

Address given by Paul-Henri Spaak (Brussels, 29 January 1963)

Caption: On 29 January 1963, during the 17th ministerial meeting between the Member States of the European Economic Community (EEC) and the United Kingdom, the Belgian Foreign Minister, Paul-Henri Spaak, criticises the French veto of the United Kingdom's application for accession to the European Communities.

Source: Western European Union Assembly-General Affairs Committee: A retrospective view of the political year in Europe 1963. March 1964. Paris: Western European Union Assembly-General Affairs Committee. "Speech by Paul-Henri Spaak, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Belgium (Brussels, 29 January 1963)", p. 32-33.

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Everyone will, I think, understand with what anxiety, disquietude and sadness I speak at this meeting.

The movement to unite Europe and give it back its place in the world has, like every great movement, days of victory and days of defeat. Today is incontestably a day of defeat.

Great Britain has been excluded without valid reason in the opinion of five of the delegations of the Common Market, from the negotiations over its entry. All those things of which it is accused today were known when the negotiations began. When in October 1961 Mr. Heath went to Paris, at France's request, to explain the position of Great Britain, he said that Britain was prepared to accept the political consequences of membership of the EEC. But he loyally pointed out that there were three kinds of subjects on which talks should be held: problems relating to the Commonwealth; problems relating to British agriculture, and the problem of relations with the EFTA countries.

After having heard this speech we decided unanimously to begin negotiations.

Today five delegations out of six consider that although these negotiations have been long and at times difficult, they have not reached a deadlock and that it would be the wisest course to continue them in the same spirit of co-operation and loyalty. If there were today any other reasons for excluding Great Britain, it seems to me to be the duty of those who seem suddenly to have discovered motives for bringing the negotiations to an end, to tell us these reasons, so that we can discuss them. But we have not been given any new reasons: we have been asked suddenly to put an end to the efforts we have been making for over a year now. A serious thing is happening today, for it is a serious thing to exclude Great Britain from Europe without valid reasons. It is doing grave violence to what were our solemn promises.

When we made the Rome Treaty we proclaimed over and over again that the Community we were forming was an open Community. This is written into the text of the Treaty. Today, without being able to explain our attitude to Great Britain we are forced, some of us against our wishes, against our will, against our hopes, to go against the policy we laid down. You can well imagine that such a situation is extremely painful to us, and that it is difficult to imagine that there will be no repercussions and consequences in the future.

Gentlemen, what is happening today is unfortunately much bigger and more important than the question of the negotiations between the Community and Great Britain. It is the foreign policy of the Community countries which has suddenly been changed.

It should be remembered that for over a year each of us, including the French Delegation, has ceaselessly maintained that our aim was to receive Great Britain into the Community, and that in order to succeed we would conduct the negotiations loyally. On 14th January, we were faced with a spectacular reversal of French policy demanding a spectacular reversal of our own policy, without being forewarned by any of the diplomatic means at the disposal of our countries, and without even being permitted to discuss the reasons leading up to this event. It is a painful obligation for us to incline before this. I feel it would not be too bold to say that even if the Treaty of Rome is not disrupted as a result of what is happening, a severe, if not mortal blow has been dealt at the Community spirit, the effects of which are likely to last long.

As soon as one member of a Community seeks to force all the others into decisions of capital importance for its life, the Community spirit ceases to exist. It will be extremely difficult, I am convinced, to continue to develop economic Europe. As for the political Europe of which we had dreamed as a necessary consequence of economic organisation, I do not know when it will be possible to speak of this again, since there is no doubt that confidence has been destroyed.

Gentlemen, I have many more things to say, many more matters for concern, many more sad thoughts to express, but I think I have already spoken long enough. In closing I wish to express my deep regret at what has happened and my solemn protest against the way in which this decision has been imposed on us.