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EC VICE PRESIDENT SOAMES COMMENTS ON COMMON MARKET TREATY WITH NORWAY

WASHINGTON, DC -- May 17, 1973 -- The European Community and Norway signed a trade agreement in Brussels on May 14. The accord with Norway -- which rejected membership in the Common Market in a referendum held last September -- is on lines similar to treaties signed with other member states of the European Free Trade Association (EFTA).

Speaking at the signing ceremony in the Egmont Palace, EC Commission Vice President Christopher Soames expressed the hope that Norway would one day join the Community.

Soames said:

"Just over 15 months ago the treaties marking the enlargement of the Community [from six to nine nations] were signed in this very place, and six months later in July 1972 the enlarged Community signed agreements here with five EFTA countries who were not joining the Community.

"The main purpose of these agreements was to avoid a situation where progress in the construction of Europe by the members of the Community would mean a setback in wider European relations. Then in September 1972 came the Norwegian referendum.

"The decision of the Norwegian people is something that we must respect and understand, but I must honestly say that it is one which caused us disappointment. There are many who hope that one day Norway may decide to join the Community -- but meanwhile it was necessary to have further negotiations to establish the relationship between Norway and the Community. These have been carried out in an atmosphere of firm political will and with a sense of urgency on both sides.

"On the side of the Community I would only recall the decision at the Paris [Summit] Conference in October 1972, and the resolution adopted in March this year by the European Parliament expressing the wish that the negotiations could be finished in time for the first tariff reductions to come into effect on April 1 -- simultaneously with those between the Community and the other EFTA countries. We have not quite met that timetable, but we have been able to ensure that the first tariff cuts will take place on July 1.

"The framework for the negotiations was largely determined in advance by the existence of the agreements with the other EFTA countries. Our signatures today confirm that within this framework we have been able to reach an agreement -- a fair and balanced agreement which takes account of the particular aspects and problems of relations between the Community and Norway.

"To this extent the agreement represents a consolidation. But we must also see it as a gateway to future progress. We are today demonstrating our common desire to work toward the construction of Europe.

"The Norwegian referendum has perhaps served to remind us that Europe is still an imprecise idea, and that as long as this is so public opinion can be expected to treat it on occasion with reservations. The Community exists to change the course of events and to establish the foundations for future peace and prosperity, and perhaps the very size of this undertaking has made it difficult to project the image of the Europe we are building as clearly as we would like.

"We have undertaken to transform the Community into a European union by the end of the decade. This is an enormously ambitious program. As it evolves, the Community's image will be more clearly defined. It is our firm hope that we shall be able during this process to count on the contribution which the people of Norway can make to our common enterprise."