

does, however, concern many Western governments is that, if such a conference were held prematurely, it might prejudice the important progressive trends now so promising in Europe. Negotiations can make progress only when the other side displays a readiness to talk about something more than a mere freezing of the status quo in Europe. It would not make sense for the Western countries to be beguiled into a conference where the cards are stacked in advance against an outcome reasonably acceptable to both sides. The consensus emerging from the meeting reflects these factors, while keeping open the door to a conference.

The problem of procedures for organizing negotiations with the other side is a complex one. Bilateral contacts may be more suitable at present for some issues, limited multilateral discussions for others, and a general conference including the neutral nations of Europe will probably become appropriate in due course. We proposed some weeks ago that there should now be a detailed alliance study of this question of procedures for negotiation, and I am very pleased to report that, following the Canadian suggestion, the declaration includes a specific request to have the NATO Council study this issue and report on it to our next ministerial meeting in May.

Discussions at NATO meetings are necessarily detailed and sometimes technical. It isn't easy to get agreement when 15 governments, each with its own essential national interests and its own way of looking at things, are involved. I can tell the House, however, that some real progress was made last week. It was encouraging to me, and to all who were with me, to find a new and more hopeful atmosphere and a new resolve that the arid confrontation that has for too long characterized East-West relations should be brought to an end - not by any sudden dramatic initiative, but by steady and careful negotiation of specific issues, starting with those that show the best chances for success.

We found a new climate in Europe, a new dynamic in the Common Market, that points the way to enlargement of the Community and strengthening of ties between its members, a new German Government already working towards a modus vivendi with East Germany. Above all, we found a new atmosphere of hope brought about by the promise of progress in the SALT talks. I was encouraged, as I know all members of this House will be, to find NATO sensitive to the new trends, contributing to the great events that are taking place, and looking beyond its essential defence functions to the opportunities for a more positive role in securing the peace in Europe.

I took advantage of the NATO meeting to have individual talks with some of my NATO colleagues. I met with the Foreign Ministers of Italy and Turkey and had brief sessions with the German Foreign Minister and the United States Secretary of State. I also had a useful discussion with the French Foreign Minister of our bilateral relations, and I am glad to say that there was mutual agreement that we should work out arrangements to avoid future incidents of the kind that have marred our relations in the recent past. I am hopeful that in this way we may be able to put our relations on a better footing.