

STOCKHOLM SPEECH 15 JUNE 1996

I take as my starting point the fact that differences of opinion on the political arrangements under which we live are natural and inevitable. Indeed, difference is the motor of progress. As alternative views and philosophies meet, new and different ways of doing things being imaginable and feasible. Without the clash of ideas, society is doomed to stagnation.

The history of Western society is one of difference and its consequences. For centuries, our peoples attempted to resolve their cultural, religious, political and economic differences by one form or another of violence. European society has seen a tragic history in which attempts have been made to suppress differences by force. Witch hunts, inquisitions and crusades have been accompanied by full-scale European civil wars over the centuries.

Sweden, of course, played its full part in these perpetual wars. But wisely and fortunately, your country withdrew from the self-destructive madness long before your neighbours to the South came to their senses. For our century has been the bloodiest of all. Apart from all the countless wars around the planet, Europe has massacred itself twice in this century. Tens of millions have died because we could not find a way to live with our differences. Even today, there are still unresolved conflicts in Europe, and even within the European Union, my own country being the prime example. You cannot eat a flag, but a flag can kill you.

These violent conflicts have not been resolved because the parties to those conflicts have not yet succeeded in developing strategies for peace. While terrorism of the Red Brigades or RFA type can be dealt with as primarily a policing problem, conflicts such as that in Ireland are much more deeply embedded in our history and politics, and can ultimately only be resolved by a political solution.

There are three options in the face of difference, whether they be of national identity, ethnicity or religion: to pretend that they do not exist; to combat such differences; or to accommodate them. We have seen the failure of the Stalinist attempt to pretend that difference either does not exist or is an irrelevance. For example, such differences were suppressed purely and simply for almost forty years in the former Yugoslavia. But the end result has been the greatest catastrophe in Europe since 1945. We have all been sickened by the efforts of the warlords in ex-Yugoslavia to eradicate difference by killing and ethnic cleansing. In Ireland, the eradication of difference has been a regrettable part of our history. In my country, we have also suffered from the activities of those who thought that being Irish or British was a matter of life and death, who were prepared to make sure that it was. It seems to me therefore that the only rational, human and realistic course of action is to try to seek arrangements which will allow different traditions to live together while preserving their identities. The only sensible way forward is to accept difference as inevitable and see it as a basic and natural principle of human society. We must cherish the diversity of

cultures which exist in Europe, and seek to preserve them and the equilibrium between them.

The second option to combat difference by force has also been disastrous. Force, or the threat of force, is not a useful method of dealing with difference. Indeed, it often reinforces identities which might otherwise be only a minor part of a person's life. The use of force also generates more force, creating the vicious cycle of an eye for an eye. I have often pointed out that the policy of an eye for eye eventually makes everyone blind. Violence dehumanises those who employ it. It drives governments towards violations of human rights, and threatens the freedom and safety of all citizens, however remotely they are involved in the conflict. Indeed, it is seriously detrimental even, or especially to the communities in whose name violence is allegedly used.

This lesson is one for everyone - governments who think that they can suppress their minorities by force as well ^{as} minorities (or more usually minorities within minorities) who believe that they can ameliorate their situation by the use of force. The use of violence merely makes problems more intractable. This is absolutely clear in Ireland where the last quarter century of violence has deepened the antagonisms between the various sections of our people. It will be no easy task to overcome the consequent bitterness and division, but we have no choice but to try if we want to establish a lasting peace.

The third option is the direction taken after World War II by those western European states who finally realised that the centuries-old effort to destroy each other could no longer be sustained. From that realisation emerged the creation of the Council of Europe, the European Court of Human Rights, and eventually the European Community and the other range of European organisations.

The European Union is of particular significance because I believe that it is the greatest ever example of conflict resolution in human history. The fact that countries which had spent centuries invading, occupying, expelling and massacring each other came together freely to put aside their past hatreds. They came together to work in their common interests and to ensure that war could no longer be a way of settling their differences. This in itself would have been remarkable but the fact these countries still preserve their identities is even more encouraging. It proves that it is possible to establish institutions which allow for common policies without submerging the variety of cultures and traditions which are the real riches of Europe. The experience of the EU therefore affords a good many lessons for those of whose who still have to deal with the consequences of difference conceived as a threat, both in Ireland and further afield.

In recent years we have been able to build on this experience in our attempts to resolve our differences and to end our conflict in Ireland. Most people, irrespective of their preferred views

on the type of political system under which they want to live, now realise that we can only create a viable and peaceful system by coming to terms with each other. The various paramilitary organisations know that they cannot achieve their objectives by force. The authorities, and all responsible political leaders, know that they cannot suppress the paramilitary organisations. Only by removing the divisions, fears and suspicions which exist in our society which give rise to violence can violence be eliminated.

Differences can only be accommodated by dialogue and agreement. Last week we initiated the process of negotiation. It is clear from the early stages that our work will not be easy. But it is also apparent that negotiations can work, provided we all concentrate on building rather than wrecking the future. No participant can expect any other to give up their fundamental rights and aspirations, but we can be expected to work towards a situation in which everyone's fundamental interests can be guaranteed. By now, I believe all the people of Northern Ireland are aware that we will sink or swim together.

We live in a global economy in which our historic divisions are frankly irrelevant. In order to play our full role in turning our country into a dynamic part of that economy, all sections of our people will have to work together. The perpetuation of our conflict is a luxury we cannot afford. Driving this truth home is really the primary task of political leadership in Ireland.

However, success in our goal of obtaining a political agreement acceptable to all sections of our people would be immeasurably helped if the discussions were to take place in a totally peaceful climate and if the discussions were to include all the relevant parties. I have repeatedly called for the IRA to reinstate its ceasefire so as to ensure that talks can take place in a peaceful atmosphere and with the presence of Sinn Fein. If we are to create a mutually acceptable political agreement, all parties must be part of the solution. The present situation is essentially postponing the day in which we can finally place a plan for agreed political institutions before the people for approval in a referendum. Until that day comes, no political leader in our country can be satisfied with him or herself. No one can claim a victory until we can all collectively claim a victory for peace. Only then can we definitively state that the cause of human rights has triumphed.