Accordingly, problems, such as interest rates, economic stimulus or restraint, have to be tackled in concert by the Western countries together, although the appropriateness of individual measures will still vary by country. The increase in linkages of Summit countries with the oil producers has also been dramatic, whether it is in Western demand for oil and search for markets; or OPEC dependence on Western manufactured products and know-how, and OPEC need for secure and remunerative places to invest. Even with other developing countries, trade and capital links are now of great and growing importance for many Summit countries, and market prospects in certain newly industrializing countries are among the most promising anywhere.

– There has been a shift from the rather more short term, specific, relatively optimistic communiqués of the first few Summits, to the longer term, relatively realistic, indeed almost dogged mood in the later ones. Summit countries have in fact increasingly appreciated that the issues facing them cannot be dealt with quickly but will be around for some years, that we are in for a period of relatively low growth, high cost energy, high inflationary pressures, employment problems. And if one looks ahead to the end of the century – as leaders did at Venice – the prospects, without major policy changes in the meantime, are not encouraging.

– While Summits have thus increasingly looked longer term, they also have taken positions on the immediate or the specific, often in great detail. This is so, in significant part, because leaders have clearly perceived they need to have something concrete to show after such a major meeting. The public focus on these Summits has been greater each year (we may have between 1,500 and 2,000 press in Ottawa) and the expectations that are built up are increasingly difficult to satisfy.

– Yet, despite the fact that simply by meeting, the leaders have not brought magic solutions to their own and the world's ills – after all, these problems are still with us seven years later – the leaders are continuing to meet. They have found these gatherings a necessary, indeed central, element in their calendars. Summits have increasingly come to play a major role in the calendar of the whole international economic process.

– Not infrequently, the communiqués contain language, agreed to by all participants, that on the face of it could be embarrassing at home to one or more participants. The truth is that participants have not been unhappy with such wording. They need the mutual reinforcement to help them either to resist domestic pressures, e.g. for protectionism, or to move in desired directions such as on energy pricing for the United States.

– The Summits have gradually extended their purview beyond the basic economic issues looked at in Rambouillet. At Venice, for example, clearly political issues were raised and communiqués were issued about them, notably Afghanistan. Terrorism and hijacking have been other such issues, as were refugees at Venice.

– Although no continuing secretariat has been established, an innovative aspect of Summits has been the appointment of personal representatives of the leaders. The personal representatives have been charged with following-up on one Summit and