



PRIME MINISTER GRO HARLEM BRUNDTLAND

Words of Welcome at Buffet Dinner for the Diplomatique Corps of Oslo
Akershus , 17 September 1996

Welcome,
Dear Guests,
Members of the Diplomatic Corps of Oslo,
Excellencies,

The Government is pleased to honour you here tonight, - in a setting that allows us all to talk, mingle and exchange views.

That has become Norway's challenge - to do our utmost to mingle and exchange views. We, Norway, have to use all possible channels open to us, in the daily international struggle for attention - and so we do - as skillfully and imaginatively as possible. But one channel remains in permanent shape - the heads of missions in Oslo.

A diplomat's method of work must change in a new world of instant telecommunications. It has been a while since King Friedrich the First of Prussia wrote his instruction to his diplomats, to "report every fortnight, on anecdotes, rumor and scandals".

And there is no place for bellicose views on diplomacy, as when Field Marshall von Wrangel wrote to Bismarck, that "all diplomats should be hanged!".

But a clever observer should keep his eyes open for a variety of inputs. A few days ago, the Foreign Editor of the Economist visited Oslo. His main interest was the economy. After interviews with a variety of sources he concluded in the following way;

"Norway must be the only European country whose most pressing problem seems to be that there has been too much nice weather lately".

It may look like that seen with eyes shaded by experiences from other countries. The economy is indeed solid. The prospects are good. The government is conscious of the challenges ahead. The results we have achieved since 1990 will not be put at stake. We are committed to maintain a balanced budget and to set aside the surpluses to the benefit also of coming generations.

We will have to withstand the temptation of today's high oil revenues. This is our historic challenge - a challenge new to modern democracy; not to use money that is available, win democratic support for standing firm on the following: If we spend today to meet all kind of needs, tomorrow's needs will suffer.

Norway benefits from rich natural resources. Yes, many observers point to that. But the main reason for our results lies above all with the achievement of dedicated people. It is not natural resources in themselves that give us wealth, but the way we utilize them. If resources alone could

make us wealthy, we could have reached our present standard of living a long time ago.

We would not have come where we are without close cooperation between the government and the social partners. They have taken their share of the burden, securing the path towards lower interest rates, increased investment and reduced unemployment. Yes - revenues from the North Sea are important. But if trends continue, Norway will shortly run a surplus even without the revenues from oil and gas.

In the future, most of our countries will face similar challenges; There will be more elderly people with acquired pension rights. Education will be longer. Fewer people at work will pay for more people who are not. In the coming decades all of our countries will experience profound changes. And we must share experiences. Learning as we go.

We live in a knowledge-driven time, but we are still in transition. We shall never be able to escape from the ultimate dilemma that all our knowledge is about the past - and all our decisions are about the future.

Although the EU issue divided the Norwegian population two years ago, there is a broad consensus on the main priorities of Norwegian foreign policy. An observer recently made the following point on foreign policy decision making in the Nordic countries: "In Finland, important decisions are made by four persons - in Sweden by forty - in Denmark by four hundred - and in Norway by four million."

Luckily, most of these four million are internationally minded. That is why there is continued support for a continued high level of development assistance. That is why the Foreign Minister will continue to be active in Eastern Europe, and why the Defence Minister will continue to work with Russia, the Baltic countries and all our other new partners. It is also why we will press forward with our increased presence in Asia, and tomorrow we will hold an open conference on our policy towards that important region.

And all of you here, if any, are familiar with our role in Bosnia, the Middle East, and wherever ensuing democracy is in need of support.

Four million people. A transparent society. We try to make it easy for you to find your way. We intend to maintain an open door for all the diplomats of Oslo. This occasion in your honour is meant to tell you how much we appreciate your work and our relationship.

So please join me in a toast to yourself, to the Diplomatic Corps of Oslo. I hope you will have an enjoyable evening.