

Address given by Edward Heath (Brussels, 29 January 1963)


Caption: On 29 January 1963, in an address given at the 17th ministerial meeting between the Member States of the European Economic Community (EEC) and the United Kingdom, the British negotiator and Lord Privy Seal, Edward Heath, rejects the arguments put forward by Maurice Couve de Murville, French Foreign Minister, to justify the breakdown of the accession negotiations.

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 Edward Heath, Lord Privy Seal of the United Kingdom (Brussels, 29 January 1963)", p. 37-41.

Copyright: (c) WEU Secretariat General - Secrétariat Général UEO

URL:
http://www.cvce.eu/obj/address_given_by_edward_heath_brussels_29_january_1963-en-d6b554fe-bb82-4499-85fa-02b2407adc65.html

Last updated: 08/08/2016



Speech by Edward Heath (Brussels, 29 January 1963)

My ministerial colleagues, the whole British Delegation, and I myself have been deeply moved by the things which so many of my colleagues have said in response to your opening remarks. At the beginning of this meeting you read a text to us. Had that text been agreed by all the Community Delegations, the British Delegation would willingly have accepted it, because it would have shown that the negotiations were being resumed in good faith and with a view to reaching a successful conclusion. Each of my colleagues around this table has expressed his view upon it, and I should like to offer some comments to my colleagues in this conference, perhaps for the last time.

On 9 August, 1961, we asked to open negotiations with the six member States of the Community with a view to acceding to the Treaty of Rome under Article 237. The decision of Her Majesty's Government to do so represented — as Dr Schroeder recognised and indeed as everyone knows — an historic development in British foreign policy. Because of what Mr Couve de Murville has said this evening I should like to recall to you why we took that decision. I do not think I can do better than to remind you of what I said on this point on 10 October 1961; and I look back to that setting in Paris, I recall the high hopes with which we all set out on this great venture. I said this:

"There can be no doubt that the success or failure of these discussions will determine the future hope of Europe."

Many of my colleagues have echoed that thought this afternoon. I continued with the following words:

"These discussions will affect profoundly the way of life, the political thought and even the character of each one of our peoples... The British Government and the British people have been through a searching debate during the last few years on the subject of their relations with Europe. The result of the debate has been our present application. It was a decision arrived at, not on any narrow or short-term grounds, but as a result of a thorough assessment over a considerable period of the needs of our own country, of Europe, and of the free world as a whole. We recognise it as a great decision, a turning point in our history, and we take it in all seriousness. In saying that we wish to join the EEC, we mean that we desire to become full, whole-hearted and active members of the European Community in its widest sense and to go forward with you in the building of a new Europe."

These words expressed our profound convictions then; our convictions remain unchanged today.

I remember well the warmth of the welcome which was extended to us by all of you round this table, when the negotiations began. I remember State Secretary Lahr, who made the first statement responding to our application on behalf of all the member States of the Community at the initial meeting here in Brussels, saying that it was the sincere hope of the Six that the negotiations would succeed. We have negotiated with you for sixteen months on the assumption that all those participating in the negotiations did indeed desire their success.

The problems which confronted us at the beginning were very extensive, as we all recognise. But during the intervening time an enormous amount of work has been done. A very large part of the problems which faced us has already been solved. All preparatory work has been done on the remaining problems, including the work of the Committee on agriculture over which Dr Mansholt presided immediately before our last meeting began. Five of the six Community Delegations, and the Commission, have said that it should be possible to find solutions for all outstanding questions. That is my view too. Certainly, Britain is ready to make her contribution towards the solutions. I am convinced that many of you were prepared to do likewise.

In view of what Mr Couve de Murville has so frankly said, I should like to deal with a number of points he has made. He said first that the negotiations were coming up against difficulties. It is quite plain to everyone at this meeting what those difficulties are. He stated that, since October, the negotiations had been marking time, and that France alone has taken note of this. He further stated that the United Kingdom was not in a position to accept the discipline of the Community and the common agricultural policy. I completely repudiate those views. During the meetings we have had since October, and I would remind my colleagues that it was my request and suggestion that we should speed up our meetings and meet at fortnightly intervals, we have covered considerable ground. We have dealt with many Commonwealth items, and notably the question of the arrangements to be made for independent Commonwealth countries which did not avail themselves of the opportunity of Association with the Community. We have dealt with tariff problems. And we have dealt with a number of points, for example Aden, Malta, and the High Commission Territories. We have reached a broad agreement concerning the institutions of the Community. We have agreed on the interpretation of Article 234 of the Treaty. And here I should like to make a comment on the speech which Mr Couve de Murville made to the French National Assembly on 24 January. He suggested that we had not made plain our attitude with regard to the European Free Trade Association. We have often made our attitude clear. It was agreed at the meeting before Christmas that Article 234 of the Treaty was in no way affected by the EFTA position. At our meeting here on 11 December we were told that, in the view of the Six, if the negotiations with the United Kingdom were successful, there would be favourable prospects for the negotiations with Denmark and Norway. We agreed then that it was not possible at this stage to decide when it would be possible to finish the negotiations with the other EFTA countries. There has been no smudging of the position here; our position is clear. As regards agriculture Mr Couve de Murville said that we had accepted *a* common agricultural policy, but not *the* common agricultural policy. It is true that, at Paris in October 1961, I said that we were prepared to participate in *a* common agricultural policy. But at that time, the common agricultural policy did not exist. The first decisions about the common agricultural policy did not exist. The first decisions about the common agricultural policy were taken in January 1962. We took no part in the formulation of these decisions, and our views were not heard. But we accepted common agricultural policy as formulated in the regulations which were worked out, subject only to putting forward a very limited number of proposals for amplifying them. I would like to ask whether it is against the principles or practice of the Treaty to propose that for pigmeat there should be measures of intervention such as the Community already has for cereals? We played a full part in the work of the Mansholt Committee on agriculture. And, at our first meeting here this January, I indicated very clearly that, so long as we could reach agreement on reasonable transitional arrangements, it would be possible for us to accept that the transitional period should end, for us as for you, by 31 December 1969. The only exception I made was with regard to horticulture, which was not discussed in the Mansholt Committee. In the circumstances, it is not justifiable to say that Britain cannot accept the common agricultural policy, the transitional arrangements, or the disciplines of the Community.

So far as negotiations on the tariff items were concerned, I should like to mention, though this is in no way a reproach, that, after sixteen months of negotiations, the Community are not yet able to take up a position with regard to such important products as lead, zinc, and aluminium. Similarly we have not been able to talk to you for a long time about the regulation on agricultural finance, or on the three draft regulations concerning beef and veal, dairy products and rice. We have not discussed them with you because they are matters on which the position of the Six remained undetermined.

It cannot therefore be maintained that the negotiations should not continue on the ground that no progress has been made since last October. And I believe it is important, in these circumstances, that what has been said should be clearly refuted. But Mr Couve de Murville also said that we were trying to join a club which had not yet been completed. I am not clear whether the implication was that the Community could not accept any new member before 1970, and if so what difference there is between the position now and in October 1961. I am also not clear what relevance this has to the offer of full membership which we understand to have recently been made to the Danish Prime Minister in Paris.

We said, at the beginning of these negotiations, that we were ready to discuss any matter with you at any time; we also said that we would not wish in any way to slow down the development of the Community. We have had no part in the preparation of the Association Convention which has since been worked out, except to offer

our views. We have had no part in the preparation of the common agricultural policy. We have nevertheless felt able to go along with what you have done. I should like to emphasise that, in October 1961, we accepted the common external tariff, only seeking changes in the tariff level for a number of items. On only about 26 items, in relation to a common tariff which contains some 2,500, has agreement yet to be reached. This figure should be compared with the 68 items on which the level of the common tariff was not settled when you established the Community. It has been said that we were not prepared to abandon the system of preferences for Commonwealth countries. But, as Signor Colombo has pointed out, all the arrangements we have negotiated for the Commonwealth are in accordance with the Treaty. Under the Treaty itself the Associated Territories are a preferential area. Nevertheless, in respect of manufactured goods from the developed Commonwealth, in respect of temperate foodstuffs, and in respect of the processed foods, we have shown ourselves ready to phase out the Commonwealth preferences. That is a contribution which the Commonwealth was ready to make in order to bring about greater European unity. And so in all these matters we have been prepared to accept the disciplines of the Community. It has been said that, we had sought a privileged position for British agriculture: nothing could be further from the truth. It has been said that we should declare our undertakings towards our partners in the European Free Trade Association to be null and void. I must ask whether it is now to be made an example of international conduct that a new member of the Community should be asked to break its international obligations to other countries. Finally, it has been said that a judgment has to be made as to whether Britain was European or not. There have been times in the history of Europe when it has been only too plain how European we are, and there have been many millions of people who have been grateful for it.

The plain fact is that the time had come when the negotiations were, for some, too near to success. It is clear to the world that they have been halted, not for any technical or economic reasons, but on purely political grounds and on the insistence of a single government. I find the attitude of that government irreconcilable both with the terms of the Treaty of Rome which in its preamble and in Article 237 extends an open invitation to other European States to join the Community, and with what, that government has itself said in the past. I should like to remind the Leader of the French Delegation of the speech he made in the Consultative Assembly of the Council of Europe on 2 March 1961, a speech which was read at the time with the deepest interest throughout Europe and especially in my own country. I should add that we were at that time carrying on bilateral discussions with the governments of the European Economic Community about the possibility of full British membership. Mr Couve de Murville spoke first about the attempts which had been made to set up a European free trade area embracing most of the countries of Western Europe. He said this:

"In the early stages an attempt was made to settle this problem by creating between all our countries a great free trade area, that is to say, in fact, by robbing the Common Market of its substance from the outset. The result at the same time would have been to destroy the germ of political union contained in the European Economic Community, and which we made no attempt to hide."

We fully acknowledged that this was a chapter of the past, and the subject has never been raised or discussed since. Mr Couve de Murville went on as follows:

"The idea now appears to have been abandoned, and we are all trying to find another. Our colleagues in the Six countries and we ourselves, have always said that the Common Market was and would remain open for any other European country to join if they wished. We still believe that for some people at least this is a worthwhile prospect and perhaps the only satisfactory solution. We still hope that there will be a change of mind in certain quarters whence the response has so far been negative."

These words, when they were spoken, aroused high hopes and expectations, and it is those today which have been dashed to the ground. There was, of course, a response to that speech. It was because, as Mr Couve de Murville had said, full membership of the Community was the only satisfactory solution, and

because as we have always made plain, our purposes were political as well as economic, that I spoke as I did on 10 October 1961.

I should like to pay tribute, at this point, to the great endeavours which have been made by so many people to bring these negotiations to a successful conclusion. First of all, I should like to thank you, Mr Chairman. When you assumed the Chair we all thought that we were entering on a period of intensive negotiations aimed at settling all the outstanding problems in what has become a Community tradition of a package deal which would finally and speedily lead to the conclusion of the negotiation. For you, and for the leader of the Belgian Delegation, the events of the last few days must have been a personal and bitter disappointment. I should like to express our thanks to your country, which has been so generous a host to this Conference. As I look back over the past sixteen months I recall in particular our opening meeting under Professor Erhard's chairmanship; our first agreement on the treatment of manufactured goods from the developed Commonwealth, which came when Signor Colombo was in the chair, and the impetus which it gave us at that time; our strenuous meetings under Mr Schaus when the problem of temperate foodstuffs, which seemed probably the most formidable, was largely solved; and the autumn meetings under Mr van Houten and Dr Luns. I should like to thank all those who have sat in the chair during these negotiations, and the delegations of all the countries which have participated in the negotiations. I should like to thank the President of the European Commission, and his colleagues, who have given us such great assistance in finding solutions to our problems. I should like to thank the Secretariat and the interpreters, who have worked so devotedly throughout our long meetings. I also wish to express the appreciation of the British Government to the Governments of the Commonwealth, who have devoted so much care and effort to these negotiations. They have had permanent representatives in Brussels for them. Their Ministers have made repeated journeys across the world to study and discuss the repercussions on their trade which would result from Britain's entry into the Common Market. In particular, I wish to thank the Governments of these Commonwealth countries for their recognition of the importance of widening and strengthening the basis of European unity, and their readiness to accept a sacrifice of their own interests for the attainment of this object. Finally, I should like to thank the Leader and members of the French Delegation for the part they played in the negotiations until this stage, and to express my regret at the action which they have now found it necessary to take.

During these negotiations I have felt a considerable responsibility, as Leader of the British Delegation, not only in respect of British problems, but also because it was clear that the results of our work here would not only influence the Community itself, but also affect many millions of people throughout the Commonwealth and in the other countries of Europe.

Mr Chairman, as my colleagues have said this afternoon, the events of the last few weeks have placed in jeopardy progress towards that true European unity which, I believe, many millions of people desire. But although, as has just been said, this is a sad moment for European unity, I should like straightaway to say one thing. We told you, at the very beginning of these negotiations, that we wanted to go forward with you in the building of a new Europe. Our words were very carefully weighed. They remain true today. We have been encouraged by the upsurge of support for the fullest British participation in a united Europe which has been demonstrated in so many quarters in these recent weeks. And so I would say to my colleagues: they should have no fear. We in Britain are not going to turn our backs on the mainland of Europe or on the countries of the Community. We are a part of Europe; by geography, tradition, history, culture and civilisation. We shall continue to work with all our friends in Europe for the true unity and strength of this Continent.