

Speech by Prime Minister Willoch at the lunch given by the Norwegian Government in honour of the President of Italy, Mr. Francesco Cossiga, on Sunday 11 August 1985.

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Your Excellency, President Cossiga, ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure and honour for me to be able to welcome the <sup>President</sup> of the Italian Republic to Norway. I wish to emphasise the particular pleasure it gives the Norwegian Government and people that you have chosen Norway as the destination of your first journey abroad as President. Let us take this as a sure sign that contacts between our two countries will be even closer and more frequent in the years to come.

To a great many nations and at all times, Italy has been a magnet. As we know, from antiquity, all roads led to Rome, and the flow of people to Italy has been un<sup>n</sup>interrupted ever since. For us it started, in fact, a thousand years ago, when the Norwegian viking king, Harald Hadråde, raided the Mediterranean and spent several years in Sicily - which he called Sikiløy - where he conquered eighty cities, according to the Saga of the ancient historian Snorre. However, what has meant most to Norway are other more peaceful, more fruitful and more recent contacts.

Our dramatist Henrik Ibsen spent a number of years in Italy about a century ago, drawing inspiration, for some of his major works. Norwegian student, artists and archeologists not to mention tourists by the thousands, have since followed in his footsteps, in order to experience and study classical Italy and the enormous cultural treasures your country possesses. Ever since classical antiquity, Italy has been a creator and keeper of culture; awareness of Italy's attractions as a cultural centre is today increasing in our country, as is our interest in the Italian language.

To give Italians a similar opportunity to acquaint themselves with Norwegian, a Norwegian Institute has been established in Rome, and Norwegian lecturers are seconded to a number of Italian universities.

These cultural ties have, of course, a significance which reaches far beyond the realm of culture into the political field: The cultural aspects of foreign relations are, in my opinion, bound to become more important as a more distinct and common European political identity emerges, with shared cultural traditions as one of its strongest elements.

Mr. President, like Italy, Norway is dependent on and takes a close interest in current economic and political developments in Europe. The fact that in 1972 Norway chose to remain outside the European community has not prevented us from taking part in the decision-making process which has since shaped and is still shaping political cooperation in Europe. Norway has thus attempted to prevent any reduction of Norwegian influence in Europe, at a time when Norway's actual importance has been increasing, as a result, among other things, of our energy resources and of strategic developments.

In the development of Norway as a supplier of large quantities of energy to Europe, Italy plays an important part as a cooperating partner, suffice it to mention the Italian petroleum company AGIP's participation in the North Sea and the large deliveries from Italian shipyards and suppliers to the off-shore operations.

The substantial and constructive part played by Italy in the European Community, illustrated by her recent chairmanship has contributed to increases in our political contacts with Italy which have a very special significance.

Norway takes a favourable view of the increasingly extensive and practical modes of European cooperation, such as Eureka and ESA, which are also open to interested countries not party to the EC's formal agreements. This attitude is based on Norway's clear political support for the idea of strengthening the European identity and giving Western Europe greater political weight in international affairs.

Italy and Norway also cooperate closely in NATO. Last year, Italian mountain troops were among the participants in NATO's "Avalanche Express" exercise. Italy's contribution to NATO is invaluable to Norway and to our fundamental Atlantic cooperation in the defence of Western democratic values.

Permit me to mention once again, Mr. President, how happy we are that, at the busy beginning of your period as President of Italy, you nevertheless found occasion to visit Norway. I am certain that your visit, like those of Foreign Minister Colombo in 1982 and of State Secretary Fioret two months ago, will contribute to the further strengthening of the ties between our two countries.

With this I propose a toast to the President of Italy and to the strengthening of the ties between Italy and Norway.