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ADDRESS BY THE PRIME MINISTER OF BELGIUM AT
THE OPENING CEREMONY OF THE MINISTERIAL MEETING
BRUSSELS, 7TH JUNE, 1966

Gentlemen,

It is not just a duty but a special pride and pleasure for me to voice, on behalf of the Belgian people and its Government, our feelings of friendship, solidarity and peace by asking you to regard our country and its capital as your own today.

Our capital - I venture to remind you - has both a European vocation and an Atlantic past. It was in Brussels that a collective defence treaty between Belgium, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, France and the United Kingdom was signed in March 1948. It was the request of the signatories of the Brussels Treaty which in December 1948 led to negotiations, initially with the United States and Canada, on the drafting of the North Atlantic Treaty. It was also in Brussels that at a critical moment in its history the Atlantic Council appointed General Eisenhower Supreme Commander of the Allied Forces in Europe.

The 37th Ordinary Meeting of the North Atlantic Council will not be an academic one.

The discussions to be held may be - indeed, will be - particularly important for the very existence of the political and military system which gives Europe peace despite its weaknesses and imperfections. This peace, which each of us without exception forged in 1949, was in danger every hour of every day.

NATO was born of our common fear at the threat of attack and of the startled realisation that our weaknesses and disunity were leading us straight to war.

We set forth our doctrine in the Treaty itself and here I want to quote the terms of Article 3: "the Parties, separately and jointly, by means of continuous and effective self-help and mutual aid, will maintain and develop their individual and collective capacity to resist armed attack". This text is fundamental for it implies the rejection of the method of juxtaposed defences in favour of co-operation and mutual aid.

As of 7th June, 1966 many things have changed but this principle and this choice are just as fundamental. East-West relations have evolved in the direction of a rapprochement, which my country welcomes.

In our opinion, every attempt should be made to increase this rapprochement. The Alliance, whose objective continues to be international co-operation, must press ahead with concerted action along these lines without delay. We are resolved to defend ourselves together and it is together that we have the best chance of conducting worthwhile negotiations.

It is therefore perfectly true that 1966 is not 1949. But if we ignore the existence beyond the Iron Curtain of 130 divisions on a war footing supported by 6,000 aircraft and 700 missiles, if we forget that the Alliance was, is and remains the best, if not the only, "deterrent" that imposes peace by force of arms, and if, disregarding all this, we were to think we could afford the luxury of dissension, each of us, with the exception of the United States, would in turn be isolated and condemned to neutralism, the consequences of which for Europe 25 years ago we have not forgotten.

This neutralism would not even produce the illusion of concealing the weaknesses of those who want and yearn for peace when confronted with those possessing the weapons and armoured divisions.

Gentlemen, whatever the motives and convictions of each of us, we know that the decisions of each of our Governments carry implications for all of us, for the whole of Europe, for all mankind: would it be going beyond the limits of this inaugural speech to voice the fervent hope that we will take this into account in the coming discussions?

When threatened from without by an imminent peril, the Council summoned up the resources of energy, will and courage to grapple with it unflinchingly.

Today, the decision of one of those signatories who is close both to our frontiers and to our hearts means that the problem arises within the Alliance itself.

The time for regrets or reproaches is over. We hope that, transcending our internal political worries the Alliance will proclaim its continuance and the continuance of the Treaty of Washington.

We express unreservedly the hope that on this basis, even if most of us consider it too narrow, the Council will summon up the same resources as in 1949 to overcome the crisis, mend the dyke and consolidate what can be consolidated.

We believe that these principles reflect the resolve of each one of us.

Unity in freedom has never depended on uniformity of opinions.

As regards Belgium, I should like to sum up our fears, our hopes and our aims as follows:

- (1) international co-operation must remain our fundamental objective;
- (2) to talk of an alternative policy divorced from Atlantic solidarity appears to me to be a deception or an illusion; this would not be politics but daydreaming;
- (3) the East-West rapprochement must be fostered and pursued by continuous and concerted action within the Alliance;
- (4) the common destiny of Europe and North America must always find expression in the Alliance on the basis of a genuine partnership accepted by both sides;
- (5) changes in structure are necessary - let them be made without delay. Let a new plan of action be prepared which will meet the major problems confronting us;
- (6) solidarity cannot be merely verbal. A declaration of solidarity implies solidarity in action;
- (7) the occasion is too serious for us to be held up by procedural misunderstandings. They must be settled.

Gentlemen, your task is a heavy one but you will not fail.

That at least is the hope I express on behalf of Belgium which, because it has already suffered more than enough from war, hatred and oppression, will prove a loyal and determined support for your endeavours, giving expression in this way to its resolve to participate in the building of a world where the weak will be secure and the strong will be just.

Because we desire that world with all our hearts, and because we believe that it is possible, we also want there to be no doubt about the Alliance's determination. Let us endorse the act of faith of him who was the leader of the United States but the friend of all, President Kennedy:

Let every nation know that, whether it wishes us good or ill, we shall pay any price, we shall make any sacrifice, we shall bear any burden, we shall support any friend and oppose any foe to ensure the survival and victory of freedom.