

Press conference held by General de Gaulle (14 January 1963)


Caption: On 14 January 1963, General de Gaulle holds a press conference at the Elysée Palace, during which he declares his opposition to the United Kingdom's accession to the European Common Market.

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Question: Could you define explicitly France's position towards Britain's entry into the Common Market and the political evolution of Europe?

Answer: A very clear question, to which I shall endeavour to reply clearly.

I believe that when you talk about economics — and much more so when you practise them — what you say and what you do must conform to realities, because without that you can get into impasses and, sometimes, you even head for ruin.

In this very great affair of the European Economic Community and also in that of eventual adhesion of Great Britain, it is the facts that must first be considered. Feelings, favourable though they might be and are, these feelings cannot be invoked against the real facts of the problem. What are these facts?

The Treaty of Rome was concluded between six continental States, States which are, economically speaking, one may say, of the same nature. Indeed, whether it be a matter of their industrial or agricultural production, their external exchanges, their habits or their commercial clientele, their living or working conditions, there is between them much more resemblance than difference. Moreover, they are adjacent, they inter-penetrate, they prolong each other through their communications. It is therefore a fact to group them and to link them in such a way that what they have to produce, to buy, to sell, to consume — well, they do produce, buy, sell, consume, in preference in their own ensemble. Doing that is conforming to realities.

Moreover, it must be added that, from the point of view of their economic development, their social progress, their technical capacity, they are, in short, keeping pace. They are marching in similar fashion. It so happens, too, that there is between them no kind of political grievance, no frontier question, no rivalry in domination or power. On the contrary, they are joined in solidarity, especially and primarily, from the aspect of the consciousness they have of defining together an important part of the sources of our civilisation; and also as concerns their security, because they are continentals and have before them one and the same menace from one extremity to the other of their territorial ensemble. Then, finally, they are in solidarity through the fact that not one among them is bound abroad by any particular political or military accord.

Thus it was psychologically and materially possible to make an economic community of the Six, though not without difficulties. When the Treaty of Rome was signed in 1957, it was after long discussions; and when it was concluded, it was necessary — in order to achieve something — that we French put in order our economic, financial, and monetary affairs ... and that was done in 1959. From that moment the community was in principle viable, but then the treaty had to be applied.

However, this treaty, which was precise and complete enough concerning industry, was not at all so on the subject of agriculture. However, for our country this had to be settled. Indeed, it is obvious that agriculture is an essential element in the whole of our national activity. We cannot conceive, and will not conceive, of a Common Market in which French agriculture would not find outlets in keeping with its production. And we agree, further, that of the Six we are the country on which this necessity is imposed in the most imperative manner.

This is why when, last January, thought was given to the setting in motion of the second phase of the treaty — in other words a practical start in application — we were led to pose the entry of agriculture into the Common Market as a formal condition. This was finally accepted by our partners but very difficult and very complex arrangements were needed — and some rulings are still outstanding. I note in passing that in this vast undertaking it was the governments that took all the decisions, because authority and responsibility are not to be found elsewhere. But I must say that in preparing and untangling these matters, the Commission in Brussels did some very objective and fitting work. Thereupon Great Britain posed her candidature to the Common Market. She did it after having earlier refused to participate in the communities we are now

building, as well as after creating a free trade area with six other States, and, finally, after having — I may well say it (the negotiations held at such length on this subject will be recalled) — after having put some pressure on the Six to prevent a real beginning being made in the application of the Common Market. If England asks in turn to enter, but on her own conditions, this poses without doubt to each of the six States, and poses to England, problems of a very great dimension.

England in effect is insular, she is maritime, she is linked through her exchanges, her markets, her supply lines to the most diverse and often the most distant countries; she pursues essentially industrial and commercial activities, and only slight agricultural ones. She has in all her doings very marked and very original habits and traditions.

In short, the nature, the structure, the very situation (conjuncture) that are England's differ profoundly from those of the continentals. What is to be done in order that England, as she lives, produces and trades, can be incorporated into the Common Market, as it has been conceived and as it functions? For example, the means by which the people of Great Britain are fed and which are in fact the importation of foodstuffs bought cheaply in the two Americas and in the former dominions, at the same time giving, granting considerable subsidies to English farmers? These means are obviously incompatible with the system which the Six have established quite naturally for themselves.

The system of the Six — this constitutes making a whole of the agricultural produce of the whole Community, in strictly fixing their prices, in prohibiting subsidies, in organising their consumption between all the participants, and in imposing on each of its participants payment to the Community of any saving they would achieve in fetching their food from outside instead of eating what the Common Market has to offer. Once again, what is to be done to bring England, as she is, into this system?

One might sometimes have believed that our English friends, in posing their candidature to the Common Market, were agreeing to transform themselves to the point of applying all the conditions which are accepted and practised by the Six. But the question, to know whether Great Britain can now place herself like the Continent and with it inside a tariff which is genuinely common, to renounce all Commonwealth preferences, to cease any pretence that her agriculture be privileged, and, more than that, to treat her engagements with other countries of the free trade area as null and void — that question is the whole question.

It cannot be said that it is yet resolved. Will it be so one day? Obviously only England can answer. The question is even further posed since after England other States which are, I repeat, linked to her through the free trade area, for the same reasons as Britain, would like or wish to enter the Common Market.

It must be agreed that first the entry of Great Britain, and then these States, will completely change the whole of the actions, the agreements, the compensation, the rules which have already been established between the Six, because all these States, like Britain, have very important peculiarities. Then it will be another Common Market whose construction ought to be envisaged; but one which would be taken to 11 and then 13 and then perhaps 18 would no longer resemble, without any doubt, the one which the Six built.

Further, this community, increasing in such fashion, would see itself faced with problems of economic relations with all kinds of other States, and first with the United States. It is to be foreseen that the cohesion of its members, who would be very numerous and diverse, would not endure for long, and that ultimately it would appear as a colossal Atlantic community under American dependence and direction, and which would quickly have absorbed the community of Europe.

It is a hypothesis which in the eyes of some can be perfectly justified, but it is not at all what France is doing or wanted to do — and which is a properly European construction.

Yet it is possible that one day England might manage to transform herself sufficiently to become part of the European community, without restriction, without reserve and preference for anything whatsoever; and in

this case the Six would open the door to her and France would raise no obstacle, although obviously England's simple participation in the community would considerably change its nature and its volume.

It is possible, too, that England might not yet be so disposed, and it is that which seems to result from the long, long, so long, so long Brussels conversations. But if that is the case, there is nothing there that could be dramatic. First, whatever decision England takes in this matter there is no reason, as far as we are concerned, for the relations we have with her to be changed, and the consideration, the respect which are due to this great State, this great people, will not thereby be in the slightest impaired.

What England has done across the centuries and in the world is recognised as immense. Although there have often been conflicts with France, Britain's glorious participation in the victory which crowned the first world war — we French, we shall always admire it. As for the role England played in the most dramatic and decisive moments of the second world war, no one has the right to forget it.

In truth, the destiny of the free world, and first of all ours and even that of the United States and Russia, depended in a large measure on the resolution, the solidity and the courage of the English people, as Churchill was able to harness them. Even at the present moment no one can contest British capacity and worth.

Moreover, I repeat, if the Brussels negotiations were shortly not to succeed, nothing would prevent the conclusion between the Common Market and Great Britain of an accord of association designed to safeguard exchanges, and nothing would prevent close relations between England and France from being maintained, nor the pursuit and development of their direct cooperation in all kinds of fields, and notably the scientific, technical and industrial — as the two countries have just proved by deciding to build together the supersonic aircraft Concorde.

Lastly, it is very possible that Britain's own evolution, and the evolution of the universe, might bring the English little by little towards the Continent, whatever delays the achievement might demand, and for my part, that is what I readily believe, and that is why, in my opinion, it will in any case have been a great honour for the British Prime Minister, for my friend Harold Macmillan, and for his Government, to have discerned in good time, to have had enough political courage to have proclaimed it, and to have led their country the first steps down the path which one day, perhaps, will lead it to moor alongside the Continent.

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