

Akershus Slott

Statsminister

Jan P. Syse

TALE VED MIDDAGEN FOR DET DIPLOMATISKE KORPS -
16. JANUAR 1990 KL. 2000

Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

You are most welcome. I am so glad to see you all here at Akershus Castle. For seven hundred years this Castle has been the very centre of Norway, in peace and war. It was built as a fortress. As Shakespeare put it: "A rock, that served us in the office of a wall, against the envy of less happy breeds." To-day we are not aware of any such envy, but might understand that others have thought Akershus a magnificent place to possess. I am glad we held the fort. Otherwise I don't know where we could have held tonight's dinner.

Speaking of time: The Dean of Windsor once asked King George V what he would like him to preach about. To which the King answered: About ten minutes! It is my ambition to keep well within the limits of this Royal Command.

It took us Scandinavians some hundred years to learn that peace is better than war. But in the end we discovered that we are friendly and peaceful when

independent, but tend to be aggressive when invaded. So we opted for peace.

In that sense we meet tonight at the right time, in the right place for the right event, a festive occasion. And perhaps that was the original purpose for building castles. Then I see the full sense of what I once read about Kieler Schloss in Germany, some words of wisdom which I have always remembered, and which I now dedicate to Akershus:

- denn wozu hat man eigentlich Schlösser gebaut? Um darin essen und trinken zu können! Politik und Handel waren früher wie heute nur Vorwand. Der gute Geist des Essens und Trinkens ist seit 700 Jahren im Akershus Schloss zu Hause. -- I feel sure that many will say that for once politics and trade are correctly ranked. For this evening I agree.

Staying in an old castle like this gives a feeling of being part of history. A true conservative myself, and I don't spy many revolutionaries among those seated here either, this historic continuity brings serenity.

The history of Akershus itself makes it a symbol of independence and sovereignty. All of us here are representatives of sovereign states who, by being sovereign, are able to work in harmony with others, and to settle disputes before they are fought out in the military battlefield.

As we enter the last decade of this century, the challenge is to shape new patterns of cooperation and security on our continent as well as other continents. An exciting task and a difficult one. The healing of Europe will require that we strike the right balance between change and stability. If the emphasis is put too much on change - then we could run the risk of creating new and unexpected instabilities. If the emphasis is put too heavily on stability - then we would fail to meet the aspirations of our peoples.

But Europe would fail if the new prospects on our continent led to an introvert concentration on ourselves. Our ties across the Atlantic must remain firm and strong. Our cooperation with other parts of the global society must not be pushed aside as a result of our own new European efforts.

Formerly one used to say of diplomats that they enabled states to declare war on each other in a civilised manner. That may have been true. But even in times of war diplomacy remained the means by which peace could be restored. Today we see you ever more clearly as warriors for peace.

On occasions like the one tonight there is always the question of which language to use. Your own tongue? French - the language of diplomats? Latin - the language of scholars? The Queen's English? Or simply simple English?

But in the end it doesn't matter. In Norway we are living next door to the Finns, who are doing splendidly all over the world without anybody - except perhaps the Hungarians - understanding their language. (Perhaps that is the trick.)

The Finns have even convinced the world that Santa Claus is living in Finland, whereas we all know him to be a true Norwegian.

I see before me tonight the united nations. There's a song that would be appropriate for an occasion like this: "We are the world". Old nations, and new. Some of you were already around at the time when the ice cap over Norway had not yet melted. Others are even younger than we are. As a nation of seafarers we discovered the Americas before they did so themselves, but we forgot about it. We lost England in a similar fit of absentmindedness, at Stamford Bridge in 1066.

(But we think the British have run themselves fairly well since then.)

The Norwegians have always gone around the world like that. We were the first to reach the South Pole, the whole point being to see that nobody had been there before us, which they hadn't. Then we went home.

Later on we started shipping our aquavite to Australia and back, just to make sure it is drinkable. Which it is.

Right now we have taken on the Winter Olympics, at the very time when winters started passing us by.

I trust that's why you have come to serve here. To see a country that is fairly enterprising, slightly eccentric, partly inhabitable but mostly hospitable. We are glad to have you here. And we are especially glad to have you with us tonight.

We are proud of the excellent diplomatic representatives present here. We interpret the high standard of the diplomatic corps accredited to Oslo as a compliment to our country. It is our view that the cooperation between all of you and Norwegian authorities are excellent. We intend to keep it that way. Permit me, on behalf of the Norwegian Government, to propose a toast to you all and wish you success in your private lives as well as in our common endeavours.