

## 'The European island' from Le Figaro (29 October 1971)

**Caption:** In its editorial of 29 October 1971, French daily newspaper Le Figaro comments on the approval, by the British parliament, of the principle of the UK's accession to the European common market. .

**Source:** FAIZANT, Jacques. Le Figaro. Paris: Le Figaro. 29.10.1971, n° 8.436, 145e année, p.1. "L'île européenne", auteur:Massip, Roger , p. 1.

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## The European island

'Britain has an island mentality', exclaimed General de Gaulle, on 14 July 1963 during a press conference which, for many years to follow, was to distance our British friends from Europe.

After almost eight years of determined effort, punctuated by gruelling discussions, exhausting negotiations and thorny debates, the House of Commons has concluded its lengthy deliberation: Britain remains an island, of course, but it no longer has an island mentality.

The vote at Westminster, a personal triumph for Mr Heath, merits recognition as a major event as it emphatically supports a development which, for a moment, it was feared might be jeopardised.

Unfavourable opinion polls, the adoption of a hostile stance by Mr Harold Wilson and staunch opposition by a group of right-wing Conservatives all gave cause for concern.

There was particular disquiet over the size of the shift in the opinion polls: in September 1966, 70 % of those asked were in favour of Britain's entry into the Common Market. On the very day following the meeting between Mr Pompidou and Mr Heath, an event which was to have guaranteed the success of the negotiations, 60 % declared themselves to be against entry.

However, Commons approval still seemed assured, once the debate had been opened, since, in Great Britain, decisions are reached not by those who might be described as the 'grass roots' but by those who represent them in Westminster, to the point where a referendum would certainly have produced exactly the opposite result.

Britain's arrival in Europe, its docking at the continental quayside, has taken place at a difficult time for the Community in view of the monetary crisis and of the United States, to the extent that a British observer recently declared with irony: 'We are going to marry a girl who has lost a good deal of her beauty and appeal.'

It is quite true that the current economic difficulties have put the solidarity of the six continental countries to a severe test. For this reason, the vote in the British Parliament is all the more significant. It signals a very firm resolve to commit the United Kingdom to the wonderfully inspiring European adventure in spite of the obstacles in its way and in spite of the uncertainties on its horizon, assuredly more numerous today than at the time when Britain decided to knock at the door of Europe.

Proof of this resolve can also be found elsewhere, for example, in the UN vote of 26 October on the admission of the People's Republic of China and the expulsion of Formosa, when the British delegation voted against the United States.

On that day, it seemed as if London had wanted to refute the criticisms of those who had so often accused the United Kingdom of looking continuously towards the Atlantic and of wanting to maintain close and privileged links with the United States.

So Britain is changing course. It is getting ready to face a number of storms shoulder to shoulder with the Europeans. And, let us admit it quite freely, it is also hoping to share with them all the opportunities arising in the future.

Roger Massip