

Oslo, 18 October 1990

Prime Minister Jan P. Syse

OPENING ADDRESS TO THE CONFERENCE ON THE SOCIAL DIMENSION OF
EUROPEAN INTEGRATION.

Ministers, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Europe today is a continent where barriers are being dismantled. Instead of confronting each other, Europeans can finally join forces and confront problems and challenges that we all have in common.

For years, the debate has been on the economic dimension of European integration. The social dimension has over the years been too much of a side-issue. It is therefore a great pleasure to welcome representatives of governments, European institutions, trade unions and employer organizations from what is soon to be the European Economic Area. It is encouraging that the European Community and the EFTA countries can address the social dimension together.

President Delors has repeatedly stressed that the internal market will not work unless the rights of the individuals are secured - and even more important, unless the citizens feel that their concerns are taken into account. I fully agree. What is true for the completion of the internal market is equally true for the creation of the European Economic Area.

Our citizens have the right to expect that European integration will lead to a better life for all. That is, after all, what our efforts are all about. It must be perceived by people, in their daily life. It is useful to remind ourselves of this fundamental objective. If the results of our endeavours are not good for people, and seen by them to be good, then there is no point in what we are doing.

The completion of the European Economic Area will be beneficial to all of us. Cooperation - and competition - will grow. But we must go further. We have shown our political

determination to create a unified market. Now we must demonstrate our political determination to make that market a good place for people to live and work.

Helmut Schmidt once said that "Markets are like parachutes - they only function when open". But a free and open market is no end in itself. It is merely a means - the best means found so far - to achieve the most efficient allocation of productive resources. Our large European market must be monitored to ensure that it functions effectively. It must be adjusted to achieve social justice. The German expression "Soziale Marktwirtschaft" - a social market economy - embraces all these dimensions.

This is what the social dimension of the European Economic Area is all about. Our citizens do have legitimate concerns that we must meet. They have legitimate questions to which we must give satisfactory answers. Let me point out some of the challenges we face in this respect:

1. A more efficient economy will require restructuring efforts. Some of today's jobs will disappear. If the process is managed correctly, new and sound jobs will be created. But we must make sure that the safety nets are there.
2. Technological progress will make our industry more competitive. But it will also make greater demands on the qualifications of the workforce. The right to education and training is essential. We must see to that our educational system, at a national as well as a European level, be shaped to meet these demands.
3. A freer flow of capital and growing competition could lead to a pressure on regulations concerning health and safety, and even create a risk of so-called "social

dumping". Our harmonization of norms and standards must point upwards, not downwards.

4. A greater mobility of people will benefit our economy as well as the individual, - provided that those who move do not lose their social rights.
5. Increased internationalization will be a welcome result of stronger European integration. But we will have to seek new answers to the questions of workers' participation in these new structures. Our national experience of such participation is unambiguously positive. I see no reason why similar arrangements should not be developed at a European level.

In Norway and other EFTA countries, we have noted with great interest and satisfaction that all these questions are now high on the agenda of the European Community. The adoption last year, by 11 Member States, of the "Community Charter of the Fundamental Social Rights of Workers" represents a valuable step.

This Charter was conceived as a direct response to concerns expressed by the European trade unions. The dialogue which has been established at a European level between the social partners and the authorities, as well as internally between the social partners, is of great importance. The social partners of the EFTA countries also participate in this dialogue, through their membership in the European Trade Unions' Confederation and the Union of Industrial and Employers' Confederations of Europe.

It is equally significant that the Charter was adopted at the highest political level. And it is interesting to note that the citizens of the European Community, through their political representatives in the European Parliament, attach great importance to these issues.

The social dimension has been put on the European agenda. The EFTA countries have much to offer, and want to contribute actively and constructively to this process. Let me suggest that we in EFTA consider endorsing the Social Charter adopted by the Community.

I want to be clear on this point: The European Economic Area must not be limited to the four freedoms alone. One of our negotiating groups is dealing with what we call the "flanking issues", including the social dimension. These are issues that point forward, towards a cooperation that embraces dimensions of both economic and social life. I expect that our negotiations will be as ambitious in this field as in the others.

This conference will be an important contribution to the on-going process of reflection. But we must go beyond the phase of reflection. Common action is required. Your participation here in Oslo makes a most promising point of departure.

The challenge before us is to create a more integrated Europe where the rights and needs of all our citizens are at the centre of our endeavours. The principles that must guide us - principles of social justice, of freedom and participation - form part of our common European heritage. They represent one of the most valuable contributions Europe can offer the world community. But they will only inspire others if we take them seriously.

I wish the conference success.