

Mr. Speaker:

In the course of three days in Brussels last week I attended the December Ministerial Meeting of the North Atlantic Council, continued our conversations with the European Economic Commission and had meetings with the French Foreign Minister, Mr. Schumann, and the Acting Foreign Minister of Greece, Mr. Palamas.

Western Europe, with Britain on the threshold of the Community and already being drawn into its councils, is the scene of some of the most dynamic developments in the world today. The negotiations for the enlargement and deepening of the Community in their final stage are paralleled by East-West negotiations over the status of Berlin, and by promising moves toward a modus vivendi between the Federal German Republic and the German Democratic Republic. These developments, taken together, are bringing about a Europe more soundly based economically and with a healthier and saner political climate.

Progress on Berlin is the most dramatic of these developments. Since the Second World War, Berlin has been a focus of the East-West confrontation and unsettled relations between the Federal and Democratic Republics of Germany a major stumbling-block in the search for détente.

Without the active support of NATO, Chancellor Brandt would have been unable to negotiate, on a basis of equality, the treaties with the USSR and Poland nor could the Federal Republic, acting alone, have any real hope of reaching a modus vivendi with the German Democratic Republic.

It is against this background of forward movement in Central Europe that the NATO Meeting should be seen. The two major preoccupations of the Alliance, and I believe of the Soviet Union and the countries of the Warsaw Pact, are the holding of a Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe and the negotiation of mutual and balanced force reductions, usually referred to by the acronym MBFR.

On the Conference, Ministers re-affirmed the position they adopted at the June meeting, that NATO countries are ready to enter upon multilateral preparations for a Conference when a satisfactory conclusion of the Berlin talks has been reached. Meanwhile they agreed to keep in touch with the Finnish Government which has offered Helsinki as a site for conversations on this subject. Two of the stages needed for a Berlin settlement have been concluded. The Soviet Union has made conclusion of the final stage contingent upon ratification of the Warsaw and Moscow Treaties. This may be expected within the next few months.

What is important, however, is the process set in motion by the Conference concept. The Conference, whenever it is held, and whatever its outcome, is only one element