

Prime Minister
Jan P. Syse

Meeting of EFTA Heads of Government

Gothenburg, 14 June 1990

The EES-negotiations

Mr. Chairman, dear colleagues,

Most anniversaries invite the celebrators to look at past achievements. This is not that kind of anniversary. We didn't come here to celebrate our past. We came here to look forward; to take the next important steps. But we can also be proud of our achievements. We have given a valuable contribution to free trade and to the economic and social welfare on our continent.

Our Ministers and representatives came here to gather the loose ends and to set the stage. They have done so successfully under excellent Swedish chairmanship.

Our negotiators are ready and well prepared to sit down with their counterparts of the European Community. In one week they will launch the formal negotiations to create a European Economic Space. That work will not be easy, it will be one of EFTA's most crucial challenges since its foundation 30 years ago. Today, our task is to give our negotiators firm support and a clear marching order; to unite in a determined effort to achieve our common goals.

I insist on that term; common goals. It is essential. The EES-process was given a decisive new momentum in January last year. At that time, President Delors presented his challenging ideas to the EFTA countries - as a group. Together, we gave him our reply at the Oslo-summit two months later. And together - acting in unison and speaking with one voice we

successfully concluded the exploratory phase. That is indeed an important achievement.

Two basic options were on our table: To proceed individually or together in search for a new and more structured partnership with the European Community. We could have continued down the bilateral track. Instead we decided to rally our forces and to go forward together. The Oslo Declaration does not rule out bilateral contacts with the EC. But it is above all a clear manifestation of our belief that we can best succeed in our common endeavour together.

Now is the time to live up to that commitment, to go forward with determination and a clear sense of purpose. At the present phase of European integration the EES-process represents a major opportunity for the EFTA countries. It must be fully exploited. The ground has been prepared.

To speak with one voice is a basic prerequisite for success. It will give us the strength we need in the future negotiations. And it will make us a credible partner for the European Community. But equally important; speaking with one voice will be the clearest demonstration of our political will to make full use of the process we have launched together. There will not be a second try. Our ability to act as EFTA will determine the future ability of EFTA to act. What is at stake is our credibility.

Strengthening EFTA will be another prerequisite. Let us get the proportions right. There is no question of creating a mini-version of the European Community. The EFTA pillar can never equal the EC pillar in size, institutions or basic principles.

But it is by adequately strengthening our EFTA pillar that we can become the other entity of the partnership. In our declaration from the Gothenburg meeting we call for an

appropriate legal and institutional framework. A framework which can safeguard the homogeneity of the European Economic Space. We reaffirm our commitment to strengthen EFTA's structures and decision-making capacity. Time has now come to turn these solemn declarations into deeds. Good intentions are not enough. It is not by talking about a realistic EFTA-pillar, but by building it that we can be credible when we ask for a decision-making system with equal rights and obligations.

Much has changed since the Oslo-Brussels-process was launched. At an unprecedented speed European nations seek new ways of cooperation and integration. More and more of the present challenges require common solutions.

This new political climate should encourage us in our pursuit of the objectives we have set for the EFTA/EC-process. Our ambition should be a truly comprehensive EES-agreement, which will secure an active role for the EFTA countries in the shaping of future European cooperation.

We must also provide the agreement with a dynamic and evolutionary element to enable us in the future to update and enlarge the scope of our cooperation. We are agreed that an EES-agreement will go beyond the four freedoms. It must cover other vital issues such as the environment, education, research and the social dimension of integration. In principle, this part of the agreement should be made open ended. New areas of cooperation could then be added as we proceed.

Earlier today, we discussed the broader perspectives of the future European architecture. We agreed that a European Economic Space can be a valuable contribution to European integration.

Our negotiations will add a new political dimension to our

cooperation with the Community. How should this be done? A comprehensive agreement on trade and economic cooperation among 400 million Europeans will in itself constitute a building block in the political construction of our continent.

The detailed modalities of this cooperation will be a subject for the future negotiations. But we should be open for frequent involvement of Ministers and Heads of Government to give a practical political dimension to the EES cooperation. We should be ready to a pragmatic, informal and flexible political dialogue between EES-ministers. A new culture of political dialogue is emerging on our continent. The EFTA-countries must form part of that culture.

The political dimension of the European Economic Space will not embrace issues of security and foreign policy. In this field our countries have different obligations and priorities. But that must not prevent us from seeking a broad and fruitful dialogue wherever such a dialogue is appropriate.

Mr.Chairman,

When the EFTA Heads of Government last met they launched the Oslo-Brussels process. We are coming out of the last curve, we are entering the final stretch. Our task is to bring the process to a successful conclusion. An unambiguous political signal is required; that we are determined to stand together and able to speak with one voice. Success will depend on our ability to unite on common positions. All the details need not be sorted out. Our platform will have to be modified as negotiations proceed. But the main elements must be ready from the outset.

In the months to come, the European Community, our future partner, will be our counterpart. Negotiations will be difficult. That is normal. We embark on a road that nobody has travelled before us. There is no blueprint to follow. But

Europe of the 1990's is ambitious. Let us too be ambitious.

Being in Gothenburg I find it appropriate to quote the Swedish entertainer Povel Ramel who once said: Even if you are on the right track you may be run down if you just sit there.

So let us proceed!