

Interview given by Maurice Schumann to France-Inter (29 October 1971)

Caption: In an interview with France-Inter on 29 October 1971, Maurice Schumann, French Foreign Minister, welcomes the positive vote in the House of Commons on the issue of British accession to the European Economic Community (EEC).

Source: La politique étrangère de la France. Textes et documents. dir. de publ. Ministère des Affaires étrangères. 2e semestre 1971. Paris: La Documentation Française. "Interview accordée par Maurice Schumann à France-Inter (29 octobre 1971)", p. 173-174.

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Q. — *Minister, how did you receive, and how should France receive, the news of yesterday evening's vote?*

A. — As the proof that this time the Common Market is truly irreversible, since those people who understand the British know that they judge by experience. The fact that, yesterday, there was, as one newspaper put it, an absolute and overwhelming 'Yes' obviously means that the vast majority of British MPs, and in particular a significant number of Opposition MPs, believe that the European Economic Community is now up and running once and for all. This may seem surprising, given that the Community is currently in crisis, but it is precisely when an enterprise of this size is in crisis that those who believe it will survive say that, when all is said and done, the storm will pass and the roots are very deep.

Q. — *A moment ago, you mentioned the British Opposition MPs, and one part of the Opposition that voted for Mr Heath's Government. What is your opinion of Mr Wilson's attitude?*

A. — I shall refrain from giving my opinion of a man who has been Prime Minister and with whom I had the honour of negotiating at the time when he, let us not forget, had just submitted Britain's application for accession to the Common Market. Having said that, two comments do spring to mind: firstly, that Britain is the country which invented the concept of 'fair play' and that, when she gives her word, she will not go back on it. That is why, definitively and through numerous changes, she has, as Maurois said, been 'fashioned by ten centuries of happiness'. Secondly, the eminent politician to whom you have just referred, quoted General de Gaulle when he said 'I will model myself on him.' This was exactly right! When General de Gaulle returned to power in 1958, his first statement was: I was in no way involved in negotiations on the Treaty of Rome, France has given her word and will neither renounce nor retract it. And as you know, General de Gaulle's actions over a decade accelerated the stages in the dismantling of tariffs and quotas. So that is why I trust him.

Q. — *Your next trip to London, therefore, promises to be extremely positive?*

A. — Absolutely. That was my first reaction when I heard how large the majority was.