

Address given by Lord George Brown (London, 20 December 1967)

Caption: On 20 December 1967, the day following the meeting of the Council of Ministers of the Six, Lord George Brown, British Foreign Secretary, informs the House of Commons of the action to be taken by the Government.

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Mr. Speaker, with permission I should like to make a statement about our application for membership of the European Communities.

Honourable Members will know of the events which took place in Brussels yesterday at the meeting of the Council of Ministers of the Six. In spite of strong insistence by the representatives of five of the governments and the clear recommendation of the European Commission, the representative of one of them — France — refused to permit the opening of negotiations on our application. Here let me pay a tribute to these five governments and to the Commission for the very considerable efforts they have made individually and collectively to bring this enterprise to a successful conclusion.

My Right Honourable Friend the Prime Minister said in this House some weeks ago that if, contrary to our hopes and the hopes of most people in Europe, a veto were to be imposed, we should still regard ourselves as committed to our main purpose in Europe.

Sir, I reaffirm that today. We continue to believe that the long-term interests of this country and of Europe require that we should become members of the European Communities.

The communiqué which was issued after yesterday's meeting of the Community Council of Ministers made clear that our application, as well as those of the other countries, remain on the agenda of the Council of Ministers. We in turn confirm that our application stands. We do not intend to withdraw it.

We now propose to enter into consultations with those five members of the European Community who supported the Commission's view that negotiations should be started at an early stage.

We shall of course also be in the closest touch with the members of European Free Trade Association and the Irish Republic. We are by no means the only country whose hopes of progress towards a genuine European unity have been temporarily disappointed.

As regards the content of the consultations, to which I have referred, and which will begin at once, we for our part want to see the links between us forged as strongly as possible. But, Sir, we cannot expose ourselves to any further vetoes on the part of President de Gaulle.

As regards our relations with France, whilst we shall not indulge in any peevish or petty reaction to the present situation, it would be idle to pretend that what has happened is not a grave blow to our relationship. We think the attitude taken by the French Government represents a false view of the future of our continent of Europe. We think it contains a deplorable number of mistaken ideas about the realities of the various questions at issue. We question its motivation. But I think it important to stress that this is not an Anglo-French affair. This is a European affair.

We regret, of course, that Europe has been held back temporarily from achieving the unity which it now aspires to. But it is just because time and events in this technological age are running against Europe that we do not intend as a result of this temporary check to abandon all work along the road.

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