

Speech by Pierre Pflimlin (Paris, 25 March 1952)

Caption: On 25 March 1952, Pierre Pflimlin, French Minister for overseas territories, reveals to delegates of the Member States of the Council of Europe, meeting at Quai d'Orsay for an agriculture conference, the importance which his Government places on agricultural integration in Europe.

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Preparatory meeting for the European Organisation of Agricultural Markets

**Statement by Mr Pflimlin
Chairman
Minister of French Overseas Territories (Paris, 25 March 1952)**

I greatly appreciate the honour you do the French Delegation in asking me to preside over this conference. I sincerely thank you.

We have before us to-day a task the importance of which is obvious to all those here present.

It is indeed the first time that Ministers from a number of European countries meet specially to consider together the problems raised by the feeding of Europe and the expansion of its agriculture, and to study ways and means of solving those problems.

The idea of a European Organisation of Agricultural Markets and of the closer association of the agricultural systems of the European countries corresponds to a concern which, for the last few years, has increased in force and precision in many countries and in widely differing circles.

In 1948 the Marshall Plan was already trying to expand agricultural production in order to safeguard Europe against famine and to lighten the burden on the European economy of imports of foodstuffs from the Dollar Area.

The O.E.E.C. strongly urged, particularly in 1949, that this expansion effort should be made, and insisted on the necessity of settling the problem of outlets by setting up guaranteed markets, in order to make this effort possible. The careful work done by that Organisation will certainly considerably facilitate our own work.

The Council of Europe showed the same preoccupation, and its Assembly decided, in 1950, to study the setting up of a European Authority specialising in agriculture. The result of these studies was that the Consultative Assembly, during its session last December, adopted a recommendation that a Conference of experts should be called.

This general desire for closer cooperation in agricultural matters between European countries gave rise to concrete plans for integration. Mr Mansholt, Minister of Food, Agriculture and Fisheries in the Netherlands, is the author of a plan which was received with the liveliest interest in all the countries of Europe and which should receive our attention to-day.

In agricultural circles the plan for a European Agricultural Association was favourably received and such organisations as the International Federation of Agricultural Producers and the European Agricultural Confederation devoted much extremely interesting work to it. Finally, the United Nations Food and Agricultural Organisation at its last General Assembly, approved and encouraged steps for the integration of European agriculture.

The contribution of so much work and independent initiative is proof of the importance of the problem and of the interest in it and hope for its solution.

To my mind, our discussion should be governed by two facts: Europe's food supply is not assured; agricultural production in Europe is inadequate, but can be greatly extended.

I believe it is our duty to do all in our power to create the right economic atmosphere for this necessary expansion of production by seeking to achieve equilibrium between agricultural markets, by guaranteeing outlets, by increasing trade in agricultural products within Europe and by creating the necessary conditions for healthy competition with a view to the reduction of cost prices.

These are the objectives of the projects which this preliminary meeting is about to study. We consider that it

should be possible for all European countries to accept these objectives and for their people to receive them with hope.

The spirit in which we should approach this work, and I am convinced that we are at one on this point, is a spirit of solidarity. We believe that this undertaking would have little hope of success if all the participating countries could not find in it the solution of some of their problems; problems of supply for some, problems of markets for others, for most the problem of investments.

The Agricultural Pool should not be so designed as to favour any one social category. We believe that the interests of all social categories are really the same. In truth, the producer's interests do not run counter to those of the consumer, nor rural interests to those of the townsman. The former would benefit by stable prices and guaranteed markets but they should also accept a certain amount of competition, as long as it is fair, as a stimulant to the reduction of their cost prices by modernising their technique and their farms. The latter would receive the advantage of a stable food supply and normal prices but they should understand that a certain degree of economic security for the farmers means security for them too.

Finally, an expanding and progressive agriculture is of the greatest advantage to Industry, firstly because it opens up new markets for it, and secondly because it contributes to the stability of economic conditions favourable to industrial development.

Perhaps our undertaking is an ambitious one; it is certainly a difficult one. We must remember that our economies are of a delicate nature, that agriculture is not only a sector of production but a way of living and that its prosperity is a necessary element in the moral and political equilibrium of our countries.

We must therefore combine prudence of action with ambitious objectives; we must beware of any improvisation and, in order to advance more surely, know how to proceed in successive stages. A flexible and progressive method will make it possible to avoid violent disturbances which might engender violent reactions against the very idea of European unity.

We must realise that we shall not achieve the organisation and unification of agricultural markets without the consent and support of public opinion, and particularly agricultural opinion.

In embarking upon this Conference, our hopes outspan the field of agriculture and European Economy; they concern the very fate of this continent. The creation of a European agricultural community would be, for us, a new and important stage on the difficult but necessary road to European unity, which duty and exigency require that our generation should achieve. The very life of Europe is bound up in our undertaking, firstly the physical life of Europeans which, according to the adage, is the first requirement; then the material life, namely security of employment and improved economic conditions, and finally the political life. Once having overcome political dissensions, Europe must unite to put an end to economic discord in order to recover her due place in world politics, a place which she deserves by the value of her far reaching material resources and the equality of her peoples.

We must, surely, realise that the recreation of Europe in a new form is the essential condition and the only hope for peace.

In approaching this work, Gentlemen, let us express the hope that, by our joint efforts, we may be able to achieve positive results from this conference and thus to accomplish our duty.