

# The Daily Telegraph

181 MARSH WALL LONDON E14 9SR TEL: 01 538 5000 TELEX: 22874/5/6  
TRAFFORD PARK MANCHESTER M17 1SL TEL: 061 872 5939 TELEX: 668891

## Untimely offensive

**T**HE PRIME Minister's speeches in Bruges and Luxembourg this week on the future of Europe will be applauded by most people in this country. Elsewhere, there will be considerable dismay and puzzlement. There is a permanent need to keep unreality about "The United States of Europe" at bay, and to warn against the excesses of the Brussels bureaucracy. The remarks of M Jacques Delors earlier this year certainly deserved a measured riposte. But the puzzling aspect of Mrs Thatcher's speeches is that they appeared to be based on the premise that there is some deeper and more immediate threat to our sovereignty than the incautiously phrased remarks of a European civil servant. To her European critics, Mrs Thatcher will be seen as swinging a sabre at a man of straw.

The timing is as perplexing as the tone. The Government is attempting to galvanise British industry to rise to the challenge of 1992. This seems a curious moment to put the accent so heavily on the limitations of what can be achieved. The spirit of 1992 is one of commercial and economic pragmatism, rather than political day-dreaming. Yet a modicum of idealism and considerable impetus will be needed to achieve a sensible degree of economic integration. Europe needs talking up, not down. There will be battles enough ahead. Why throw the tanks on to the offensive before the skirmishing has really started?

The effect of Mrs Thatcher's remarks on West German sensibilities could be particularly unfortunate. At a time when warming winds are blowing from the East, it is more than ever imperative to keep Bonn looking westwards. Britain's record in the defence of Western Europe and in political co-operation is second to none. By her insistence on the difficulties of collaboration, rather than the necessity, Mrs Thatcher risks underselling her own and the Community's political achievements. In Community affairs, common sense is a supreme virtue. But Britain does not have a monopoly of pragmatism. It is good, pragmatic politics for the French to allow us to incur the odium of being half-hearted Europeans while Paris pursues her national interests under a cloak of Euro-pietism. The French are no more ready to contemplate the erosion of the nation state than we are. Where it has been essential, the Prime Minister has never hesitated to take a forceful line with her European colleagues. There will be more occasions when both our national interests and those of the Community itself will need her tough-mindedness and her readiness to stand alone. Britain's special concerns and reservations about the degree of European integration that is either feasible or desirable could have been conveyed by a speech in which there was less "No, because" and more "Yes, but".