Stability in Europe - NATO's way forward

Address given by
Secretary General, Manfred Wörner
to the Annual Meeting of
the World Economics Forum

In a few weeks from now, on April 4, the Atlantic Alliance will be forty years old. On that day we shall celebrate the achievements of the past, and who would deny us this right? With pride we will look back on forty years of peace with freedom for the peoples of Western Europe; we will remind ourselves of an economic prosperity which on the day the Treaty of Washington was signed would have seemed nothing more than a dream; and we will salute the transatlantic partnership which has led to a stronger and more self-reliant Western Europe and to a North America that is now actively engaged in world affairs. Today we look to the future not with fear but with confidence.

Forty years ago it was different. We were struggling to build a defence against the military threat from without, and to re-build our societies after the destructions of war. Yet the Treaty of Washington clearly shows that even in those dark days we looked beyond the immediate danger towards a dual purpose: first to create a permanent military stability in Europe that would not only reduce but indeed eradicate the threat of war; and, second, to establish on this continent a new political order that would allow for political change, that would respect human rights and human dignity; an order that would give freedom to all the citizens of East and West; an order that would grant to the peoples of the East the same rights of self-determination that we enjoy here in the West, and in a Europe that would be able ultimately to overcome its painful division.

We are now living through a time of breathtaking movement. There has not been such all-embracing and radical change since the end of the Second World War. The ever closer union of Europe, the economic and ideological decline of Communism, Gorbachev's reform drive, the first disarmament agreement in human history, the growing importance of economic power - even overshadowing military power, the spreading influence of democratic ideas and free market forces, the revival in superpower relations - everywhere the dynamic of history is plain to see.

The East is turning to the West. Our political approach of co-operation instead of confrontation, as set out in the Harmel Report, is gaining increasing acceptance. Our ideas are on the advance. Democracy, human rights, plural-ism. You need to read Gorbachev's speech to the United Nations to see how far concepts which we have fostered for two decades have penetrated the Soviet vocabulary. Our initiatives are determining the course of political events.

The conclusion of the Vienna follow-up meeting has been a new triumph for the CSCE process which the West first set in motion. In all areas of disarmament, the real impetus has come from the West. Just consider the zero option, the START negotiations, the talks

on the elimination of chemical weapons or the concept of conventional disarmament from the Atlantic to the Urals.

More fundamentally, the competitive success of our free societies and market economies have given Mr. Gorbachev his main motive for reform. It is the freedom, the standard of living and the industrial success of the West which the Soviets fear, not our tanks. At the origin of Gorbachev's perestroïka is the need to reverse the decline of the Communist system if the Soviet Union is to remain a world power.

Thus it is not we who need to modernize our thinking. Our policy has never been guided by the spirit of confrontation. We have never been driven by the image of an enemy, and certainly are not today.

For all these reasons I passionately disagree with those who say that Mr. Gorbachev has the initiative. They confuse day-to-day politics with long-term strategy and the Soviets' "proposal of the week" firework display with true conceptual leadership. The latter lies with NATO, in spite of all the voices of doubt, and it will remain with us.

Our vision of the world in the year 2000 is clear in its fundamentals:

1. A global order founded on respect for the rights of peoples and individuals and characterized by the spirit of peaceful co-operation, in which the industrial nations of East and West can combine forces with the peoples of the Third World to resolve the great problems of humanity.

2. A new pattern of East-West relations bringing co-operation and peaceful competition in the place of confrontation and ideological and military antagonism, reducing military potentials, opening borders and ultimately ending the division of Europe and Germany. The aim is a peaceful European system which guarantees individual freedom and the right of national self-determination.

3. Further development of the Western community of shared values and destiny embodied by the Atlantic Alliance, working towards a mature partnership in which a united Western Europe plays a role in accordance with its strength, bears a fair share of the common burden and of global responsibilities. Without the strength and stability of a continuing Atlantic security system neither these long-term visions nor the goals of the immediate future can be achieved. In the coming decade the Atlantic Alliance and the dynamic of the European unification will remain the driving forces of world political developments.

There will be better prospects for peace and freedom in the last decade of the 20th century than ever before. Twenty-five years ago Hannah Arendt wrote that wars and revolutions had up to then given the 20th century its distinct shape. Today, in 1989, there are encouraging signs of hope.

The guns have fallen silent in the Iran-Iraq war. Soviet troops have begun to leave Afghanistan, and we expect and demand that they will pull out completely according to

plan. Cuban troops are now leaving Angola. In Indo-China the occupying forces of Vietnam are being reduced. The tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union, and between the Soviet Union and China, are easing. North and South Korea have begun a dialogue. Diplomacy has made progress in the attempt to resolve the Western Sahara conflict, and the PLO has unreservedly accepted United Nations' Resolutions 242 and 338.

Of course there are still many question marks, and setbacks cannot be excluded. But, in general, the historical lesson that times of radical change are also times of opportunity is proving to be true. By the same token, these times offer those with a clear vision and the strength of will the chance to shape the future. NATO is set on doing so. We willed the change. We made a crucial contribution to bringing it about. We do not fear it, but are determined to seize every opportunity and not to remain suspicious and passive.

Our hand is outstretched. We are prepared for a decisive improvement in East-West relations and for extensive disarmament. We want dynamism and not statics, unity and not division, open doors and not walls.

With Mr. Gorbachev and his perestroika policy the chances of reshaping East-West relations have improved substantially. There is no doubt about that. There is also no doubt that we have an interest in success in so far as he is opening up Soviet society and politics.

Our readiness to co-operate depends on progress in three areas:

1. human rights and free exchanges;

2. responsible behaviour in foreign policy, involving a contribution to removing tensions in world crisis areas;

3. reduction of military potential.

It is on this basis that we will support Mr. Gorbachev's economic reforms. What we should encourage are economic relations on their own merits: normal business transactions, not subsidized government loans; joint ventures based on sound economic criteria, not politics; enterprise and normal commercial risk, not feather-bedding of inefficient industries. You will all be familiar with that old Chinese proverb: "Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish and you feed him for life". Let us open our universities and business schools to Soviet managers; let our economic planners share their experiences with their Soviet counterparts; let our entrepreneurs tell Soviet industrialists what motivates human endeavour. I believe firmly that the application of modern Western business culture to the Soviet system would in the long run speed the process of genuine reform more than any number of soft loans.

Finally, we are looking for a more constructive Soviet attitude towards world affairs. The Soviet Union must act responsibly in the international arena. After all, the East-West

confrontation, however central it may be to those of us who live in this part of the world, is not the only issue affecting humanity.

There is no lack of burning issues in which our common interests are at stake, and where East-West co-operation could be beneficial. Countering terrorism, tackling environmental and energy problems, stopping the international drug trade, relieving the chronic underdevelopment of so much of the world, to name but a few. Also we shall engage the Soviet Union in discussions regarding those stubborn political problems that make some of the world's trouble spots so explosive, and where, once again, it is in the interest of both East and West that we seek a solution to these problems.

It is clear from our political goals that the Alliance challenges the present status quo. This status Quo not only denies freedom and justice to the peoples of Eastern Europe; it also, and despite forty years of peace, still does not guarantee Western Europeans security on their own territory. Weapons are the reflection and not the cause of the East-West confrontation. This is beyond doubt. But it is also true that our political goals cannot be realized until the military instability that threatens peace in Europe is removed. Here too we have a clear vision of the direction in which we wish to go.

We are striving for a European continent where military forces exist only to prevent war and to ensure self-defence, not for the purpose of initiating aggression or for political and military intimidation. Our goal is a Europe in which recourse to the use of force is no longer an option.

Our NATO forces are already structured to reflect these peaceful principles. The major threat to stability comes as a result from the preponderance of forces on the Eastern side. And Soviet forces, in particular, are concentrated in such a way that we cannot but doubt their strategic intention and their role in maintaining the division of Europe.

Indeed, the Soviet Union possesses more tanks and artillery than all the other members of the Warsaw Pact and the Alliance combined. It is these weapons, together with armoured troop carriers, that are ideally suited to large-scale offensive operations with little or no warning time. They can also be used to seize and hold territory. In their current configuration, Soviet forces have the capacity to launch a surprise attack, and to conduct offensive operations against NATO. Military stability thus requires that this dangerous imbalance be corrected. For this reason, we have proposed negotiations on conventional armed forces in Europe. The Soviet Union and its allies have recently agreed to a mandate based almost entirely on NATO's concept.

We have suggested that these talks cover the whole of Europe, from the Atlantic to the Urals, as it is only in this extended zone that reductions and constraints can really make a decisive contribution to stability. When the new talks open next month in Vienna, the Alliance will strive for conventional parity at a substantially lower overall level of forces. This will imply asymmetrical reductions by the side with superior numbers in the force categories under discussion. As reduced numbers in themselves do not necessarily produce greater security, we will also be seeking restrictions on the location, nationality

and state of readiness of those forces that will be allowed to remain in Europe once an agreement has been concluded. Above all, we will be seeking to restrict active units.

Aggression cannot be launched without the prior concentration of offensive equipment. Therefore, we will seek overall limits on the total holdings of equipment. Let us, for example, look at tanks. We propose to cut the number of tanks in Europe roughly in half. Even after Mr. Gorbachev's announced unilateral reductions are completed, the Warsaw Pact will still have 41,000 tanks in active units in Europe - most of which will be Soviet - compared to only 16,000 in active units for the Alliance. In other words, an advantage of 2.5 to 1. As tanks are designed for standing-start and fast-moving operations, this disparity is the one that gives us most cause for concern. Therefore the Alliance has proposed an overall limit of about 40,000 tanks in Europe, of which no one country will be allowed to have more than one-third, or about 12,000 tanks.

But tanks, although a major concern, are not the only items we are looking to restrict. We are seeking similar reductions on other offensive military systems, such as artillery and armoured troop vehicles.

Finally, we shall require a rigorous and reliable regime for verifying future agreements. This must include the periodic exchange of detailed data about forces and deployments and the right to conduct on-site inspections.
It should be clear from my comments so far that the Alliance whole-heartedly welcomes these forthcoming negotiations. The continuation of the present security imbalance in Europe can only bring the seeds of military instability.

The Allies have devoted two years of painstaking work to formulating our concept of conventional stability in Europe, and to developing our proposals. We are convinced that our approach is not only practical, but indeed the only concept that will achieve this objective. Our task now is to persuade the Soviet Union to agree to our concept, and to restructure its forces along the lines we have suggested.

Although we are accustomed to disappointment, there are indications from the Soviet Union that this may not be a forlorn hope. In recent weeks, leaders of Warsaw Pact states have announced unilateral reductions, and an intention to begin soon withdrawing certain units from Eastern Europe. These unilateral reductions are obviously welcome.

We have been pointing out for years that the Soviet Union has such an overwhelming superiority in conventional forces that it can afford to reduce without endangering its security. We can thus take some hope from the fact that the Soviet Union is now talking of the principle of asymmetrical reductions to parity; that it will withdraw at least some of its offensive military equipment from Eastern Europe; and that it now suggests restructuring its forces for defensive purposes only. But at the same time we do not yet have enough information regarding long-term Soviet intentions to evaluate with any confidence the significance of these unilateral reductions.

Furthermore, it is a fact that the Soviet Union will have, even after the reductions are complete, a substantial offensive capability against the West. Unilateral concessions can be unilaterally cancelled. In the absence of agreed verification measures, we will have no means of knowing when or if this happens.

However, we can also hope that, in announcing these reductions, the Soviet Union genuinely desires to improve East-West relations, and sees its initiative as a first step in renouncing an offensive force posture.

Is the glass half full or half empty? On the basis of the available evidence, we cannot say which view is more justified. The unilateral reductions suggest a new Soviet policy, but they do not confirm it. There are questions that must be asked.

First, we must learn what will happen to the other items of offensive equipment - such as armoured troop carriers - that Mr. Gorbachev has not mentioned so far. We will need to focus on all the equipment that can be considered as invasion assets, and which the Soviet Union has integrated into its concept of combined arms operations.

Second, we will ask questions about the logistical supporting structure that the Soviet Union has established in Europe to sustain an offensive operation. I am thinking of forward supply depots, stockpiles of equipment and spare parts, and ammunition dumps. We cannot assume that Soviet divisions have been disbanded until these logistical facilities are disbanded too.

Third, we will need to find out more about Soviet plans for the Western military districts of the Soviet Union. These areas are sufficiently close to the West to be used as a jumping off point in a reinforced attack. It seems from recent Soviet reductions that some of the troop reductions will be from the Western military districts. But given the importance of this area, we must ask the Soviet Union for more details.

Fourth, the Soviets recently announced a modest reduction in Soviet military production. But we must remember the high level from which they start. Even if carried out, this in itself will not have much impact on the current enormous output of Soviet tanks and artillery pieces. So how can we be sure that all the offensive equipment to be withdrawn will not be replaced by modernized versions in the near future, and which can always be introduced into Eastern Europe later on?

Fifth, our assessment of the announced reductions will also depend on the quality of the equipment to be eliminated. We want to see whether it includes the modern, operational materials, instead of outdated reserves.
Sixth, and finally, we will need more details on the Soviet conception of "defensive defence". What exactly does the Soviet leadership have in mind, and how can we verify these new "defensive" units to ensure that they no longer can attain strategic objectives on our territory?

While the West is pressing these considerations, the talks on conventional armed forces in Europe will be underway in Vienna. Our attention is now fully focussed on these negotiations, and rightly so. It is in Vienna that the real conditions for military stability in Europe will be discussed. We must insist on
a comprehensive system of agreed restraints and limitations in which we can have total confidence, as it will be applied by all, in the interest of all. Unilateral measures are no substitute for the hard bargaining that lies ahead.

Therefore, although I am interested in learning more about the Soviet reductions, my most immmediate concern is to have the reaction of the Soviet Union to our proposals. Is the Soviet Union ready to accept the restrictions on tanks, artillery and armoured troop carriers that we will put forward? Is it ready to accept limits on the stationing of its forces outside its national territory? Will it agree to our ideas for stringent verification? In short, will it agree to these first essential steps on the way to achieving lasting conventional stability in Europe?

The period of historical flux which we are living through brings risks as well as opportunities.

Progress with nuclear arms control stands in contrast to the spread of chemical weapons and missile technology, against the background of the population explosion and structural poverty and hunger in the developing countries. Dangerous international imbalances and the excessive debts of some Third World countries are marking the transition to a global economic order. The democracies are still threatened by terrorism, the international drug trade and persistent military asymmetries.

Political, ethnic and religious conflicts in many trouble spots ensure that the world is still not at peace. Even the Soviet reform process is by no means irreversible. Mr. Gorbachev is indeed firmly ensconced at the helm but his problems have not gone away. The gap between increasing political and social openness and economic stagnation and failure is widening.

The reform process has unleashed forces among the different ethnic groupings and in the satellite countries which it will be difficult for the Soviet Union to manage. We cannot yet tell whether Mr. Gorbachev will win through. We can only hope so. There is no certainty. Nobody can say what policy would be followed were he to fail.

We should also not lose sight of the following facts:

1. The Soviet Union is continuing to modernize its weapons;

2. The Warsaw Pact still has military superiority in Europe;

3. Even after the cutbacks in the defence budget which have now been announced, the Soviet Union will still spend more than 13% of its gross national product on armaments;

4. We have no certainty about future production rates of weapons, for example, tanks. Even if production is reduced by 19.5%, as announced, the Soviet output of tanks will still be 2,600 a year.

This situation requires us to have not merely the courage to face change but also steadfastness and loyal adherence to the proven principles of our policy. The Harmel concept is not out of date, and our flexible response strategy cannot be called into question, if only because for decades it has perfectly fulfilled its purpose of preventing war. Above all, it would be a disastrous mistake to neglect our defence precisely at a time of radical historical change, and thus to tear down that wall which protects us from attempts to solve problems by force. We cannot entrust our security to one person alone or to intentions. Both can change overnight. What counts is the other side's potential. That is what must guide our efforts for defence. Any Soviet politician - whether he be Mr. Gorbachev's successor or rival - must know that, whatever happens in the Soviet Union, the option of a military solution to Moscow's problems remains barred, so that there is no alternative to a policy of peaceful internal reform.

So there are three conditions for our future success.

First, we must maintain an effective defence. It is vital that we maintain the combat strength and readiness of our Allied military forces, particularly in view of the forthcoming disarmament negotiations. Any unilateral reduction on the side of the clearly weaker party must further restrict our negotiating room, making multilateral disarmament less probable.

Second, we must remain united. Alliance solidarity, arrived at through extensive negotiations and adhered to steadfastly at the conference table, has forged the new opening in East-West relations. Concertation of the political approaches of the sixteen Allies is the life-blood of NATO.

If we are to preserve Allied unity, we must be serious about equitable burden-sharing. We must tackle it energetically and ultimately find the right solution. It is also vital that we maintain a spirit of Atlantic solidarity to help us to resolve the points of economic conflict between Americans and Europeans which spring partly from the prospect of 1992. We must not allow economic rivalry to have a prejudicial effect on Alliance solidarity in the field of security policy. Therefore we must do everything to resist moves towards protectionism on either side of the Atlantic. We can afford neither a "fortress Europe" nor a "USA in splendid isolation".

Last but not least, we need the continuing support of our publics. We know from opinion polls that the Alliance is considered to be essential by the large majority of our citizens. But support for our objectives does not equally mean support for the burdens of our daily defence. This situation calls for strong leadership if we are to keep public expectations within hopeful but realistic bounds.

The three challenges that I have described are serious ones; but they are the problems of our success, and we can meet them if we continue to have the courage of our convictions. On the other hand, Mr. Gorbachev faces challenges of a totally different dimension, for the problems of the Soviet Union are the problems of decline and misguided policies. They cannot be solved by economic reform alone but only by a transformation of the political system. We wish Mr. Gorbachev well with this herculean task. But let us not base our policy on the assumption that, becausewehope for the best,the best will automatically happen. This is not the time to lower our guard.

With change finally coming to the East, the Allies will face issues that are more complex than anything we have known in the past. At the same time, the potential for success is greater than what we had come to expect. The Alliance is the essential medium through which a more humane, just and secure peace can be achieved in Europe.

The opportunities that we face today are proof of the wisdom - and the vision - of those Western statesmen who came together in Washington forty years ago. They did not know how long it would take us to complete our task, and I cannot today make a prediction either; but at least they mapped out for us a path that history has shown to be the right one. Let us pursue this path with confidence and vigour.

I am optimistic as I look towards the future. Our societies are more flexible and creative. Our economic structures are more successful. Our social systems are more just and our thinking is more attuned to humanity's concerns.