

Address given by Michael Stewart to the WEU Council (Paris, 26 April 1968)

Caption: On 26 April 1968, following the United Kingdom's application for accession to the European Communities, Michael Stewart, British Foreign Secretary, gives an address to the Council of Western European Union (WEU) in which he outlines relations between his government and the other European organisations and countries.

Source: Speech by the Foreign Secretary at the Western European Union ministerial meeting, Paris, 26 April, 1968, Relations between the U.K., other EFTA countries and Ireland and the EEC. Paris: 26.04.1968. 4 p. .

Historical Archives of the European Union, Florence, Villa Il Poggiolo. Deposits, DEP. Edoardo Martino, EM. Union de l'Europe occidentale (UEO), EM.C.D-03. EM-200.

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Publication date: 18/03/2013

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with member
of the Community*

SPEECH BY THE FOREIGN SECRETARY AT THE
WESTERN EUROPEAN UNION MINISTERIAL MEETING, PARIS,
26 APRIL, 1968.

Relations between the U.K., other EFTA countries
and Ireland and the EEC

We now come to what is the most important part of our deliberations today. If the picture as we see it has not changed since you last met at the end of January, the issues have lost nothing of their urgency.

As I have already assured my colleagues, the objective of our European policy remains unchanged. This will surprise none of you. When we decided to seek membership of the European Communities, it was in every sense a national decision. For it had the overwhelming backing of all our political parties, and was approved by one of the largest Parliamentary majorities which we have seen in peacetime. This too need surprise no-one. The need for European unity and integration which my country, with historical responsibilities in many other parts of the world after the war, was slower than you to recognise has become more - not less - compelling with time.

In applying for membership of the Communities, and stating our readiness to accept the Treaties and the rules adopted under them, we were following encouragement and advice which we had received from each Government represented round this table and from the European Commission. We were accepting that the "ever closer union among the European peoples" which the Rome Treaty set out to create was best created within, and by the enlargement of, the existing Communities. That remains our policy. And I think that it is important for us all, and indeed for the future of the Communities, that this should continue to be so.

Last December the attitude adopted by the French Government towards the British application made the immediate opening of negotiations impossible, despite the declared wish of all the other interested parties. We in Britain were then faced with a choice. I will not pretend that it was a difficult choice. But it had to be made deliberately. We could have given up our declared objective; we could have taken the view that it no longer made sense to look to the existing Communities as the framework for wider and more intensive European unity. The alternative course, on which we decided, was to see what could be done, in the face of the impossibility of opening negotiations for full membership, to preserve the objective which all or nearly all of us shared and to ensure that the time which must pass before wiser counsels prevail was used to the best advantage.

We made our choice, and maintained our application for full membership of the Communities. This was seen by the Community -

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rightly in my view - as the critical point in our position. As the Federal German Foreign Minister informed us at the last Ministerial meeting of WEU at the end of January, our application would be maintained on the agenda of the Council of Ministers of the European Communities. I understand that this has the unanimous support of all the members of the Community. The need was then recognised to prove to public opinion that Governments were not content with merely talking, but knew what could and should be done in certain fields. As Herr Brandt put it, keeping our application on the agenda of the EEC Council meetings was not a mere formality but a commitment to take political action. And the view was put forward by my Italian colleague, you will recall, that Britain must not be left to argue for accession on her own.

In present circumstances, we have two objectives, which I hope we share with all of you: first, the avoidance of increasing differences between us, and the narrowing of these differences wherever possible, in the context of the maintenance of our application to join the Communities. This means consultation, and we have made it clear that we are ready to play our full part in every channel of consultation open to us. Our second objective is to find practical ways of ensuring that this period of waiting for the possibility of full membership is not wasted, but that we use it together to promote Europe's interest.

A variety of proposals and ideas have been put forward related to one or other of these two objectives. First in time, and most detailed, were the proposals of the three Benelux Governments in January. As you know, we accepted and welcomed these proposals at once. We saw in them, and we continue to see in them, the most promising approach to the difficult situation facing all of us as a result of the EEC Council meeting on 19 December. They provide for both consultation and joint action, and do so in a way which would seem to involve no risk to the principles of the Communities. The discussion at the last WEU meeting in January showed that these proposals also enjoyed a wide measure of support among member Governments of the Community and in the Commission.

Then there were the ideas put forward by our German colleague at the last WEU meeting - he made it clear that they were not then proposals - particularly the possibility of economic and trade policy solutions which would serve not as a substitute for the accession of Britain and other candidate countries but to prepare the ground - solutions which would create rights as well as obligations; the possibility of procedures which would allow co-operation in areas lying outside or on the periphery of the Rome Treaty, which could be the subject of research by experts; and the possibility of the extension of Euratom, which Mr. Brown described as opening up interesting and valuable opportunities. Then there came the Italian memorandum, which we also welcomed, and which seemed to have much in common with the ideas of the Benelux Governments and to offer similar opportunities; and the proposal of the Belgian Government that a conference should be held to consider the whole subject of European technology.

I would like here to say a word about technology. Our decisions on space do not imply any doubts on our part about the importance of European technological co-operation. The necessity of narrowing the Technological Gap remains as urgent as ever;

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but European co-operative efforts should in our view be concentrated on projects and activities which - unlike many of the proposals in the Causse Report on European Space Activities - are likely to prove viable. We are convinced that much progress can be made within the framework of the various proposals for European technological co-operation which have been put forward by our European friends. In welcoming the Belgian memorandum we are ready to participate in the inter-governmental Conference on Technology which it envisages. Four main topics for discussion were proposed. We have already made known our views on space; and there will be further discussion between us at the European Space Conference in July. As to the other three - aircraft, computers and atoms - we believe that they offer far better opportunities for European co-operation than some of the space proposals; and we should welcome an inter-governmental Conference for this purpose. We would also like to discuss the extent to which the proposals made by the Prime Minister on 13 November, 1967 can be fitted into the Benelux framework. One of the proposals he made was for the establishment of a European Technological Centre which could do valuable work in creating a climate of industrial opinion and in defining some of the steps necessary to joint industrial integration on a European scale. But it is obvious, as he said, that technological collaboration can come to full fruition only when Britain enters an enlarged Community.

I know that you have been giving careful consideration to the possibilities. There have been three Council meetings since the last Ministerial meeting of WEU three months ago. In particular, I know that consideration has been given to the possibility of some arrangement arising out of the declaration of the French and German Governments in the middle of February. These discussions are to continue. I should like to make our position clear. We should be interested in any proposals coming from the Six as a whole which are clearly and unmistakably connected with our full membership of the European Economic Community. We are not interested in any arrangement intended as a substitute for our full membership. If, from the ideas currently being considered, there were to emerge definite proposals from the Community as a whole clearly tied to our full membership of the Community we should certainly consider them most carefully. This possibility does not arise however at present, since there are no proposals from the Community as a whole.

I would like to conclude with three observations. First, I would like to recall that there was general agreement at the last meeting of WEU - at least we noted no dissenting voices - that all these ideas for meeting the objectives which we share with you are not mutually exclusive: whatever may happen in the case of one of them, that should not preclude the development of others. Indeed, when Mr. Brown suggested a meeting of all concerned, or as many as wished to take part, in order to consider the proposals which had then been put forward this suggestion was specifically accepted by a number of other delegations. It remains our view that this is the right course.

Secondly, I have been encouraged to note the maintenance of public interest in the issue of enlarging the Communities

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despite the failure of Governments to make progress. I mention as examples the reception which the resolutions on the need to extend the Communities drawn up by the Action Committee has had in the Parliaments of member countries, and the statement of Chancellor Kiesinger in the Bundestag on 2 April that "this Government and this House desire the entry of Great Britain and other countries . . . and would be ready to take up negotiations with Britain".

Finally, I would say that we have a common objective. Let us work for it. If you had waited for perfection in 1957 before putting your hand to the task of creating the Communities, where would European integration be today? We in Britain will not abandon our objective of membership as long as there remains hope of progress towards it.