

Interview with Maurice Schumann (24 January 1970)

Caption: On 24 January 1970, on his return from a visit to London, the French Foreign Minister, Maurice Schumann, is interviewed by journalists on the issue of the United Kingdom's accession to the European Community.

Source: La politique étrangère de la France. Texte et documents. dir. de publ. Ministère des Affaires étrangères. 1e semestre 1970-Septembre 1970. Paris: La Documentation Française. "Interview de M. Schumann au micro de "France Inter" au retour de sa visite à Londres (24 janvier 1970)", p. 37-39.

Copyright: (c) Translation CVCE.EU by UNI.LU

All rights of reproduction, of public communication, of adaptation, of distribution or of dissemination via Internet, internal network or any other means are strictly reserved in all countries.

Consult the legal notice and the terms and conditions of use regarding this site.

URL:

http://www.cvce.eu/obj/interview_with_maurice_schumann_24_january_1970-en-8f63789e-1101-4d11-8708-429901dceb15.html



Last updated: 05/07/2016

Interview with Mr Maurice Schumann on *France-Inter* radio station upon his return from a visit to London

24 January

Q. — *The last visit by a Foreign Minister was three years ago when a rather frosty mood prevailed. At that time, we were far from an entente cordiale, but much has changed since. We have seen the events in The Hague and, more important, the United Kingdom's position is evolving quickly. Minister, could you situate that evolution in its context? Is a watershed being reached in Franco-British relations?*

A. — I cannot say that my trip has altered the climate. Of course, I have long-standing ties with the United Kingdom. I do not deny them; quite the reverse. The British and I were comrades-in-arms in 1939 and in 1944. In the interim, I was General de Gaulle's spokesman. I enjoy excellent relations with the British, and, naturally, we are on the same wavelength. If my trip here is considered positive, it is not thanks to me, but rather it is because the time has come when a French Foreign Minister, with his opposite number and the British Government, can make a fresh start.

Q. — *I believe the British were expecting this overture. In 1970, they may have the opportunity, once again, to resume negotiations with Europe. Do you think that the UK will finally throw in its lot with the Continent?*

A. — I believe that negotiations will most likely get under way in 1970. It would take an unexpected and ill-fated event to prevent us from keeping to the calendar laid down in The Hague.

Q. — *Here, people are often afraid that deadlines will be imposed on certain aspects. In particular, there is some apprehension surrounding French antagonism towards the so-called transitional period.*

A. — There is no reason to be apprehensive. We need a transitional period. I shall go a step further than I went yesterday and say that we are being very precise and clear about the requirements for joining the Community, which is a real community and not a more or less loosely-woven system of vague contractual relations, as in the case of traditional alliances. The more demanding and meticulous we are about the requirements to be fulfilled, the more we need a period of adaptation, or transition.

Q. — *You are very familiar with Britain; it is still very attached to its Commonwealth and its special relationship with America. Do you see in that situation, if not an impossible hurdle, perhaps a handicap?*

A. — I think that you have hit the nail on the head. The changes that we see today have prompted the President of the United States, for very many reasons, including strategic ones, to assert that Europe's policy should be increasingly independent and to point out that General de Gaulle has always, and quite rightly, pursued that independent path. These changes, in the eyes of the President of the United States, are perhaps the driving force behind the budding rapprochement between Europe and Britain, the latter, it must not be forgotten and bears repeating, having saved Europe 30 years ago.

Q. — *In this new, enlarged Europe — you yourself mentioned the Entente Cordiale — can we detect a sort of Franco-British axis?*

A. — No. We must not give the impression that the future European Community will be dominated by one or two countries. You will recall all the misunderstanding brought about by the alleged Franco-German dominance of the Community. Franco-British or Anglo-German domination over the Community is no more likely than Franco-German domination. Nor do I think that we need to consider Britain as a linchpin. Some people say, and this proves that they do not have the community spirit, that Britain must join so that Germany does not take on too much importance in the Community. You cannot handle economic problems like those of the Community in that way. It is not a matter of achieving a balance of power or a European balance in the conventional sense of the term, one that, sadly, has caused Europeans so much distress. No, that is not how we should regard the matter. What is at issue is whether the United Kingdom has developed

enough solidarity towards Europe so that it can willingly open up a number of traditional channels. More precisely, that means that the United Kingdom, as a member of the Community, would have access to a considerable industrial market. But is the UK willing to go along with the idea that, in return, it should buy more European products and, by the same token, buy fewer products from outside Europe? That is the real issue. I would not say that it has been settled or that the requisite changes have occurred. They obviously have not, but they are beginning, and there is a compelling feeling of change and that the changes are irreversible. That is what most strikes the seasoned visitor to this country. More important, another remarkable thing is that the matter of the Common Market is no longer a source of dispute, if it ever really was. We have adversaries. Yesterday evening, when you and I arrived for dinner, during which Mr Stewart and I delivered speeches, there were some young people at the entrance who were carrying signs expressing hostility to the Common Market. As befits this thoroughly democratic country, they were orderly and courteous. But the leaders of the major parties whom I saw are in full agreement. The small Liberal Party is very European. I witnessed further evidence of the high quality of democracy in Britain. As is the tradition, I spoke with the Leader of the Opposition, Mr Heath, and with Sir Alec Douglas-Home, the Shadow Foreign Secretary in the Shadow Cabinet, i.e. the 'ministry' created by the Opposition in preparation for taking over the reins of government. Both would like Britain to join the Common Market, and they are as enthusiastic as the current Government. So, whatever the outcome of the next elections, the issue will be presented in the same terms.

Q. — *So, in your opinion, Britain is moving ahead.*

A. — Absolutely.