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It is indeed fitting that at this time we meet here in the very heart of Europe, and that we meet in this city, which for so long stood as the symbol of a divided continent but which today has become a bridge between East and West, offering new hope of a better future. It is fitting too that we meet in the presence of a man who has shared so closely the hopes and fears of this city and of all his people, a statesman who had the courage to abandon the sterile suspicions and distrust of the past, and who had the wisdom to choose a better course. In the extraordinary events of recent months we have witnessed the clear vindication of his courage and wisdom and we salute here today a man who will be recognised as one of the principal architects of a new Europe - Willy Brandt.

Some forty-five years ago the nightmare that was to have lasted a thousand years was brought to an end not far from where we meet but it left in its wake a continent in ruins with millions dead, millions homeless, millions hungry. Once again the people of Europe knew the terrible price to be paid for conflict and for dreams of conquest, this time on a scale unprecedented in their history.

In the years following that cataclysmic war there were men who vowed that such slaughter should never be repeated, men of vision who saw the need to bury for ever ancient enmities and create a new order of relationships within Europe, men of differing cultures and backgrounds who recognised that what unites the peoples of Europe is far greater than what divides them.

From their vision of a new Europe was to grow the European Community of today, a community in which twelve European peoples have irrevocably linked their destinies and by sharing their sovereignty have sought to achieve a greater freedom in an interdependent world. Together they have now embarked on a process which will lead them ever closer and aims at nothing less than the total removal of the barriers that exist between them, not from any thirst for power, or desire for prestige, but in order to create the conditions in which best to protect common values and to promote shared aims. Above all, in seeking unity we do not seek any spurious uniformity, for we are convinced that one of the most precious elements of our common European culture lies in its diversity and we have recognised a fundamental truth which too often eluded our forefathers: that in our differences lies our strength rather than our weakness. The essence of unity is the acceptance of diversity E pluribus unum.

I believe the Community stands as a model for the conduct of relations between states in Europe and offers a powerful example of how ancient wrongs and animosities can be overcome by new forms of cooperation and trust. Moreover, at this time when old certainties are crumbling, the Community can be a powerful source of stability and continuity in a changing Europe.

The post-war years bequeathed a legacy of bitterness to Europe, with a divided Germany and a sundered continent. East and West faced each other in ideological conflict. The drab oligarchies of the East could only be sustained by the denial of basic freedoms and ever fiercer repression. When many least expected it and against all hope, change has begun to sweep the regimes of the East, change brought about by new thinking and by the political and economic contradictions inherent in those systems of government. Above all, change has been wrought by the frustration and anger of peoples who for too long had been denied what was theirs by right, whose dignity had too long been trampled, whose spirit had too long been crushed. We have been privileged to witness extraordinary and inspiring scenes: men and women gathering in the ancient cities of Eastern Europe demanding that they be heard, demanding that they be treated with respect. We have shared in their joy as they found new freedoms and as the old tyrannies collapsed before the tide of popular will. We have seen the powerful cast down and those who had been outcasts chosen to lead free peoples.

To an Irishman who, in his lifetime, has led people in the streets in mass non violent protest against the denial of basic civil rights, who with my party steadfastly uphold the democratic process in a society where the taking of human life is seen by some as the only means of change and by others as the means of upholding the status quo, where the doctrine of an eye for an eye leaves blindness in its wake, such scenes cannot fail to be deeply moving. The silent dignity of masses of people gathered in non-violence will bring about more change and will expose in minutes more repression than years of gunfire and bloodshed. Those who use the methods of the oppression tend to end up worse than the oppressor. I bring with me today a symbol of past divisions and present realities. I have it here. Yes, it is a piece of a wall, but it is not from the wall on which the people of Berlin danced and which they helped to tear down. It is a piece of the "Belfast Wall", taken from one of the many walls that have been built to separate divided communities throughout the city. While barriers between peoples are crumbling across a continent, even as we speak another such wall is being built in Belfast and has been given by some the grotesque name of "peace-line", as if the bleak desolation created in parts of that city after twenty years of violence could be described as peace.

This lump of concrete reminds us that while walls may separate people, the real barriers cannot be seen because they exist in the hearts and minds of the people themselves and are built of hate and violence and fear. They are barriers which can only be overcome when we overcome our fears and have the courage to trust one another and to learn to accept and respect our differences. They are also a challenge for in reality they were built by past attitudes and the challenge is, if those walls and what they represent are to fall, to re-examine those past attitudes, all of them.

Twenty years of civil unrest in Northern Ireland have also served to strengthen my belief that political change is not served by violence. Violence is a catalyst of hate, not reform, and, as this stone bears eloquent testimony, violence only creates new divisions among a divided people.

This year in Ireland we mark the 300th anniversary of a battle which involved the armies of Europe and took place by the river Boyne in 1690. For a brief moment the rulers of Europe turned their attention to Ireland as James II and William of Orange met in a fateful encounter. In the encounter were Danes, Dutch, Germans, English, French on both sides, and of course Irish on both sides. The irony, of course, is that while the peoples which participated in that encounter have long settled their differences, the anniversary still has significance to us in Ireland, representing for some the destruction of liberty while for others the securing of their freedom. It is seen by many in Ireland as the beginning of our present problems.

But even if there are in Ireland those who would rehearse ancient rights and wrongs, when respect for the past paralyses their attitude to the future, I am not despondent about the future and my hope is based on the powerful example which Europe provides. If the most bitter of enemies who fought each other twice this century can compose their differences and contemplate even closer forms of political and economic union, I am certain that we in Ireland can find a way to live together in peace and mutual respect. The fact that both parts of Ireland are partners in the Community immediately places in a new context old questions of sovereignty and identity which were themselves European in origin, and provides the basis for a common future.

Recent events in Eastern Europe also show that new ideas can sweep away obstacles which had seemed immovable, and just as the darkest hour comes before the dawn, new beginnings can emerge just when we face despair. But I do not despair: as someone who has devoted my life to politics and the democratic process, I say with complete and utter conviction that there is no political problem which cannot be solved by men and women who chose to put aside former animosities and work together to find solutions, and who are prepared to act in a spirit of goodwill and trust. I say too that the time has come for us too to tear down the walls which separate us and find a new liberty in freedom from hate and freedom from fear.

As the euphoria of recent weeks inevitably fades, it is evident that the countries of Eastern Europe face difficult and urgent choices. The outcome is uncertain but the prize is great: we have finally been offered a window of opportunity to make the historic adjustment in the relations between the nations of Europe and the chance to create democratic and stable societies in a reintegrated and peaceful continent.

Of one thing, I am certain: in the challenges which lie ahead for all of us in Europe, history will not judge us kindly if those in political life fail to make a generous and imaginative response to the demands of the moment. Already we hear siren voices, some urging caution, saying that there is nothing we in the West can do to make or mend the situation, others lamenting the passing of old certainties and the grim stability of the past, others still rejoicing in the difficulties of former adversaries. What madness! We in the West cannot hope to prosper with half a continent in turmoil. A tide of change is sweeping through Europe from the Atlantic to the Urals and it will take all our skill and nerve to ride the crest of the wave; those who cling to the rocks will be overwhelmed: we must have the courage to sail on into uncharted waters.

And as we move to build a new European order we should not forget that it can only have real meaning for Socialists as part of a new world order.

In recent times we have taken pride in the fact that Willy Brandt has been a distinguished symbol and a distinguished leader in his efforts to heal wounds in Europe and to bring about a common inheritance of freedom, democracy, peace in a new Europe but let us not forget that the challenges of East West are not the only ones posed to us by the vision of Willy Brandt. To the people of the Third World he is a symbol not of a new Europe but of a new world economic order, of the need to address the underdevelopment, poverty, hunger, illiteracy and disease suffered by so many as a result of an unjust and inefficient world order and indeed as a result of the price in nuclear and military costs of the cold war.

Let there be no doubt that there is deep concern and fear in the developing countries that our preoccupation with the Single Market and with Eastern Europe will yet again put their problems on the back burner. Let us reassure them. If we accept as we do, that one of the travesties of the arms race and cold war was that it maintains such dreadful injustice and misery then we must make a new global cooperation and meaningful North/South dialogue one of the prizes to be won from the changing East/West relationship. We seek a new European order, yes, but within a new world order.

We, as socialists, already face other more direct challenges. Just as in the 1980's new trends in economics were used by our critics to deny the public sector practically any valid role in society, so too now they are using the collapse of the regimes in the East to predict the death of socialism. We must be quick, to defend our proud record in the creation of truly democratic and humane societies in Europe. We must assert that while we always were concerned about the creation of wealth, the focus of our agenda was ever on how best to use that wealth. That is a question which today more than ever demands the most urgent moral and intellectual consideration. We hear much in these days of free markets, of the free flow of capital, of the free movement of goods and services, but we must insist - and remind our critics - that these are useful only to the extent that they serve a more important freedom, that is the freedom of the individual, and the freedom that is afforded all our citizens, and not just a privileged few, to exploit the potential of the human condition. That is our agenda, it calls for no apology, it is one of which we can be proud.

We are the heirs of two thousand years of history and today we stand on the threshold of a new millennium. At the end of a century which has seen such unprecedented horror and witnessed such unparalleled pain, we are called to heal the divisions of the past and to build a Europe that is a whole in a world that is whole.

Let us not fail, let us try to usher in a new and kinder era in the affairs of our continent and our world and let us hope that our children and our children's children will be able to say of our generation in time to come, "Truly, they were men and women of vision: truly, they were men and women of peace."

Fifty years ago today, the Second World War was under way. The slaughter had begun. Millions, not for the first time in the century were to die. Cities like the one where we now stand were devastated. Bitterness and hatred were the order of the day. If someone had stood up then and said that in fifty years time we would be well on the way to a Single Europe, and the French would still be French and the Germans would still be German. That person would have been described as a fool or a dreamer. Thank God we did have dreamers. Thank God too that we had leaders of the calibre of Willy Brandt and Jacques Delors who dream dreams but who have the dedication and leadership to bring their dreams to fruition and to reality.