

*The President
of the European Parliament*

**EXTRACTS FROM A SPEECH BY LORD PLUMB,
PRESIDENT OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT,
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I am delighted and honoured to be in Moscow at this most opportune moment in the history of political relations between the Soviet Union and the European Community.

The establishment of diplomatic relations between the Community and the Soviet Union has marked an important point of mutual convergence which will, I know, be of considerable mutual benefit, in view of the general desire to strengthen our links.

It was overdue and I am glad that the signature of the EC/CMEA Joint Declaration opened the way for you to propose this logical step.

I am particularly pleased to be the first representative of the Community institutions to visit Moscow officially since the EEC-CMEA agreement last June.

My visit was also made possible by the undeniable improvement in the climate of East/West relations in which the Soviet Union has played its part. This progress also affords the certain prospect of a good and co-operative long-term relationship between the Supreme Soviet and the European Parliament.

The citizens of the European Community have followed recent developments in the Soviet Union with close interest, noting in particular the ambitious programme of remodelling and modernising the economy, and the atmosphere of glasnost which is providing greater openness in information and a much larger measure of free political debate.

It was my own compatriot, Edmund Burke, who wrote "A state without the means of some change is without the means of its conservation".

It was General Secretary Gorbachev who restated this concept according to current conditions by observing "Perestroika hits hardest those who are used to working in the old way".

The ideological gap which divides us must be honestly recognised. The nature of society in your country does differ significantly from that in the European Community. However, many of the problems you are grappling with are all too familiar to us: how to increase technical and industrial efficiency; how best to match food supplies with demand; how best to use and invest our natural resources to bring about a maximum benefit for our people; how to raise living standards and preserve the quality of our environment and how to use our human potential so that it benefits society as a whole. These are not problems readily or easily resolved by the recourse to one single ideology. We are all, I think, learning in this respect. Our aims and our ambitions are undoubtedly much closer than they are generally perceived to be, despite the obvious differences in approach and initiation.

You have been experiencing change. The European Community, too, has been changing. We have become more a Community of nations and less of an economic club. It is significant to me that some of the fastest progress of all has taken place within the past few years.

Post-war suspicions between European nations have given way to real and enduring partnerships between the countries of Western Europe, many of which are actively working for a European Union.

The accession of Spain and Portugal in January 1986 means that the European Community comprises over 320 million people. After a period in the late 1970s and early 1980s which many observers termed "Eurosclerosis", the Community is now set fair on a course which will carry it, healthy and prepared, well into the twenty-first century. The European Community is in good shape for the future.

The last couple of years have seen important decisions proposed and taken. We have completed an extensive and vital revision of the original Treaties by passing into law what is known as the Single European Act. This Act might be summed up as our way of avoiding a stranglehold of bureaucracy over European decision-making. It introduced a greater degree of majority voting in the meetings of the Council of Ministers, which are made up of the ministers of each European Community Member State.

The European Parliament now has a prominent role in the framework of decision-making. The greater flexibility was essential. European legislation does not always suit every Member State, but there is now an additional consideration. We now discuss whether proposed legislation suits the European Community as a whole rather than each individual Member State separately.

The future financing of the Community and its policies is now set on a more stable and equitable basis. Important decisions have been and are being implemented on the reduction of economic disparities between the various regions, and on a thoroughgoing reform and modernisation of the Common Agricultural Policy. These decisions have been complemented by a firm commitment by the EC Member States to achieve a single market by 1992. That means a market without barriers to the movement of goods, services, people and capital.

The text of the Single European Act refers to the removal of all internal frontiers between Member States. Already this year measures have been adopted to permit free movement of capital. This will mean the abolition of all foreign exchange controls by July of 1990.

I hardly need to tell you the implications of all this. The European Community is becoming stronger, more united, more integrated. The Member States are making a reality of the common market by opting for cooperation and convergence in their economic policies. Economic and monetary integration is inevitable.

I am, as you know, the President of a unique institution: the directly-elected Parliament of the peoples of the European Community. We play our full democratic role, as a Parliament, in the decision-making of the European Community.

Of course, a whole range of ideologies is represented in the Parliament. We have a very generous political spectrum. But it is not a modern Tower of Babel. In many ways the most extraordinary thing about the Parliament is that it works. It works just a Parliament should. The only difference - and this is a major one - is that there is of course no European Government on which it can exercise its full and effective influence.

As a Parliament we are all, naturally, agreed that we should have more institutional responsibilities, even than those we have at present. For it is not a question of power, but of responsibilities. It brings to mind another of Edmund Burke's observations that "all Governments, indeed every human benefit and enjoyment and every prudent act, is founded on compromise and barter". We will have a chance to renew our mandate for these extra responsibilities at the next European Elections in June 1989.

As you are probably aware, I am a farmer; a farmer born and bred. I have a farm in the centre of England, on which I was working for most of last month, bringing in the harvest.

I am sure that no farmer, however small, can afford to ignore the international consequences of farming as we know it today. I have spoken with and represented farmers from all over the world, and I believe I know what their interests and their preoccupations are. I believe farmers are the same all over the world. No-one likes to produce when there is no market for the goods, and it is the same on the international level.

The past few years have seen extraordinary developments in agriculture. Only fifteen years ago at a World Food Conference arranged by the United Nations, most participants were publicly worried that there was not enough food to feed the world. This

year, and indeed for some years already, we know that the world is producing enough food to feed the world. But hunger and malnutrition persist in certain areas of the world.

It is an international disgrace that we have not been able so far to achieve a proper balance in food production and consumption so that everyone can be fed adequately. Instead, there are large surpluses in most industrialised countries and famine in many of the least developed countries.

I organized a World Food Conference in Brussels in April of this year, which sought to bring the experts together. I was most encouraged with the commitment of the participants and the relevance of the final communiqué. I was particularly delighted with the contribution of the delegation from the Soviet Union, and was very pleased to welcome them to Brussels on that occasion.

In Europe we have the problem of plenty. Thanks more to the scientist than the politician, European agricultural production is in substantial surplus. We are producing too much, and the surpluses are threatening the stability of international trade in agriculture. I believe that we in Europe are beginning to put our house in order. We are beginning to produce more for the market and less for the grain-store.

The Common Agricultural Policy has undergone important and thoroughgoing reform in response to the new international conditions of trade and production. Some of these changes will affect the Soviet agricultural sector. For instance, I know that the Soviet Union customarily buys surplus Community dairy produce. The quota measures under way in the Community are likely to cut the surplus amounts available for export. In the international grain market, the picture might change over the next few years either because we are able to cut down on overproduction or because the Soviet Union will be able to increase its production.

The European Community and the Soviet Union exercise a major presence on world agricultural markets, as do the United States.

Yet I am conscious that despite this dominance of the world market, we are not talking enough to each other, and we are not listening enough to each other. It would of course be helpful if the reforms under way in the Soviet Union were to permit the Soviet Union to become a full member of the GATT, but may I suggest to you that in the meantime, or as a substitute, you consider an idea I have had for some time? Let us together, the Soviet Union and the European Community, meet regularly, for example twice a year, to talk specifically about trends in world agricultural trade as they affect our policies, our producers and our consumers. These talks should involve our most senior agricultural policy-makers and policy-takers. The World Food Conference demonstrated what can be achieved. I believe that such talks would fit in well with the restructuring of international agricultural trade that is so badly needed in the West, with Soviet agricultural objectives, and most notably with the spirit of 'perestroika'. I hope I am able to report to the European Commission the Soviet willingness to consider an idea of this sort. General Secretary Gorbachev has remarked that "there is a great thirst for mutual understanding and mutual communication in the world". I could not agree more, and international agricultural trade seems an excellent brief to benefit from such international cooperation.

Thanks to the great improvement in East/West relations, there are now encouraging signs, throughout the whole world, of more peaceful conditions between antagonists. The superpowers have a great responsibility to the whole world and it is in their cooperation that the spirit of peace can be fostered in regional conflicts.

The INF agreement to abolish intermediate nuclear forces was a very significant step forward. It opened a large door to the resolution of a whole series of disarmament negotiations in many areas. The European Parliament very much welcomed this historic achievement, while emphasising Western Europe's direct interest in being closely involved in the disarmament process.

The EC/CMEA Framework Agreement fits easily into this context. It marks a new and positive era in relations between the European Community and Eastern Europe. It of course opened the way to the establishment of diplomatic relations between the Community and the Soviet Union and with four other countries. These agreements were long overdue. Too much time has been wasted. We understand and appreciate the Soviet wish for a trade and commercial cooperation agreement with the European Community, which I know will be interested as long as there is a perceived mutual advantage.

We have much to show each other, tell each other, and sell each other. It is as wise, at this early stage, to point out that the development of trade should always be based on reciprocal and mutual advantage. The Community's programme to create a Single Market, for example, will not be characterised by the building of walls around Europe to make a fortress. This is not the source of our inspiration. It is quite the opposite. We wish to make trading conditions easier, not more difficult, but it will require similar commitments, conditions and assumptions on both sides.

Increased understanding between the Community and Eastern Europe will reduce tensions and decrease the sense of threat. The European Parliament is looking forward to being able to contribute to future developments. Our delegations for relations with the Soviet Union have already started work, and I hope very much that there will be extensive contacts between our Parliamentarians, for international relations are not just a question of intergovernmental contacts and agreements. Parliamentary representatives have to meet and exchange ideas, and explain to each other, at first hand, the preoccupations of their peoples. These contacts permit us all to examine and explore the possible areas of future cooperation in many political and economic sectors.

In my lifetime the continent of Europe has known periods of bitterness, division and war. But today the prospects are brighter than they have ever been for peaceful co-existence and peaceful co-operation.

Let us never slip backwards from the progress we have made in recent years.

Bonds have been and are being created. Political cooperation has been institutionalised between our countries.

As President of the European Parliament, my mission has always been and will always be to seek practical ways of bringing people of many nations together, and particularly the peoples of Europe.

That objective is the guarantee of our future well-being and the certain harbinger of lasting peace, not only in Europe, but throughout the whole world.