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SPEECH BY
THE NETHERLANDS MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS,
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HONORARY PRESIDENT OF THE NORTH ATLANTIC COUNCIL

OPENING CEREMONY OF THE COUNCIL IN MINISTERIAL SESSION
8th December 1988

Mr. Secretary General,
Colleagues,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I consider it a pleasure and an honour to assume this honorary presidency of our Alliance. Indeed, we are meeting at an important juncture in time. Much is happening that affects our Alliance, too.

Mr. Secretary General, this is the first time that the North Atlantic Council of Ministers formally meets under your able chairmanship. We are looking forward with much expectation to working under your guidance. I am sure that I speak on behalf of all of us when I say that we are confident that your tenure will be most successful.

In your recent address to the Atlantic Assembly, you made a number of most valuable observations. One of these I would like to recall here. You said that when looking at the changing international environment, you saw "more opportunities than risks ahead". I think this is very true.

Indeed, the very values on which our Alliance is based are gaining acceptance in many parts of the world. Free and democratic societies are proving by far the most successful in providing prosperity and justice for their people. Those societies which adopted collectivist or semi-collectivist models are increasingly forced to concede disappointment with the results. Curbing freedom means curbing progress and opportunities. States suppressing freedom are in fact penalizing themselves. They see the world entering into a new age without them.

The significance of President Gorbachev's Perestroika lies, in my opinion, in the recognition that to get the economy moving will require not just economic reforms, but also more openness, more debate and at least some measure of democratisation. Further evidence to this notion I believe was clearly reflected in President Gorbachev yesterday's extraordinary and meaningful address to the General Assembly of the UN. Clearly, a Soviet Union that

concentrates on internal regeneration rather than external expansion will be a more comfortable partner amongst the family of nations.

I take it that President Gorbachev's UN speech - that covers a wide range of interesting observations and presents significant unilateral steps in the field of conventional arms reductions - will certainly receive careful attention during our deliberations later today.

We want to encourage positive developments in Eastern Europe and we are ready to seize opportunities for a more constructive East-West relationship. In this endeavour, the Harmel doctrine will continue to be our guide, for it has proved its validity beyond a doubt: in accordance with this doctrine, we have maintained our defences, and at the same time succeeded in substantially expanding dialogue and arms control. In the previous decade we had a fragile détente which often left us disappointed. Now we are on the way to a much more significant détente, without the euphoria of the seventies. Undoubtedly, this state of affairs offers the best prospects. With our colleague Geoffrey Howe, I would like to say: "do not change a winning formula".

Real détente clearly implies more than just arms control. Human rights and people-to-people contacts are an essential part of it. In tandem with our arms control agenda, we should in fact try to build what I would like to call a civilian détente. Beside human rights this includes policies aiming at the promotion of mutually beneficial trade, environmental co-operation, cultural exchange, etc. By creating what I would call a new osmosis across the dividing line, we can contribute to overcoming the division of our own continent. The Helsinki Final Act contains valuable guidelines for bringing this about.

In these times of change a coherent Alliance policy, bringing together the many facets of East-West relations, is essential. We have reason to be hopeful, but this should not lead to complacency. One would have expected Perestroika to bring with it a reallocation of resources from the military to the civilian sector, but there is as yet no evidence of this. We cannot mortgage our security on the basis of mere hopes and expectations which have yet to materialize.

If we want to be successful in meeting the challenges before us, if we want to make the most of the opportunities that present themselves, we will have to make sure that we are well prepared, that our positions reflect wide consensus among ourselves, that we focus on what is essential. The elaboration of the comprehensive concept for arms control and a unified position in CST are cases in point.

We need a comprehensive concept as a basis for our endeavours. We should be clear amongst ourselves as to what arms control can do for our security. We will also have to define our minimum requirements for an effective deterrence and defence. Our fundamental aim is to prevent any war, of any kind. This requires, in the present circumstances and as far as we can foresee, an adequate mix of conventional and nuclear forces, which of course will have to be kept up to date.

No less important is that the Alliance define and agree without further delay on a common position for the CST. Our credibility will no doubt be affected if agreement amongst ourselves is not soon evident. The current conventional balance is indeed at the core of Europe's security concerns. The extent to which the CST will make progress towards a stable conventional balance at lower levels will be a crucial test for the possibilities of establishing a new kind of relationship on the European continent.

Allied cohesion will continue to be essential, as it has been since the very beginning of our Alliance. The long-standing commitment of our North American Allies is vital to European security. Likewise a free, independent and increasingly unified Europe is vital to North America's security. Greater European unity is indeed good for the Alliance as a whole.

This is of course relevant also to our discussion on burden-sharing. The report on burden-sharing, adopted last week by the Defence Planning Committee, must be considered a major contribution to a thorough and balanced approach of this matter. It rightly emphasizes the need to provide adequate resources for defence and, above all, to use them as efficiently as possible.

I would be remiss if I did not take this opportunity, and again I am sure I speak for all of us, to thank George Shultz for the major contribution he has personally made to the vitality of the Alliance. Countless are the times when he came to Brussels to consult with us and thus to help cement our unity. We will remember him for more than one good reason. We wish him a long, healthy and happy future. We have no doubt that the incoming US-administration will continue investing in the Transatlantic dialogue.

As a great European, Jean Monnet has said: "Les Etats-Unis et l'Europe partagent la même civilisation fondée sur la liberté individuelle et conduisent leur vie publique selon des principes démocratiques communs. L'essentiel est là."

The Atlantic Alliance is indeed a house of democracy. And it is in good shape. It is befitting to recall this when we are about to celebrate its 40th anniversary. We can look towards the future with confidence.

Thank you Mr. Secretary-General.