

Belgium

Speech by the Prime Minister of Belgium, M. Leo Tindemans, at a dinner in honour of the Prime Minister of Australia in Brussels on 16 December 1974

I take great pleasure in welcoming you to Belgium and also in welcoming Mrs Whitlam, the Minister of State, and the important Australian Delegation.

While our two countries are geographically separated by a great distance, this does not necessarily mean that our political and moral aims are different. Quite the contrary, our two countries are fundamentally attached to political democracy and improvement in international relationships, in order to keep peace in the world and to develop that peace based on a greater justice.

There also exists a convergence in the foreign policies followed by our two countries lately, among others in the United Nations Organisation, in order to contribute to international detente. This is in particular the case with the action we are developing within the framework of the Non-Proliferation Treaty with the aim of organising control of nuclear tests.

It was with great interest that I learnt about the main trends of your home and foreign policy.

At home your Government at present aims at a greater centralisation and reinforcing of the responsibilities of the state in the economic and social field.

As to foreign policy, your country is concerned about a greater independence and endeavours to show a characteristically Australian identity.

I believe that our two countries are becoming more and more aware of the fact that we are at the start of a period that forces us to consider our international relationships and to place us in a renewed framework.

The present world can hardly be content with the bipolar balance that has dominated these international relationships.

Your country, just like ours, is anxious to contribute to the development of subcontinental organisations or communities of nations, after the manner of our friendly countries of Western Europe within the framework of the European Union.

I hope that the efforts we undertake in a parallel direction in this international community will bear fruit in the near future, in order to make the same aims prevail.

I also hope that the bilateral relations between your country and Belgium will be reinforced in the years to come. These relations already assume a very important nature in the trade field.

Your country exports to our country important quantities of iron ore, textile and food products; we export to your country manufactured goods which seem to be particularly appreciated by your Government. I am thinking for instance of the electronic sector.

It would be desirable if our business relations could be developed in other fields, in the sector of uranium, and especially if a more intense industrial co-operation could be envisaged between our two countries, for instance through participating in industrial co-operation agreements.

Prime Minister, today was the first day of your visit to our country.

I believe our first discussions have been fruitful

so that one can envisage concrete progress in the above-mentioned fields.

I hope that tomorrow you will be able to go deeply into the different aspects of our future collaboration, not only as to what concerns our own country, but also in regard to the relationships with the European Economic Community.

The Prime Minister with the Prime Minister of Belgium, M. Tindemans.



Speech by the Prime Minister of Australia at a dinner given in his honour by the Prime Minister of Belgium in Brussels on 16 December 1974

Thank you, Prime Minister, for the warm and gracious welcome you have accorded my wife and me and the members of my party. It is fitting that my visit to Europe should begin here in Brussels, the very capital of Europe, a city ancient in its culture and history yet symbolising all that is modern and contemporary in the new Europe. It is fifteen years since an Australian Prime Minister made an official visit to Belgium and the other capitals of Europe. Ten, or even five years ago, no Australian Prime Minister would have visited Brussels before going to London. No Australian Prime Minister would have discussed in Brussels matters affecting not only Australia's relations with Belgium but her relations with Britain and Europe. For our part, nothing could illustrate more clearly the momentous changes that have occurred in recent years—in Belgium, in Britain, in Europe, in Australia, in the world at large. I welcome the opportunity to reaffirm the strength of our friendship. Throughout this era of historic change relations between Belgium and Australia have grown and strengthened—founded as they are in common cultural traditions and based on the enduring Western values of liberty, democracy and the rule of law.

There is an impression abroad—in Australia and elsewhere—that Europe no longer matters to Australia, and that our destiny now lies exclusively with Asia, Japan and the nations to our north. That is a false impression. It is true that Australia has developed closer and more realistic ties with Asia and Japan. Our trade with those nations has increased three-fold in the last twenty years, and Japan is now our biggest single trading partner. No one welcomes more than I do the historic trends that have brought Australia closer to the nations of her own region, deepened our friendship with our neighbours and sharpened our sense of regional responsibility. No one has worked harder to encourage those trends. But it would be a grave mistake to suppose that our greater involvement in Asia means a lesser involvement in Europe.

Australia's interests in Europe are of great and growing importance.

Britain and Europe take roughly one-third of our exports. Our involvement in Asia and our involvement in Europe are not mutually exclusive. They are complementary. They reflect not only our desire—a natural desire—to enlarge our role in the world, but a growing trend towards interdependence between all nations. On my first visit to Brussels as Prime Minister I reaffirm Australia's profound and lasting interest in Europe, our support for the European ideal, and our desire for stronger and closer ties with all European nations.

Australia has always given her full support to the concept of a united Europe. It is true that we have sought to safeguard our own trading interests as best we can, but on the wider issue of European unity there has never been any question of our support for the high principles and noble aspirations that guide and sustain the European community. Australia believes deeply in the value of regional co-operation at the economic and political levels: in our own region we have done our best to promote it. How natural, then, that we should support one of the greatest and most successful examples of regional integration ever attempted by sovereign nations. I acknowledge the anxiety that many Australians felt at the prospect of Britain's entry.

Speaking for myself, it seemed to me a matter of profound historical justice, of singular 'rightness', that within the space of a week in 1971, two of the world's greatest nations were committed to membership of organisations to which they were destined to belong—China was admitted to the United Nations General Assembly, and the House of Commons voted in favour of Britain's entry to the European Community.

May I say, Prime Minister, how greatly Australians admire your own contribution to the cause of Europe and Belgium's central role in that cause. This city, always one of the loveliest

in Europe, now enjoys a new eminence and a proud status as the institutional capital of the European communities and the headquarters of its most significant and enduring security alliance. Australians for many years honoured your predecessor, the late Paul-Henri Spaak, as a statesman of world stature and one of the founding spirits of the Common Market.

It is appropriate that you, Sir, have been charged by the recent conference of Heads of Government of the Community with the task of reporting to them on the prospects and progress of European political unity. In that difficult and complex undertaking, I have no doubt that your efforts will bring closer the fundamental and guiding objective which for twenty years has provided the inspiration and philosophical basis of the European experiment—the belief that independent states may one day submerge their political differences and come together in a political union.

There are pressing reasons why nations of all kinds must seek a unity of purpose, a greater measure of co-operation and understanding. The whole world—Australia no less than Belgium, our own region no less than Europe—is beset by problems of unprecedented difficulty, of daunting complexity, of great danger. Overpopulation, pollution, the energy shortage, terrorism, racial tensions are some of the most urgent. Overhanging the economies of the Western nations are the twin problems of unemployment and inflation. Because these problems are global in their scope and origin, the solutions to them must be international solutions. It is folly to pretend that they will be solved by nations, or even groups of nations, acting alone or in isolation.

What is at stake is not just the ability of democratic states to manage their economies, but people's faith in the ability of democracy to survive. Must the democracies concede that only authoritarian regimes can cope with inflation and employment? This is a battle that the democracies must win, not just for the sake of their economies, but for the sake of their democratic institutions. Here in Europe, where the highest living standards are combined with the highest measure of personal freedom and a unique abundance of cultural and artistic riches, the advanced industrial nations have a supreme

incentive to preserve the strength of their system and overcome the social economic and environmental problems that threaten its survival.

No nation has pursued a more active policy of international co-operation than Belgium during the past quarter of a century. I pay tribute to that effort. You are a member of the United Nations, a member of NATO, a member of the Council of Europe and Western European Union. You are one of the Benelux countries. You are a member of Euratom, the European Coal and Steel Community and, of course, the EEC. Your support for the Atlantic Alliance and an integrated Europe has provided the basis of a viable Belgian foreign policy. There is not a better example of the ability of a small power to set an example of co-operation and exercise an influence for good out of all proportion to its size and population.

There is another reason why European union is profoundly important for the world. It has a poignant relevance to my own country no less than yours. Thousands of Australians fought and died in Belgium during the two world wars. Ypres, Mons, Messines are names firmly engraved on the consciousness of the Australian people. I visited this morning the tomb of the Unknown Soldier and every year the Australian Ambassador in this city attends a ceremony at the Menin Gate in memory of the Belgian and Australian soldiers who fought as comrades in arms. We recall the suffering of those days, not to glorify war but to reaffirm the spirit of peace which is so much a part of the spirit of the new Europe. All your plans, all your hopes, all your ambitions for a greater and more prosperous Europe rest on the preservation of peace. If your Community achieves nothing else, the world will rejoice that for the first time the threat of war has been lifted from a continent ravaged by the most terrible wars in history.

In this context I commend the action of your Government in ratifying the nuclear non-proliferation treaty. Australia has worked consistently for the strengthening of that treaty. We regard it as crucial to the preservation of peace and the survival of civilisation. The alternative is a nightmare world in which dozens of nations may possess nuclear weapons by the early 1980s. Yet six years after the treaty was concluded and four years after it came into

force, some states—including some states in Europe—have still to ratify the treaty or make clear their renunciation of nuclear weapons development.

Australia and Belgium are comparatively small powers. Remote as we are from each other in terms of distance, we have a great deal in common. We are affluent nations in a world of widespread poverty. We are highly industrialised. We are devoted to regional co-operation. Our bilateral trade, though modest in scale, has grown steadily and exhibits a remarkable balance. Australia's exports to Belgium in 1973-74 were worth \$A59 000 000: Belgium's exports to Australia were worth \$A57 000 000. Australia's ties with Europe have been strengthened since World War II by a vast immigration program. It is a reminder to us that modern civilisation in Australia sprang from the great tide of European colonisation in the 19th century—a process of colonisation in which Belgium played her part.

To the north, east and west of Australia there are many nations which were once parts of European empires. These links with Europe have left an enduring mark on the newer nations of Africa, Asia and the Pacific. Australia, like many other states in her region, has set her own firm and independent course in world affairs. In doing so we acknowledge our historic and cultural debt to Europe and look to the nations of Europe for support and collaboration in overcoming the problems shared by all mankind. I take heart from the great achievement in international co-operation we have witnessed in Europe itself—an achievement in which your own country has played a lasting and a leading role.

Speech by the Prime Minister of Australia at the International Press Centre in Brussels on 18 December 1974

I am conscious that my visit to Europe—the first by an Australian Prime Minister for fifteen years—coincides with a growing sense of crisis in international economic affairs. Continuing high rates of inflation, the threat of emergent recessionary forces, severe balance of payments problems for many countries, strains on international monetary mechanisms and the accentuation of the problems of the developing countries constitute pressures of a magnitude and diversity which the world has not faced since the war.

The European Community is the largest single trading bloc in the world. The impact of these developments on the relationships between the Community and other countries and between member nations within the Community is of major significance to all the world's trading countries. As the Head of Government of a trading nation of growing significance, I believe these events demonstrate with unmistakable force the interdependence of the world's economies. Such a comment may sound trite. There are times, however, when restating the obvious

The Prime Minister speaks at the International Press Centre in Brussels.

