

May 28 / Administration of William J. Clinton, 1997

NOTE: The President's 146th news conference began at 11:42 a.m. in the Rolzall Room at Binnenhof Palace. The President met with Prime Minister Wim Kok of the Netherlands, President of the European Council, and Jacques Santer, President of the European Commission. Following the news conference, the three leaders wit-

nessed the signing of a customs cooperation agreement and a chemical precursor agreement by Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, European Commission Vice President Leon Brittan, and Foreign Minister Hans van Mierlo of The Netherlands.

Remarks at a Luncheon Hosted by Queen Beatrix of The Netherlands in The Hague *May 28, 1997*

Your Majesty, Prime Minister Kok, honored colleagues, on behalf of the United States, I would like to thank Her Majesty and the people of The Netherlands for this deeply appreciated commemoration. And thank you, Your Majesty, for your very fine statement.

The ties between our two nations are long and unbroken. When my country was first seeking its independence, The Netherlands was one of the first nations to which we turned. John Adams, America's first envoy to The Hague and later our second President, described the completion of a treaty of friendship with Holland as, quote, "the happiest event and the greatest action" of his life. More than 200 years later, America still takes pride in our friendship with this good land, whose compassion and generosity throughout the world is far disproportionate to its size.

I also express my gratitude to all my fellow leaders for being here today. Your presence is a very great honor to the United States and a symbol of the age of possibility which we now inhabit, thanks in no small measure to the vision and work of General Marshall and his contemporaries in the United States and in Europe.

The Marshall plan we celebrate today, as Her Majesty noted, was open to all of Europe. But

for half the Continent, the dream of recovery was denied. Now, at last, all of Europe's nations are seeking their rightful places at our transatlantic table.

Here in this room are freely elected Presidents, Prime Ministers, and officials from every corner of Europe, including Russia. We are the trustees of history's rarest gift, a second chance to complete the job that Marshall and his generation began. Our great opportunity and our enormous obligation is to make the most of this precious gift and together to build an undivided, democratic, peaceful, prosperous Europe for the very first time in all human history.

The daunting challenge in Marshall's time was to repair the damage of a devastating war. Now we face the equally ambitious task of promoting peace, security, and prosperity for all the people of Europe.

As we celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Marshall plan, let us commit ourselves to build upon its success for the next 50 years and beyond. And let us now join in a toast to Her Majesty and the people of The Netherlands in gratitude for this great and good day.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:53 p.m. in the Small Ballroom of Noordeinde Palace.

Remarks at a Ceremony Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Marshall Plan in The Hague May 28, 1997

Thank you very much, Mr. Sedee, for sharing your wonderful story. I forgive you for stealing the matchbook from the White House. *[Laughter]* In fact, just before we came in, I confess that I had heard he did such a thing, so without theft, I brought him some cufflinks and some Oval Office candy for his grandchildren today. *[Laughter]*

Your Majesty, Prime Minister, fellow heads of state and leaders of government, ministers parliamentarian, Members of Congress, to the youth leaders from Europe and America, to all of you who had anything to do with or were ever touched by the Marshall plan. And I'd like to say a special word of appreciation to two distinguished Americans, former Ambassadors General Vernon Walters and Arthur Hartman, who worked on the Marshall plan as young men, who have come here to be with us today.

This is a wonderful occasion. We are grateful to the Queen, the Government, and the people of The Netherlands for hosting us and for commemorating these 50 years. The words of Mr. Sedee reach out to us across the generations, no matter where we come from or what language we speak. They warn us of what can happen when people turn against one another and inspire us with what we can achieve when we all pull together. That is a message that we should emblazon in our memories.

Just as we honor the great accomplishments of 50 years ago, as the Prime Minister said so eloquently, we must summon the spirit of the Marshall plan for the next 50 years and beyond to build a Europe that is democratic, at peace, and undivided for the first time in history, a Europe that does not repeat the darkest moments of the 20th century but instead fulfills the brightest promise of the 21st.

Here in the citadel of a prosperous, tolerant Dutch democracy, we can barely imagine how different Europe was just 50 years ago. The wonderful pictures we saw, with the music, helped us to imagine: Some 30,000 dead still lay buried beneath the sea of rubble in Warsaw; 100,000 homes had been destroyed in Holland; Germany in ruins; Britain facing a desperate shortage of coal and electric power; factories

crippled all across Europe; trade paralyzed; millions fearing starvation.

Across the Atlantic, the American people were eager to return to the lives they had left behind during the war. But they heeded the call of a remarkable generation of American leaders, General Marshall, President Truman, Senator Vandenberg, who wanted to work with like-minded leaders in Europe to work for Europe's recovery as they had fought for its survival. They knew that, as never before, Europe's fate and America's future were joined.

The Marshall plan offered a cure, not a crutch. It was never a handout; it was always a hand up. It said to Europe, if you will put your divisions behind you, if you will work together to help yourselves, then America will work with you.

The British Foreign Secretary, Ernest Bevin, called the Marshall plan a lifeline to sinking men, bringing hope where there was none. From the Arctic Sea to the Mediterranean, European nations grabbed that lifeline, cooperating as never before on a common program of recovery. The task was not easy, but the hope they shared was more powerful than their differences.

The first ship set sail from Texas to France with 19,000 tons of wheat. Soon, on any given day, a convoy of hope was heading to Europe with fuel, raw materials, and equipment. By the end of the program in 1952, the Marshall plan had pumped \$13 billion into Europe's parched economies. That would be the equivalent of \$88 billion today. It provided the people of Europe with the tools they needed to rebuild their shattered lives. There were nets for Norwegian fishermen, wool for Austrian weavers, tractors for French and Italian farmers, machines for Dutch entrepreneurs.

For a teenage boy in Germany, Marshall aid was the generous hand that helped lift his homeland from its ruinous past. He still recalls the American trucks driving onto the schoolyard, bringing soup that warmed hearts and hands. That boy grew up to be a passionate champion of freedom and unity in Europe and a great and cherished friend of America. He became