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FOREIGN POLICY IN THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITY

Extract from a Speech by Sir Leon Brittan
to The Marketing Group of Great Britain
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Since the Gulf War began, commentators have been falling over one another to pour scorn on the gap between the European Community's heady aspirations and its performance when the chips are down. What good is all that rhetoric about common values, they say, if the Community cannot deliver? One day the Twelve were standing four-square and united behind the UN resolutions, agreeing that no purpose could be served by further talks. Next day a Member State launched a high-profile initiative without even the pretence of consultation with partners. When the war actually began the critics were quick to pounce on what they saw as a wide divergence between the show of common political support for the international effort, and the very different levels of financial and military commitment. What price a common foreign policy now?

It is true that the Gulf has brutally exposed the limitations that currently frustrate common action by the Community. Jacques Delors admitted as much in the European Parliament last week. Douglas Hurd was restrained in describing the Community's response as patchy.

Yet it is easy to overstate the extent of Community disarray: and there is danger of drawing the wrong conclusions. It is no use criticizing the Community for not being what its Member States have so far not wanted it to be.

The truth is that the Community responded quickly and effectively where it was competent to do so. Even before the UN Security Council imposed comprehensive sanctions, the Community had agreed an embargo and an asset freeze. Once the UN did act the Community had not only prepared but enacted the necessary implementing legislation for the embargo within 48 hours. Since then, the Community has been active in channelling emergency aid to refugees, and agreement has been reached on giving balance of payments support to the countries around Iraq which are hardest hit by their support for the international effort.

The problems have arisen in matters of foreign policy, where the Community as such is not competent. True, there are now structures of coordination between the Twelve Member States. These structures have been brought within the Treaty of Rome, and cooperation has come on a long way in recent years. But the structures are still inadequate for the traffic they are expected to bear. Matters of defence fall entirely outside their scope.

Ah ha ! say the critics. You claim the problem is merely institutional. But what good are Rolls Royce institutions if there is no underlying unity of purpose ? My reply is that the two are not distinct. Common policies, in any field, do not spring out fully-armed, like Athena. The whole history of the Single Market has demonstrated that joint policies have to be fashioned. Common policies need strong common mechanisms for their creation. And these mechanisms have to be tested over time to discover their full potential.

That is why the work on foreign policy which is taking place within the Inter-Governmental Conference launched in December - far from being rendered irrelevant by the developments of the last few weeks - has become more relevant than ever. The Community must do everything in its power to develop a political contribution which will match its economic and commercial role. This will not happen overnight, and it is certainly important not to give up the existing way of handling crises before something better is put in its place.

I hope, therefore, that the Inter-Governmental Conference, insofar as it relates to foreign policy, may achieve :

First, the full incorporation of political and security cooperation into the European Community. The careful distinctions we have to make at present between positions and policies of the Twelve and of the Community proper are tiresome to sustain, and they reduce our joint impact.

Second, the abandonment of limitative definitions of the areas of policy which are accepted within the ambit of the Community's political cooperation. The Community must be free to discuss what it wants, including military and defence issues.

Third, stronger institutional mechanisms for achieving common positions and initiatives. The role of the Commission, of the European Council of Heads of Government, of the Council of Ministers - whether meeting at the level of Foreign Ministers, or even of Defence Ministers - all need proper definition. And Ministers need adequate support from senior officials in preparing joint decisions (as they have in other areas of Community business).

Fourth, agreement that the European Council of Heads of Government, acting by consensus, may determine specific areas in which the Community should agree genuinely common foreign policy.

Fifth, the elimination from the Treaty of Rome of the Article which excludes arms production and trade from the normal rules and disciplines of the market. At present, a simple reference to national interest enables Member States discriminate against defence products coming from elsewhere in the Community, in a way that is forbidden for all other goods. This has been damaging to us all, and contributed to the so-called "one-way street" of US arms sales to NATO. It has meant that our armed forces have not always been able to get the best value for money.

Most importantly, I hope the Inter-Governmental Conference may at last begin to shape the European pillar of NATO. For decades it could be said of European defence cooperation, as Mark Twain said of the weather, that everyone talked about it, but no-one did anything about it. Now - in the context of NATO and a continuing US presence in Europe - we need to

develop a European Defence Community based on the European Community itself, which would replace the Eurogroup and the Independent European Programme Group within NATO. In the first instance such a Community would limit itself to policy coordination, joint research, defence trade issues, and so on. It would, most emphatically, be part of NATO. It would constitute the long-sought European wing within the Atlantic Alliance.

Conclusion

This is a time when the European Community should show proper humility - recognizing the limits of what it can currently offer to Europe, and to its members. But nor should we postpone decisions about future foreign policy coordination which are now more urgent than ever.

It seems clear that one consequence of the dramatic developments in Europe and the Soviet Union over the past 18 months is that the US will scale down its presence here. I suspect that this trend may be accelerated in the aftermath of the Gulf War. There is no point in the countries of Europe calling one another names, blaming each other for recent discord. Rather, we must redouble our efforts to create the institutions which will enable us to pursue more coherent European policy in the future, and help us to determine the course of events which may affect us more closely than anyone else.

Paradoxically, by achieving greater coherence and unity, we are likely to strengthen the hand of those in America who want to maintain their commitment to an active role in Europe. By the same token, we will weaken the arguments of those who are impatient with Europe's inability to play a proper role in looking after its own interests, and who are therefore tempted to reduce America's commitment to Europe.