

'Three reasons to oppose British accession to the EEC' from Le Monde (5 May 1971)

Caption: On 5 May 1971, French daily newspaper Le Monde publishes a non-editorial comment by Jean-Marcel Jeanneney, former ambassador and minister under General de Gaulle and Georges Pompidou, in which he expands upon the three reasons that lead him to oppose the accession of the United Kingdom to the European Economic Community (EEC).

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Three reasons to oppose British accession to the EEC

by Jean-Marcel Jeanneney (*)

After a year of skirmishes, we now appear to be approaching the moment when the French Government will have to say, one way or other, whether it accepts British accession to the EEC.

Its official position is well known. Like almost all French commentators, it is in favour of British accession, provided that Britain agrees to comply with the provisions of the Treaty of Rome and the Community regulations currently in force. To facilitate such compliance, it accepts that Britain should benefit from transitional measures and would, perhaps, be prepared to agree to some permanent derogations. Negotiations among the Six and with Britain appear to be concerned only with the scope or duration of those facilitating measures.

This approach does not do justice to the basic issue. If one takes the view that France's destiny in the centuries to come will be better because of the presence of Britain in the European Community and that British accession will help to safeguard a civilisation in western Europe that is consonant with its genius, then it matters little whether a transitional period lasts five years or seven, whether Britain's initial contribution to the Community budget is reduced or increased by this or that percentage, or whether greater or lesser quantities of New Zealand butter or Jamaican sugar are allowed to enter Britain duty-free. It would be ridiculous to allow such trifles to determine the completion or abandonment of such a grandiose undertaking that would, beyond all doubt, profoundly affect our destiny and that of Europe as a whole. The real question is whether it would actually be in our interest.

We should beware of sophisticated analyses where one cannot see the wood for the trees.

We do not believe that accession to the EEC would prove the life raft for Britain that some of its leaders are seeking. The British public appears to be more perspicacious in this respect. But it is not for us to determine what the British public should want.

All those who want to build a European Europe have three major political reasons to oppose British accession to the EEC. These reasons hold as good for our five partners in the existing Community as for France. None of them can be invoked against applications for accession from other European states.

Economic dependence

The first reason has to do with economic policy. The economic unit resulting from British membership would be so large that undertakings would be able to specialise to the fullest extent that was technically desirable and achieve their optimum size inside its internal market. Inasmuch as the Community wished to remain a customs union and maintain a common external tariff that safeguarded its interests, third countries, especially the United States, would experience great difficulty in exporting to it. They have accepted — not without difficulty — the very moderate protectionism of the Community of Six. They would be hard put to tolerate the protectionism practised by an enlarged Community including Britain, in which privileged intra-Community trade would account for too large a share of what is now international trade and, as such, accessible to exporters of all countries. Third countries would thus be certain to try and transform the enlarged Community into a free-trade area; and it is greatly to be feared that, given the wide-ranging means of pressure available to the United States, they would succeed in doing so.

Such a development would be dangerous for us on two counts. First, because it would increase Europe's dependence on the United States. Even if the United States agreed to lower its own customs barriers — which seems unlikely — transatlantic economic interdependence would still be asymmetrical. Thanks to their technological advance and to the diplomatic pressure exerted by the US Administration, American firms would usually be able to decide matters to their own advantage, while European companies would be left in the position of carrying out instructions.

Second, the existence of such a free-trade area would deprive Western Europe of any possibility of pursuing an independent economic policy. Short-term measures to revitalise or slow down economic growth that were taken in Europe alone would, in practice, be lost in the immensity of the Atlantic economy. And, if the worst came to the worst, if Europe suffered a serious unemployment crisis, its producers might well be left without any protection against outside competition. The social and political consequences would be serious.

Diplomatic and military dependence

The second reason to oppose British accession to the European Community is diplomatic and military. The United States has real or imagined interests that we often do not share and are, in some cases, contrary to our own. It pursues them throughout the world by methods of which we sometimes disapprove. Concern for Europe's own interests and for our dignity imposes upon us a duty to resist being drawn irreversibly into America's slipstream. There is no reason to believe that, simply because it accedes to the EEC, Britain will loosen the close ties with the United States that it has maintained over so many years. Lacking the strength or will to break those ties, it would extend them to us, since it would play a predominant role in the European Community precisely because of American support and because of the great skill that its diplomats have always displayed in the strategy of 'divide and rule'.

We were able to leave NATO. Barring a revolution in France that called everything into question, we should no longer be able to escape the position of dependence in which we would find ourselves.

The French language under threat

The third reason is cultural. Within the Community of the Six, no one national language is in a position to supplant the others. Although French is more widely used in EEC bodies than German, Italian or Dutch, these languages continue to be used there. French cannot lay claim to become the only language of intergovernmental discourse in trade or technology. This guarantees the preservation of Europe's specific character as a continent of many languages, which is part and parcel of its culture and helps to maintain an international linguistic equilibrium already under threat. The accession of Britain to the European Community would make English the common language of politics, science and trade. The other languages would be confined to literary and domestic roles. In the long run, they might even fall into total disuse. However, if Europe is to preserve and develop its unique cultural heritage, it is vital that Europeans should express their own views of life in their own languages.

These three political issues — fundamental as they are — are hardly ever mentioned. Politicians prefer to give the impression that the problems are technical: the distribution of financial contributions among the new and old Member States, the Community's more or less covert assumption of Britain's foreign debts, the role to be assigned to the pound sterling, and the settlement of relations with what remains of the British Commonwealth. These problems are real, but, if the will is there, they can easily be solved by compromises, which, the more complicated and consequently incomprehensible they are, will be all the more readily accepted by a misguided public. In reality, they would seriously undermine the principles on which a truly European Europe should be built.

Let us beware of the reactions of a people that discovers, in a serious economic crisis, that it has been deprived of all freedom of action; or finds, when an international conflict breaks out, that it no longer has any choice; or sees its own language, the symbol and substance of its national character, wilting away over time. What a disaster it would be if the Communists, always ready to denounce mistakes that others have made, then appeared as the last resort for the deeply rooted national sentiment of our peoples: they would soon drag us into a far worse dependence.

A clear choice

Why, then, do we find French people campaigning for British accession to the EEC? No doubt some of them do so because they are rightly concerned to preserve our friendship with the British and Americans and fear that a refusal would compromise it. We believe that the passing shadow that might be cast by a refusal is

much less to be feared than the lasting resentment and animosity that would result in the long run from subservience, even to friends.

Other French people, fiercely attached to national independence, are blinded by their deep dislike of any supranational authority within the Community of the Six. They are counting on the British to destroy what authority already exists or, at least, to prevent any further movement in that direction. They sincerely believe themselves to be defending our independence. But they are mistaken. It is by no means certain that British empiricism would not come to terms with coercive European institutions if it could get them to serve its own policies. And even if the British did effectively oppose the functioning of supranational institutions, what would be the good of freeing ourselves from certain institutional constraints only to be forced to submit to a *de facto* dependence that would be more damaging and, moreover, humiliating! How vain it would be to preserve the appearance of full French judicial sovereignty at all costs, if it served merely to disguise our subordination to outside forces.

Since, in the present state of technology, the French economy is obviously too small to be able to retreat into its shell without serious damage, it makes more sense to accept that our monetary and credit policies, our budgets and foreign trade, should be subject to rules and directives drafted by a European Community body, on the understanding that, within that Community, each party will be able to exercise its fair share of joint sovereignty and that respect for the vital interests of each will be guaranteed.

In the final analysis, the choice before us is clear.

Either we accept that our economy is to be much more deeply integrated into a vast Atlantic conglomerate over which we shall have no control: in which case we must fear that our interests will be sacrificed and that European civilisation will ultimately be dissolved in it.

Or we do our utmost to improve the structure of the present Community of the Six and to promote a spirit of Community independence vis-à-vis all other parties: in which case there is hope for Europe!

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