been that we wish to be able to maintain our own national cohesion. We will not contribute to European cohesion by reducing our own. In our own national policies we have had to deal with a harsh climate and its limiting effect on agricultural productivity and forestry. Our redistributive policies have aimed at providing as equal opportunities as possible in a country where settlements are scattered and far apart. It is the very notion of cohesion that has shaped our national policies of welfare and distribution. Living standards vary remarkably little from one part of the country to another.

The outcome of the negotiations confirm that we will be able to maintain our settlement patterns, our redistributive policies and control of our natural resources. It is essential for us that we can maintain settlements from Lindesnes in the south to Kirkenes in the north.

This was the background when we entered negotiations, poised to secure adequate guarantees in the fields of fisheries, agriculture, regional policy and energy.

These issues have certain features in common. They are all related to our particular demographic, topographic and climatic conditions. They are related to the control and management of natural resources, both renewable and non-renewable. And not least, the solutions to these issues will have a decisive bearing on popular support for Norway's accession to the European Community.

We did not challenge the existing legislation of the Union. What we did was to request that the realities in Norway should become part of, not exceptions to, the European public order.

Other European Prime Ministers or Foreign Ministers are rarely faced with the intricacies of fisheries policies. Some of them had a hard time understanding that access to fisheries resources could be allowed to decide the future configuration of European cooperation. For us, however, this is a vital issue. As a major fishery nation we have learned, sometimes the hard way, the importance of policies that secure the sustainable management of living marine resources. Hundreds of settlements in coastal Norway depend on these resources. The northern waters represent a particular challenge with their biological and climatic characteristics. Whereas species are heavily overfished in other waters, we have succeeded in restoring the size of many stocks back to their historical level.

For obvious reasons the instruments of the EU fisheries policy have not been developed with these waters in mind. In the course of negotiations we gained acceptance for the fact that our policy was, in many respects, superior to EU policy and that consequently, it would be advantageous for all if the substance of our policy were to be continued by the EU.

The petroleum sector is also of vital importance to Norway's economy. The contribution of this sector to our GDP is equivalent to the total contribution of mainland industry. It was important for us that the present Union member states understand and respect Norwegian concerns in the elaboration of future European energy policies. The results we obtained meet those requirements.

None of the solutions we requested represent hurdles on the future road towards European integration. Take our agricultural sector for example. Only three per cent of our territory is used for agricultural purposes. Our self-sufficiency is the lowest in Western Europe. An immediate transition to the Common Agricultural Policy would reduce our farmers' income by nearly 50 per cent overnight. Our agricultural sector will have very little impact on the European market. But it has a considerable role to play in safeguarding settlement in remote areas. At the end of the day, we achieved results that will allow for a continued development of Norwegian agriculture and adequate transitional periods, including national support systems.

I would now like to say a few words about the most pressing challenge we face today - that of rising unemployment. More than 22 million unemployed in the European OECD countries is a threat to the stability of our political systems and to the cohesion of our social systems.

We believe that firmer economic and monetary cooperation in Europe is absolutely essential. The recent monetary turbulence has brought back memories of times when one country could export its internal problems to its neighbour by means of currency devaluations. Ultimately, this is in nobody's interest. We all end up as losers.

Norway is close to fulfilling the convergence criteria for the Economic and Monetary Union set out in the Maastricht Treaty.

The debate you will see in Norway in the coming months is likely to focus on several issues that are relevant for the future of Norway and some that are not.

The assertion put forward by some opponents of membership that the issue at stake is whether or not Norway will remain a sovereign country is in my mind the one that most clearly misses the mark.

No one would think of denoting Italy, France or the Netherlands as anything other than sovereign countries. The EU receives its competence and authority from the people of the member countries. They are the masters of the Union. They can expand the Union, limit the Union or change the Union by mutual consent.

The German constitutional court has ruled that the Union is a federation of states, not a federal state. These states may choose to dissolve the Union if they so wish, and the member states would remain.

Should the Union act against the vital interests of a member state, then that state would face a fundamental change of circumstances and would be able to leave the Union. This would be unfortunate for Europe and for the rest of the world.

Historically speaking, political alliances have as a rule been concluded for an unlimited period. This is an expression of the members' intention to establish long-lasting cooperation.

I believe that we are entering a period of stronger regional cooperation, not only in Europe, but globally. I do not see such a pattern of organization as setting regions against one another. Cooperation and integration have not progressed unequally far in all regions. The Middle East, Southeast Asia, and Latin America are all in need of regional

cooperation while concrete projects have made unequal progress.

General principles and rules of international cooperation are being refined to a certain stage in in general agreements such as GATT, or the special agencies of the United Nations. Regional cooperation fills in and refines the common rules at the regional level, allowing for tailor-made solutions reflecting the state of development in each region.

At the Rio Conference on environment and development, we experienced first hand the challenge of making decisions applicable to all countries in fields which directly affect the economic life of states. Global agreements have to be implementet and elaborated at the regional level. Population issues are different in Europe and Africa, as are environmental problems and access to education.

Regional European cooperation can and must benefit other regions as well. Europe has a lot more to contribute to global affairs, and a clear responsibility to act more vigorously than is presently the case.

If Europe is unable to organize itself politically and enlarge the benefits to be shared by all, then it is difficult to see where and how regional cooperation can be successful. It is with this global outlook in mind that the future of Europe must be constructed.