

SPEECH BY THE RT. HON. SIR CHRISTOPHER SOAMES TO THE CONFERENCE OF
THE CHRISTIAN DEMOCRAT UNION, HANOVER, TUESDAY 25 MAY 1976.

Mr Chairman,

It is for me more than an honour to take part in this Conference - it is also a pleasure to be among friends, and to have this opportunity to salute the contribution of German Christian Democracy to the cause of European unity.

This contribution is more than a matter of philosophy and principle - although over the years your movement has repeatedly given proof that your commitment to European unity is built upon an unshakable bedrock of fundamental principle.

More than that - your efforts have been practical, serious, painstaking, even in the arid years of opposition. And I should like to pay a particular tribute to the contribution that has been made within the sphere of my responsibility for the external relations of the European Community by your representatives at the European Parliament, notably by Herr Klepsch and Herr Jahn, Herr Blumenfeld and Herr Schulz.

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Mr Chairman: the main problem that we are facing today in Europe can be stated quite succinctly in a single phrase - our governments are not paying sufficient regard to the European dimension of their national affairs. In all our countries the people have shown in countless ways - through Gallop polls, in the British referendum - that they applaud the concept of European unity. They want it to succeed, and they want Europe to take its proper place in the world. And it is up to us, especially in the Christian Democrat Movement and in the Conservative Party, to make this possible.

Let us look for instance at one or two aspects of this in the field of external affairs.

There is a growing contrast between the relative strength of Russia and that of Europe. For the moment there is an atmosphere of surface calm. A so-called "relaxation of tension" has been taking place. But the underlying fact is that our Europe is more vulnerable today than she has been for more than a decade.

The increasing military imbalance is only a part of this story. The roots of our weakness towards the East go deep. They are nourished by the apparent lack of cohesion and of a sense of purpose in Western Europe today.

In economic and commercial matters - where above all we should surely be making full use of the strength and the negotiating power that is ours when we stand together as a Community - we find instead that our Governments again and again yield to the temptation of bilateral dealing. To what effect? One Member state is played off against another so that whatever interest is being served it is certainly not that of the Community.

/The heart

The heart of the matter is that we cannot be strong unless we have a clear and firm understanding of what we believe and why we believe it. The moral factor is fundamental - and the more so when we are faced by countries whose world-view is so radically and systematically opposed to ours.

But how stands the moral factor in Western Europe today? I sense a danger that we may be drifting into a form of unilateral spiritual disarmament. Instead of firmness in the assertion of the values of a free society we have given way to a sort of shuffling and apologetic tolerance of the abuse of freedom. Instead of clarity in the practice of our principles we are in danger of falling into a posture of ambiguity and government by expedient. It is your party and mine that is going to call a halt to this by offering our people the choice of a free and open society.

It will not, however, be enough for us to preach the idea of a free society only at the national level. The European Community is an essential projection of that idea on an international scale, and we must work together to promote it. That is why I join Mrs Thatcher in welcoming the alliance of our two parties cooperating for a common purpose. And let there be no doubt about what that purpose is - it consists of the joint defence of our free society by way of further progress together towards unity in Europe.

The recognition that this is what is at stake is fundamental for the formulation of the Community's policies in every part of the world - of its policies towards our friends and allies in the United States and our other partners in the industrial world, and of our attitudes in the present debate which is now proceeding over the redefinition of the relations between the industrial world and the developing countries.

Here is an area in which Europe has a unique contribution to make and in which therefore we owe it not only to ourselves but to the world to define and to promote our common purpose.

Our Western way of life is built upon economic progress - progress which entails an ever-changing division of labour both nationally and internationally. Hence the inevitable growth of international economic interdependence. But what is not inevitable is that this world-wide economic process should be allowed to drift out of control to the point that the livelihood of our people and of people everywhere is disrupted by a failure to adapt in time to changing circumstances. We have to find a positive and enlightened response to the legitimate claims of the developing world. But at the same time we must continue firmly to resist the sort of excesses which can only damage both our interests and theirs.

I give you this as one clear and evident example of how the true balance of the interests and responsibilities of our countries is weighted in favour of defining a European approach and pursuing European policies. For how else are we to influence the outcome of the North/South dialogue?

The will that is needed to sustain this concept of a European foreign policy is of course a political will. It is the will to enable Europe to find and exert her influence - an influence born of unequalled experience - not in a distant future but without delay. And as you in the CDU understand very well, it is action that is called for - not just words.

/The fact

The fact is that at this stage in the development of the Community with its limited institutional powers a heavy responsibility for Europe's future rests upon the governments of its members.

Surely our experience has taught us that if our Community is to be more than an organised hypocrisy then it must be greater than the sum of its parts. In our external affairs the European interest can only prevail when our governments are prepared consciously and constantly to promote it - to ask about their policies and attitudes not just where lies the national interest, but also the interest of Europe.

And in our internal affairs also it behoves each nation to pursue the necessary economic policies and social disciplines so that it may contribute to the well-being of the Community as a whole.

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Mr Chairman: we are at a turning point in European politics. With the approach of direct elections to the European Parliament a new framework for our political action is beginning to emerge, and new political forces are beginning to stir.

Christian Democrats in Germany and Conservatives in Britain and other like-minded parties have begun to recognise their cousinhood and to seek out common ground for the effective, practical, day-to-day cooperation which will be increasingly necessary in the future.

The success of our cooperation will require a large measure of give and take on the part of all of us who share the same broad political beliefs. No single element in the emerging alignment of the political form of the Centre and Right in Europe can aspire to a preponderant influence, and the policies which result from our joint action will necessarily be a genuine synthesis.

Above all what is needed is a psychological sea-change. We all have to take on board the implications of the fact that it is no longer realistic to think of European policy as essentially a part of external policy - as a special kind of foreign relations. We have to learn to think of the Community more as an extension of home affairs. We have to understand that what is at stake in Europe is the formation of an increasingly integrated and homogenous society whose character we ought to be seeking to mould according to our own political philosophy.

For the circumstances of our children and our children's children will in large part be shaped by the sort of Europe they grow up in. And their ability to influence events on a wider world stage and to make the contribution to world affairs which they will want to make will also depend upon the sort of Europe we bequeath to them.

You Christian Democrats in Germany and we British Conservatives are proud of our distinctive political traditions, and rightly so. There is no question of our giving them up, any more than the national identity and traditions of the German or the British people are put at risk by our progress together towards unity in Europe. But if our cherished traditions are to make the contribution that they must and should to the future politics of Europe we must acknowledge that it can only be by way of our participation in an effective alliance which brings us with the traditions of other parties and other nations.

A hundred years ago the leader of my party, Mr Disraeli, remarked that "the Conservative Party is a national party or it is nothing". Today I believe his celebrated sentence can be applied both to the Conservative Party and to the Christian Democrat Union: we are European parties, or we are nothing.