

IP(90)35

**PRESSE-MEDDELELSE • MITTEILUNG AN DIE PRESSE • PRESS-RELEASE • INFORMATION A LA PRESSE
ΑΝΑΚΟΙΝΩΣΗ ΓΙΑ ΤΟΝ ΤΥΠΟ • INFORMAZIONE ALLA STAMPA • MEDEDELING AAN DE PERS**

EMBARGO
16h00 UK time
Friday 19 January 1990

420.43
441.2(3)

EUROPE : THE CHALLENGES OF CHANGE

Extracts from the speech by Sir Leon Brittan
Vice-President of the European Commission
to Sixth Formers of Leighton Park School
Reading, 19 January 1990

"One by one the peoples of Eastern Europe have risen up against totalitarianism. Even Romania's nasty dynastic dictatorship has fallen. It is a glorious awakening : a time of hope and excitement. Yet it also poses formidable challenges for us all. How should Europe now order its affairs?

The first point I would make is that the earthquake is still going on, and the new landscape has yet to emerge from the dust.

That emphatically does not mean we should stand back and wait. But we should resist the temptation to think that because Europe's post-war order has collapsed in a few short months we must create a new European architecture just as quickly. We must beware of floating Grand Designs which offer neat 'solutions' in terms of new relationships between existing groupings in Europe.

"Eastern Europe" is about as far from being a monolithic bloc as might be imagined. The countries of the European Free Trade Area, EFTA, are much closer to one another, politically and economically - but their interests, too, diverge in important respects. And there are great differences between the interests of the various Mediterranean countries bordering on the European Community.

The European Community's role

Yet I would exempt the European Community itself from my general observation about the dangers of thinking in terms of established groupings. For the Community's achievement - especially in the last five years - has been to develop a new kind of relationship between sovereign countries. And instead of being overtaken by the pace and scope of recent events, the Community has become more intensely relevant than ever.

Let me explain my reasons for offering this judgement :

- First the Community is a unique, and a uniquely successful, experiment in collaboration and common decision-making between independent democratic countries. As powerful forces of nationalism resurface in Eastern Europe, within the Soviet Union, and in Germany, we are bound to see the reemergence of ancient ethnic rivalries and regional tensions. Indeed this is already occurring. In such a world the Community offers an important model of how sovereignty can be pooled without diluting national pride or regional identity.
- Second, the European Community offers a centre of gravity and political stability in Europe, and this is desperately needed in times of such rapid change.
- Third, the European Community offers a mechanism for immediate common action to help the countries of Eastern Europe to build the competitive economies which are crucial if they are to sustain and develop their new political freedoms. In a unique and highly significant development, last summer, the 24 OECD countries called on the Commission of the European Communities to coordinate joint efforts to help Poland and Hungary. Ten years, or even five years ago, it is inconceivable that we would have been given that task.
- Economic adjustment cannot, of course, be divorced from wider issues. And this leads to a fourth reason why the European Community's role is pivotal in present circumstances. We offer the most appropriate means for developing a common political approach to developments in Eastern Europe.

Completing the 1992 programme

The Community, then, has become a natural focus. It offers a pole of attraction in Europe. Some people have suggested that because of recent events we should stop devilling away at the detail of the European Community's further development, and lift our eyes exclusively to these wider horizons. I believe that those who think in this way are profoundly mistaken. Continuing and enhancing the progress towards 1992 and beyond is not an alternative to helping the countries of Eastern Europe. It is the best way of enabling us to give them practical assistance.

What service would it be to them if we jeopardized the basis of our present and future prosperity? What service to them if we delayed our drive towards economic and monetary union which will provide a rock of low inflation and sound money at the heart of Europe?

It is part of our contribution towards the emerging democracies of Eastern Europe - and a very important part, at that - that we should complete the process we have started within the Community.