

'The Scandinavians and the EEC' from Combat

Caption: On 11 November 1967, the French daily newspaper Combat describes the reactions of the Nordic members of the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) to the United Kingdom's application for accession to the European Communities.

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The Scandinavians and the EEC

by Georges Andersen

Ministers of Trade from Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Iceland and Finland recently met in Oslo to discuss, firstly, the development of their economies and reciprocal trade and, secondly, their role and opportunities as pillars of EFTA. The 'Scandinavian bloc' is currently attracting particular attention not only from the USSR and the Socialist bloc, as proven by Soviet and Polish opinion polls and the forthcoming visit of Nicolas Podgorny to Helsinki, but also from the Americans. In the face of the expected — if not current — difficulties and schisms within the EEC, following the United Kingdom's application for accession, the very powerful Joint Economic Committee in Washington is already preparing its alternative solution and has drawn up a plan consisting of a vast Atlantic Free Trade Area (North Atlantic Free Trade Association, or NAFTA), in which the EFTA Seven will play a primary role, as, subsequently, will 'survivors' from the EEC.

These initiatives have sparked conflicting reactions among the Scandinavian leaders.

Some are of the opinion that the dilemma facing the countries of Western Europe is as follows: either they form a vast union encompassing the 'Six' and the 'Seven', or they resign themselves to subscribing to the American plan, on condition that the neutral position of those countries which reject any military coalition or alliance be constitutionally guaranteed.

It is this underlying rivalry for the favours of the Nordic countries which goes some way towards explaining Stockholm's extreme aloofness. Whereas, in the other Scandinavian capitals, the idea of ever closer cooperation, if not union, with the EEC is regarded favourably, and indeed seems to be under way, the Swedish Government is clinging, with a tenacity which is disappointing Copenhagen and Oslo, to the terms of the note, handed over this summer to Brussels, whereby Sweden would consent to cooperation with the EEC only insofar as it did not in any way jeopardise that country's neutral status.

Since we know that the European Commission replied to that note on behalf of the European Community, Sweden should, at all events, agree to the political conditions and objectives of the EEC.

Although Gunnar Lange, Swedish Minister of Trade, recently declared before the Parliament in Stockholm and again in Oslo yesterday, that, in his opinion, any opening up in preparation for the Seven's entry into the EEC might be interpreted as a lack of confidence in the future of EFTA, his Scandinavian counterparts stand by their viewpoint and are trying hard to bring Mr Lange round to their way of thinking.

At the same time, the Opposition in the Swedish Parliament has opened a debate on the subject. The leader of the Conservative Party, Yngve Holmberg, warned the Socialist Government against 'the excesses of the policy of neutrality'. The refusal to join the EEC, he said, would isolate Sweden and weaken its economy to such an extent that it would no longer be able to uphold its neutrality. It is significant that the issue of neutrality is often discussed among the general public in Sweden, and it will be debated more and more in the run up to the forthcoming general elections. In the meantime, the five Scandinavian Ministers have agreed to do their utmost to strengthen the unity of EFTA.