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AN ERA OF CHANGE FOR EUROPE AND NATO

A Statement to the House of Commons on December 8, 1969, by the Secretary of State for External Affairs, the Honorable Mitchell Sharp.

I should like to report to the House on the NATO meeting from which the Minister of National Defence and I have just returned. I am tabling herewith the communiqué and the accompanying declaration which were issued at the close of the meeting....

... There is a coming-together of events in Europe today that opens the way to profound change. Basic differences between East and West will not be resolved overnight, but there is reason to believe that a new era of genuine negotiation has begun.

Three new developments herald this era of change. The most important, which may well turn out to be a turning-point in postwar history, is the opening in Helsinki last month of preliminary discussions between the United States and the Soviet Union on the limitation of strategic nuclear weapons - the "SALT" talks. The ground for these talks was prepared in NATO and at last week's meeting Secretary of State Rogers gave us a confidential report on progress to date. The very fact that these talks have begun in a business-like way has changed the East-West climate and brought a sense of cautious hope into East-West relations.

The second development of major importance is the manifest intention of West Germany to work out new relations with East Germany, Poland, the Soviet Union and other countries of Eastern Europe. This new West German policy has added new momentum to the search for negotiated settlements in Europe.

The third development of potentially historic significance was last week's summit meeting of the six Common Market countries at The Hague. The extent of agreement achieved at this meeting has created a new mood of optimism and co-operation in Western Europe - a development that will encourage new approaches to the problems of Europe as a whole.

It was in this atmosphere of movement and progress that the NATO ministers discussed and defined their common position. They did so in the knowledge that the outcome of their meeting as made known to both East and West by the communiqué and declaration, and by less formal but still important press reports, would become part of the evolving discourse among the nations concerned with the future Europe and its people.