

# 'As from yesterday, Britain is officially in the European Common Market' from the Corriere della Sera (2 January 1973)


**Caption:** On 2 January 1973, Italian daily newspaper Corriere della Sera comments on the United Kingdom's accession to the European Communities and analyses British foreign policy.

**Source:** Corriere della Sera. dir. de publ. Ottone, Piero. 02.01.1973, n° 1; anno 98. Milano: Corriere della Sera. "Londra da ieri, ufficialmente nel MEC", auteur:Bartoli, Edgardo , p. 15.

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### As from yesterday, Britain is officially in the European Common Market

From our correspondent

London, 1 January

Before the Christmas illuminations have even been switched off, the even more magnificent and memorable lights celebrating Great Britain's accession to the European Community have been turned on. The 'Fanfare for Europe', the programme of shows and cultural events prepared to immortalise the occasion, is imbued with great solemnity, that kind of solemnity without declamatory overtones that is typically English. There is something solemn and ingenuous about it, something serious, the same seriousness that the country, including both the champions and the adversaries of Europe, have demonstrated by refusing to make the date of 1 January 1973 a solely diplomatic occasion or the consecration of a choice — a shrewd and expedient choice according to some, or one that is contrary to national interests according to others, but in any case something unlikely substantially to change the course of British life.

For good or ill, Britain believes in Europe. Its economic world believes in it: it has already begun its penetration of the continent with alacrity and has for a couple of years been working with far-sightedness to make the City the financial capital of Europe. The Conservative Government believes in it, as the Labour Government did in its time, seeing the great leap across the Channel as the way out of the economic problems that have beset British life for twenty years, constraining it inside a closed circle of development without affluence or affluence without development. The trade unions and the Labour left, who see the association with the continent as the final rejection of the idea of making Britain an egalitarian arcadia, believe in it in their own way, as the last bulwark of social justice against the myths of economic and entrepreneurial progressivism. The Conservative right believe in it, as reflected in the non-political and patriotic opinions expressed in letters to newspapers over the past few days saying that this has been Great Britain's last Christmas as an independent nation. In reality, replied the *Guardian*, this has been Britain's last Christmas as a country without authority where the great political decisions of our time are concerned, like the American decision to mobilise all the resources of modern military technology to bring a small but tenacious country to its knees.

The economic calculation made by Britain in respect of Europe, as opposed to the political vision it is pursuing through the European Community, must not be overestimated. On 1 January 1973, Great Britain comes to the end of a decade that began under the pressure of ever more suffocating economic problems and ended in the bombardments that have been devastating North Vietnam until a few days ago. In 1961, when Conservative Prime Minister Harold Macmillan made the first application for accession to the European Community, the country was still weighed down by war debts; whilst in the rest of Europe the memory of the conflict was psychologically distant and the enticing call of the good life, together with the glimmer of the economic miracle, was emanating from Italy, Britain was looking back to food rationing as if it were only yesterday.

De Gaulle was technically right in refusing entry to Europe to a country that was continuing to run up debts in order to grant loans to the countries of the Commonwealth, to which it was in turn a debtor; whilst the General's formalistic arguments concealed a purely passionate conception of a certain Europe, however, for Britain the long wait at the door of the Community meant the aggravation of a paradoxical condition, a test of patience and faith that no other European country had had to overcome. This situation exploded in 1968 after the devaluation of sterling, when those very countries for whose defeat Britain had incurred debts — Italy, Japan and Germany — provided guarantees for its debts to the intransigent creditors of the Commonwealth. It is not surprising that the majority in Britain, which eleven years ago was in favour of Europe, has gradually moved to positions of rejection and spite.

In this decade of expectation and frustration, not only has the process of winding up the Empire been brought to a conclusion, a painful act of separation from the country's own past, but the very ties with the

international English-speaking community have worn away almost to the point where they are now merely symbols; this is not to mention the Rhodesian secession, the Indo-Pakistan conflict and all the other Commonwealth events in the face of which the British motherland has been forced to remain a spectator. The cornerstone of the English-speaking world remains the relationship between Britain and the United States, the 'special relationship' that represents one of the pillars of Atlanticism even though it has always been characterised by disagreement or even intolerance.

In the compliant Europe of the 1960s, to which French dissidence added only a note of impotence, Britain was the most uncompromising in distinguishing between a policy of alliance and a policy of alignment. Its relations with Mao's China demonstrate, moreover, that Henry Kissinger had nothing to teach the Government leaders in Whitehall. And today the silence of the British Government in reaction to the bombings of Hanoi has only shown an awareness that any gesture is pointless. And for Great Britain, still with memories of its own past, a pointless political gesture remains a degrading gesture: in its traditional pragmatism, it prefers to stay silent rather than be unheeded.

In this sense Europe is its hope of revenge, and the world events of recent times, dominated by the massacre in North Vietnam, prove the European vision of Macmillan, Wilson and Heath to be right. Today, now that the controversy has been brought to a close with the vague Labour commitment to review the terms of the agreement once the left returns to power, the people who are mourning the last Christmas as an independent nation are the same as those who condemn the silence of the Government in the face of the bombings on Hanoi. However, the two protests are incompatible. As Enzo Bettiza wrote in this newspaper, the conflict between China and Russia, and the connivance between Russia and America consummated in 1968 in Prague and in 1972 in Hanoi, fit uneasily with a lasting romance between the United States and Europe. And the only alternative is Europe. Not only does Kissinger have nothing to teach Britain: Britain hopes that it will still have time to teach something to Kissinger, who, before taking on the job of Presidential advisor, was a firm admirer of Gaullist policy and who now displays a measured scepticism with regard to the future of Europe.

Edgardo Bartoli