

Address given by Wilfried Martens (Brussels, 28 September 1988)

Caption: On 28 September 1988, Wilfried Martens, Belgian Prime Minister, responds during a press conference to the speech on the future of Europe given in Bruges one week earlier by Margaret Thatcher.

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Introductory speech by Mr. Wilfried Martens, the Belgian Prime Minister, given at the Brussels press conference on 28 September 1988

"From a geographical, historical and cultural point of view, Europe obviously goes beyond the confines of the present-day European Community. This is an undeniable fact.

Therefore, an ideal situation would be one in which there is only one single European entity.

In the meanwhile the already long existing idea of European unification has, since World War II, materialized into treaties, institutions and decisions. This evolution is not based on a utopian concept but rather on some very practical considerations: the preservation of peace and prosperity on a continent torn by fratricidal strife.

This reason for the unification of Europe - or, at least, in the shorter run, of part of it - remains entirely valid.

After a protracted period during which, with ups and downs, the EC member countries were drawing together with great difficulty, the European Single Act and the Whitebook have given a new impetus to the unification process.

The creation by the end of 1992 of one single market without international borders (population 320 million) as aimed at in the Whitebook, called for a number of measures, which came to be known as the "Delors package":

- an amended agricultural policy;
- solidarity between the different regions within the EC;
- sufficient own resources for the Community.

This package of measures was approved by the European Council at Brussels in February 1988.

All Member States of the European Community agree on the principle of a free internal market, even if there are still some divergent views as to the implementation of some aspects such as fiscal harmonization.

A further step into the direction of a closer economic and monetary cooperation and, in the long run, perhaps unity (economic and monetary union with, inter alia, one central bank and one currency) was taken at the latest meeting of the European Council in Hanover in June of this year.

The single market will yield substantial economic advantages for Europe (both for companies and consumers).

The unification of Europe implies, however, more than just economic aspects. Europe should also be given a human face - especially where European youth is concerned (e.g. ERASMUS) - if it wants to remain attractive to its own citizens (e.g. the Schengen agreement).

Europe should also have a social dimension in order to make it acceptable for broad layers of its population.

The impetus gained in the economic field must and will lead in the end to increased political unity within the Community. For the moment, one cannot foretell which final shape this unity will take.

In the field of commerce and economy, the 12 EC Member States are already to a large extent exercising their sovereignty on a common basis.

This common sovereignty should gradually be extended to other fields such as monetary matters (a

strengthened EMS), macro-economic problems, environment protection, scientific research, foreign relations, defence and security, etc.

Without economic unity the European Community loses a substantial part of its decision-making power to external forces.

The ultimate economic and political independence of Europe cannot be achieved without common sovereignty.

The final form of the "United States of Europe" is a question which is still open for debate. Given Europe's in history steeped diversity, a very decentralized form of government is undoubtedly preferable (federation?) Unity in diversity is Europe's main asset. There is no need at all for imitating the American "melting pot" as far as language, culture, and national identity are concerned.

However, a European Executive with a number of limited yet essential powers is necessary where matters such as foreign relations, currency and defence policy are concerned. These matters are precisely the characteristics of sovereignty.

A unified Europe must not develop into a "fortress Europe". It must be an example of free trade and general openness towards the world at large. The same solidarity which prevails within the European Community, must also prevail towards the rest of the world and more particularly towards the Third World.

A certain apprehension about an unbridled European bureaucracy which is not responsible to any one, is not entirely unjustified. Centrally imposed overregulation must be avoided at all cost.

Precisely to avoid these evils, Europe is in need of an Executive with a limited membership but with sufficient powers in the fields within its competence and answerable before a genuinely European and sovereign legislature".