

## Speech by Alec Douglas-Home (June 1971)

**Caption:** In June 1971, Alec Douglas-Home, British Foreign Minister, delivers a speech to the House of Commons, in which he explains the importance of the United Kingdom's accession to the European common market.

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On two counts I am in full agreement with the most vocal opponent of our entry into Europe. The first is that *our application is a step of the utmost political significance,* and the second is that *there is a danger of its political importance being overlooked in the public debate on the economic issues.* That, I think, is very natural. The Treaty of Rome is only indirectly about politics; it is about economic and commercial and possibly financial integration. There are only a few vague words in the preamble of the Treaty about the political future of Europe. It is no guide to the future political structure of Europe, although of course, political leaders in Europe have given their own interpretations of the purpose of the Treaty. M. Pompidou has said that the Community will turn out to be 'confederal'. He may well be right, although I don't myself very much like attaching labels at this stage.

Our present negotiations are not really about politics. They are about economics, and particularly about a handful of economic issues: what arrangements can be made for New Zealand, what arrangements can be made to maintain the sugar production of the Commonwealth developing countries and what our financial contribution should be across the exchanges to the Community budget. These are the matters which we are discussing now, and about which we have to get a satisfactory agreement before we can go in.

We are not at the moment negotiating about the politics of the Common Market. It has been inevitable, therefore, that public attention should focus on these economic issues and that the perspective in consequence should in some degree get distorted. Once raised, for example, the possibility of a surplus in butter and it is difficult to get it out of the forefront of the picture even when the fact of it disappears.

*Political implications*

Anyway we must face the fact that these negotiations now are about economic problems. I don't think that it is true to suggest that the political case has been allowed to go by default or that the political implications have been suppressed. If anyone had the stamina to read through a year of speeches by Ministers on these matters, he would find that they constantly returned to this theme. They have repeatedly told British audiences that Britain's political need for Europe will grow, and foreign audiences that the same is true of Europe's need for us.

There are restraints for a negotiator in using these arguments. If h

e appears too eager the terms for entry will not be so good. That works the other way for the European side. And it is also true of them and of us that the forms of political organisation which may be necessary have not yet been worked out and indeed at present cannot be foreseen.

<gr>But I think the time has come when we must say to the public in our country that the future prospect ahead of us is uncertain unless we can expand our markets and unless we can become part of a bigger organisation; for trade, for investment, and also for political reasons.</gr>

The forms of political organisation and the institutions which will be necessary have not been worked out by the Europeans themselves. Now I personally am not complaining of that at all. It is much better that they should be worked out after Britain is in, than before she becomes a member. And again I would emphasise that my own forecast of what will happen in relation to institutions and the organisation of institutions is this: that the Community will identify certain things which in the common interest are judged to bring advantage to each of the members and to the whole corporately, and, if it is necessary to set up an institution the better to achieve those aims, then it will be set up. This will be a pragmatic approach, and not one in which we go by theory and by blueprint.

<it>Britain's foreign policy </it>

But I will try to point to some principles and anticipate some practice. There is first Britain's political need of Europe. Here we have to start from the political goals of our foreign policy. I would define them in this way:<gr> it is our primary objective to guarantee in so far as we can the security and independence of Britain in the sense that we are able to live the life of our choosing, and to keep British power and prosperity and influence at the highest possible level.</gr>

To do this we have historically sought alliances.

It was only for the briefest period in our island's story that we could afford to stand alone in the world and not to bother about other people's support. During that period - and there are many who feel that it was an exhilarating period - it enabled us to play a considerable leading part in the world. But during that period there is no d

oubt that going it alone tended to estrange us from Europeans who are our nearest neighbours and natural allies.

Bit by bit after the war, like the features of the Cheshire Cat, our special position and strength disappeared to the point where it was underpinned by the strength of the United States of America. It would be absurd to suggest that during our heyday and our pre-eminence there were not some very high dividends that we gained, in Commonwealth relations, in relations with the United States, in our position for example as a permanent member of the Security Council of the United Nations and in other ways.

But as Commonwealth countries began to be more self-reliant industrially, as the United States went up into a different league of power and wealth and as our own wealth became insufficient to sustain us in a dominant role, this has meant that in a world of growing Powers Britain has been shrinking in her influence even in comparison with those countries of like size and like potential. I remember, a good many years ago now, in the Fifties, making a speech in their Lordships' House saying that I could not see how the Commonwealth could compensate us in the future or lead to an increase in our wealth and strength simply because all the Commonwealth countries were bent on becoming more independent and were fast industrialising themselves. It therefore seemed to me that we had to look for another association if we were to increase our influence and strength. So we have had many advantages but I think now we are too much living on the past. It is not safe to live indefinitely on the benevolence of other people.

*Vulnerable position*

It seems to me that the only way to preserve our independence for the future is to join a larger grouping. It may seem paradoxical but I believe it to be true. I am not as I said talking about economics but for the moment the best examples of my political point are in the economic sphere. There is no country more vulnerable than Britain to changes in the international economic environment. Our dependence on imports and exports, our invisible trade, the international position of sterling, all these things mean that it means more to us than others to influence what happens in the International Monetary Fund, or GATT, or in any of the increasing number of other international organisations which have an influence on our economic affairs. In all the negotiations concerning these international bodies there is an irresistible tendency towards bloc positions, and it is only if - and one after another countries are finding this - only if similar countries with similar needs and common interests can combine their negotiating strength that they can protect themselves. Th

the European Economic Community as a bloc adds up to an economic Power which cannot be ignored. Every Community position is itself a compromise geared as far as possible to the wishes of each member, and it is much easier for medium size or smaller countries today to win the argument inside a Community than if each country finds itself alone in the full international gathering.

If one looks around the world the trend is really very clear. There is the Organisation of American States, there is the Organisation of South East Asian countries; there is the OAU; there is the EEC, there is the Soviet Eastern bloc, there is the Arab league; this tendency towards grouping together is very marked. Some of these groupings are more political than others, but they do seek with varying success to take attitudes towards international issues outside their area. Whether this is a good development or not, it is increasingly a fact of life which countries must reckon.

Groupings of nations can of course become exclusive. If I thought that the European Economic Community was going to become an inward looking bloc I should not be nearly as keen on it as I am. But if we are members I don't believe that it will be inward looking. For a bloc need not be introspective, as the EEC showed in its major contribution to the success of the Kennedy round. I hope that if we are in it and if some of the Scandinavian countries come in, we shall ensure that it is not.

#### European policy-making

There are no European Community positions as yet on non-economic international issues. A tentative start was made last year among the Six and work was set in motion which could lead to a European policy on some matters of real concern. I was invited to attend one meeting where we had a meeting of ten, instead of a meeting of six, on the Middle East. If we were to continue those meetings I have no doubt that a European policy would be evolved and carry considerable influence. There are also meetings from time to time, for example to pursue joint policies on the problems presented by the procurement of oil, something again of enormous importance to Europe, the importance of which is underlined day by day.

But these kinds of development are rather over-shadowed while the future shape of the Community is still under negotiation. It is inevitable that the success of bloc diplomacy on economic questions will be an example which European governments will want to try to follow in pursuit of all their other national interests. Now if we are

still outside when that happens our relative isolation and weakness will stand out even more than it does now. **Part** therefore of the political case for entry is the fact that our ability to go on looking after our own interests depends on the consultations and actions of others which we cannot ignore and in which if we are wise we ought to take part. Let us not delude ourselves. If we are not members of the Community we will have no part in these kinds of discussions and talks.

*The question of sovereignty*

I have always thought it misleading to talk about sacrificing and surrendering sovereignty. This attitude of mind springs very largely from the rebuff which we had from General de Gaulle in 1963, because this gave the impression to those who had not read and studied the Treaty of Rome that there was something in it which positively set out to harm our interests. Now I think one should underline time and again that the Treaty of Rome, far from setting out to harm anybody's interests, was solely designed to help each of the partners to greater prosperity and closer understanding. That was the whole purpose of the Treaty and none of the Six would be members of it if it hadn't been for that purpose to which they all subscribed. Why do we share, if I may put it that way, sovereignty in NATO? Because by doing so we feel safer than we would otherwise be. It therefore serves our national interests. Why do we agree to the rules of the International Monetary Fund or the GATT? Because by doing so we gain in economic strength.

*The balance of power*

But it would be wrong to base the political case only on Britain's need of Europe. The need is mutual because there are bigger questions hanging over security and the political future of Europe today than in any previous time. There is perhaps no immediate threat of aggression but this can be deceptive. We are told we are living in a period of détente and that is partially - but only partially - true. Just because it suits the Communists to talk and even reach accommodation on some issues, the military facts of life do not change. If they have changed it has not been in recent years to the advantage of the free world.

There are still huge military forces stationed in Eastern Europe and they are there to stay; Czechoslovakia has seen to that. There is an arsenal of nuclear weaponry trained against us, medium range missiles which are becoming less relevant to the strategic balance bet

ween the super-Powers and by reason of that probably more threatening to Europe. Nuclear parity has some advantages when both super-Powers have the capacity to destroy each other, even if one strikes first. That means stability of a kind that lessens some of the risks of an all-out war. But it is also to some extent a destabilising factor for it must raise questions about the nuclear umbrella extended over others.

I am not suggesting that the United States is less than totally committed to holding back the Communists in Europe - that commitment stands and has lately been reaffirmed by Mr Nixon; and it is broadly speaking in the national interest of the Americans. Their stake in Europe is enormous and if any Western European countries were to fall into the Soviet orbit that would give a major tilt to the balance of global power. It is not necessary, and I hope it never will be, to rest the case for greater European responsibility for defence and for its own security on the grounds that America might totally withdraw her nuclear umbrella. But there is a limit to the defence effort that can be carried on behalf of the security of others even by a country with the resources of the United States. There are clear signs that the cost of the defence forces of the United States, in Europe will come under growing pressure in the Seventies inside the United States as the demand for more domestic spending in the United States gathers momentum and as the Americans see Europe growing in prosperity.

For these reasons <gr>it is inevitable, and I use that word advisedly, that Western Europe will begin to carry more of the burden of its own defence. This in turn is bound to call for more forms of cooperation.</gr> If economic integration makes progress on the Continent there will be opportunities for new arrangements and joint efforts in the field of defence, in the field of defence production, of defence procurement and technology applied to the science of defence. If Europe is to be adequately defended and Europe is to make a greater contribution to its own defence, Britain should find and pursue effectively practical joint defence policies.

Historically, it was the different and conflicting interests of the European Powers which dominated world events. Today these differences have dwindled by comparison with the interests which we have in common. We recognise that fact in the efforts that we make in our dealings with Eastern Europe, within NATO and other international bodies, to pool ideas and keep ourselves in step. In dealing with the oil producing countries we work towards common Western European objectives. We do it in the field of aid for the developing world.

## <it>Europe and the developing world</it>

In the colonial period most of the developing world was at some time or other in the ambit of a European Power. And in those days our attitude to one another was fiercely jealous and competitive. We have all now shared the experience of withdrawal from Empire. But we are maintaining links with most of our old dependencies; it is on our former colonies that our aid and trading effort tends to concentrate.

But on the whole <gr>for Western Europe today there is little trace of the old competitiveness. Increasingly we find ourselves consulting and coordinating and avoiding one another's toes, determined if we can avoid it not to be played off each against the other. Increasingly we recognise that it is in all our interests to raise the purchasing power of the developing nations irrespective of whether they were the colonies of Britain or France or Germany in the past.</gr> But our efforts have been haphazard. If this evolving Europeanness had a formal basis, if there were a positive European policy towards the developing world, it would benefit the developing countries by cutting-down the waste that comes from duplications in the aid effort. It is worth noting that since the formation of the Six they have multiplied their effort towards the developing world most impressively. Add Britain to the Six in this respect and it would give Europe a real influence and strengthen our hand on those occasions when our interests are threatened.

## <it>Dangers of introversion</it>

Perhaps my real fear for this country at this moment is that we are in danger of getting out of date in our thinking, that because we suffered a decline in Empire, because we have inevitably become more grown-in on ourselves, that our thinking may cease to be creative. I think that is a real danger now. For so long we have taken it for granted that our interests were in competition if not in conflict with our neighbours, that it is hard to realise the transformation that has taken place in this century. Is it not the truth, obscured but nevertheless starkly real, that nationalism simply cannot make sense in a world of instant communication? Each of the traditional Western European Powers has seen itself shrink in relative influence and role. We have all shared the experience of adjusting to a world with new centres of power and new problems and I think it is imperative that we should recognise these signs in time.

In this new world the differences between us in Western Europe ha



ve dwindled and all that we have in common has been thrown into a new relief. <gr>Our European inheritance of civilised values and achievements seems therefore all the more precious as it has grown more fragile. And it is perhaps above all the need to preserve and to continue that tradition and that civilising influence in a modern world which calls for real European unity and a united effort by European countries. </gr> It certainly does not threaten our individuality as a nation. The truth in my view is the opposite. In the world that is evolving, the world of the year 2000 - it is only as part, I believe, of a strong and determined Europe that Britain's own character, personality and individuality can thrive. <gr>Our character fitted us to rule. Our character also fits us for partnership.</gr>