

Statsminister Willochs innleing i
rundebordsmøte med EF-kommisjonen 23.11.83

Mr. President,

The European Community is the focal point of European integration. Through the EC an invaluable instrument has been created for the promotion of the interests of the member countries. Through this process new European habits of cooperation have been created.

Today the EC-countries, through the Council, the Commission, the European Parliament and more recently the European Political Cooperation, are assuming a European role in world affairs. My Government welcomes and supports this development as it is to the advantage of all European countries that European interests are given greater weight in relation to the outside world.

Norway's decision in 1972 not to become a member of the EC, although it sets certain political limits, must not be regarded as hampering our

willingness to participate in European cooperation. (2)

The continued enlargement of the scope of cooperation and consultations, between the Community and Norway which now covers most fields of government policy, is proof of this.

Our informal working arrangement with the European Political Cooperation is an expression of our desire to develop extensive contacts in the field of foreign policy.

I want to emphasize the interest of my government to continue to make the fullest use of all channels of cooperation, the formal agreements as well as the numerous informal contacts with the Commission, in order to further the process of European cooperation.

EFTA provides an important addition to our bilateral contacts. EFTA is the Community's single most important market, and the relationship developed through a decade of European free trade calls for close and special relations between the Community and EFTA. We should together explore further the possibilities for enlarged cooperation also along this multilateral avenue.

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We have passed through a period of very poor economic performance, resulting in the longest and deepest global recession of the post-war period. Although we should be careful not to overestimate the positive signs now emerging,

we seem to be - at least in the short term - on the path of recovery. In such circumstances it is important to pursue policies which aim at sustained growth without increasing inflation anew.

The solutions to the serious unemployment problem must be sought through policy measures which will have a lasting effect, without cementing unproductive and outdated industries. This is indeed a very complicated and difficult task.

In the monetary and financial fields, one can safely say that all has not been well lately. The enormous debts incurred by a number of the more expansive developing countries have indeed shaken the financial system. The role of the international financial institutions is very important and I think you would agree with me on the importance of the quota increase of the IMF coming into effect as soon as possible. This is a necessity to help avoid both political and financial difficulties in some of the debtor countries.

Recent years have been marked by a spreading tendency to counteract domestic problems by invoking short-term trade policy measures with little or no consideration for the negative effects on trading partners and on the national economy in the long run. Economic development itself has amply demonstrated how closely interlinked the economies of the Western countries are.

My government is determined to strive at international cooperation on the widest possible basis to safeguard what has been achieved through many years of trade liberalization. I welcome the initiative to implement a process of renewed liberalisation in the form of a "roll-back" of protectionist measures. I can clearly see that this could involve problems domestically, particularly in the fields of agriculture and textiles. However, my government is still prepared to join forces with the EC on this issue.

Turning to the international energy situation, the dominant feature is the present surplus of production capacity. However, underlying trends point towards tighter market conditions in the longer term. In

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addition, uncertainties about short-term developments remain.

Western Europe imports a substantial share of its oil and gas requirements. In the conclusions of the IEA Ministerial Meeting in May this year, it was stated that a diversification of energy sources is desirable in order to increase the security of supply. In this context, future gas supplies should be contracted from secure sources, with emphasis on sources within the OECD.

In 1982, gas from the Norwegian continental shelf covered about 12 per cent of the gas consumption in Western Europe. In the years to come, substantial additional quantities of Norwegian gas may be delivered, provided technical and commercial conditions permit a continued development of the very significant reserves. Let me in this context mention that just recently part of the important Troll field has been declared commercially viable. However, should there prove to be a diminishing interest in Norwegian gas in the time ahead, the resource base would allow us to give priority to oil field development.

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Shipping plays a very important role in the Norwegian economy. Consequently, my government appreciates the useful consultation arrangement we have with the Commission in this field. A major goal for all

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trading countries should be to allow a competitive market system for this important industry, based on free access to transport services for all shipping nations. In my view, we would all benefit if such principles prevail, since protectionism also in this field inevitably means more expensive and less efficient services, hampering the development of world trade. The Norwegian government will spare no efforts in its work to prevent the spread of protectionist shipping policies. We hope that this will also remain the prevailing policy of the Community, and are aware of the key role the Commission may play in this context.

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