

France's rejection of British EEC Membership

*Press statement by French president Charles de Gaulle
14 January 1963*

When we talk about economic matters, and even more when we are dealing with them, it is essential for what is said and what is done to conform to reality, for otherwise we end up in deadlocks and sometimes even in ruin.

Concerning this very important question of the European Economic Community and also lhal of the possible membership of Great Britain, it is the facts which must be considered first. Sentiments, as favourable as they might be and as they are, cannot be put forward in disregard of the real facts of the problem. What are these facts?

The Treaty of Rome was concluded between six continental States, States which are, to put it briefly, economically of the same nature. Whether in terms of their industrial or agricultural production, of their foreign trade, of their commercial practices and clients, or of their living and working conditions, there are many more similarities than differences between them. Moreover, they are adjacent, they interpenetrate, they are extensions of each other through their communication links. The very fact of grouping them and linking them together in such a way lhal what they produce, buy, sell, and consume by preference within their own grouping thus conforms to reality.

It must be added, moreover, that from the standpoint of their economic development, their social progress and their technological capability they are, in short, in stride with each other and they are moving forward at more or less the same pace. Furthermore, it happens lhal there exists between them no kind of political grievance, no border disputes, no rivalry for domination or power. To the contrary, there is a feeling of solidarity between them, first owing to the awareness they have of sharing an important part of the origins of their civilisation, and also with regard to their security, because they are continental countries and they are confronted by the same single threat from one end of their territorial grouping to the other. Finally they have a feeling of solidarity because not one of them is linked externally by any special political or military agreement.

Thus it has been psychologically and materially possible to organise an economic community of the Six. This was not without difficulty. When the Treaty of Rome was signed in 1957, it was after long discussions, and once concluded - so lhal something could be accomplished - it was necessary for us French to straighten ourselves out in the economic, financial, and monetary domain. And this was done in 1959.

From that time on, the Community was workable in principle, but it was then necessary to implement the Treaty. Now this Treaty, which was quite specific and complete on the subject of industry, was not at all specific and complete on the subject of agriculture. And yet, it was essential for our country lhal this be settled.

For it is indeed quite obvious lhal agriculture is an essential element of our national activity as a whole. We cannot conceive of a Common Market in which French agriculture would not find outlets commensurate with its production, and we agree lhal, among the Six, we are the country for which this necessity is the most imperative.

That is why last January, when consideration was being given to implementing the second stage of the Treaty, in other words, to a practical beginning of its application, we were led to insist on the

introduction of agriculture into the Common Market as a formal condition. This was finally accepted by our partners, but very complex and difficult arrangements were needed. And some of these arrangements are still being worked out. I will note in passing that, in this vast undertaking, all the decisions taken were taken by

Governments, for nowhere else is there any authority or responsibility. But I should say that, in order to prepare and clarify matters, the Brussels Commission worked in a highly objective and pertinent fashion.

Then Great Britain applied for membership of the Common Market. It did so after refusing earlier to participate in the community that was being built, and after then having created a free trade area with six other States,² and finally - I can say this, the negotiations conducted for so long on this subject can be recalled - after having put some pressure on the Six in order to prevent the application of the Common Market from really getting started. Britain thus in its turn requested membership, but on its own conditions.

This undoubtedly raises for each of the six States and for England problems of a very great dimension.

England is, in effect, insular, maritime, linked through its trade, markets, and food supply to very diverse and often very distant countries. Its activities are essentially industrial and commercial, and only slightly agricultural. It has, throughout its work, very marked and original customs and traditions. In short, the nature, structure, and economic context of England differ profoundly from those of the other States of the Continent.

What is to be done so that Britain, in the way it lives, in the way it produces and in the way it trades, can be incorporated into the Common Market such as it has been conceived and such as it functions?

For example, the means by which the people of Great Britain nourish themselves is in fact by importing foodstuffs purchased at low prices in the two Americas or in the former dominions, while still granting large subsidies to British farmers. This method is obviously incompatible with the system the Six have quite naturally established for themselves.

The system of the Six consists of making a pool of the agricultural products of the entire Community, of strictly determining their prices, of forbidding subsidising, of organising their consumption between all the members and of making it obligatory for each of these members to pay to the Community any savings they might make by having foodstuffs brought in from outside instead of consuming those offered by the Common Market.

Once again, what is to be done to make Britain, such as it is, enter that system?

One was sometimes led to believe that our British friends, in applying for membership in the Common Market, agreed to change their own ways even to the point of applying all the conditions accepted and practised by the Six, but it is necessary to know if Great Britain can at present position itself, with the Continent and like it, within a tariff that is truly common, give up all preference with regard to the Commonwealth; cease to claim that its agriculture be privileged and, even more, consider as null and void the commitments it has made to the countries that are part of its free trade area. That question is the one at issue.

One cannot say that it has now been resolved. Will it be so one day? Obviously Britain alone can answer that.

The question is all the more relevant since, following Britain, other States which are, I repeat, linked to it in the Free Trade Area, would or will want to enter the Common Market for the same reasons as Great Britain.

It must be agreed that first the entry of Great Britain and then that of those other States will completely change the series of adjustments, agreements, compensations, and regulations already established between the Six, because all these States, like Britain, have very important traits of their own. We would then have to envisage the construction of another Common Market. But the 11-member, then 13-member, and then perhaps 18-member Common Market that would be built would, without any doubt, hardly resemble the one the Six have built.

Moreover, this Community, growing in that way, would be confronted with all the problems of its economic relations with a crowd of other States, and first of all with the United States.

It is foreseeable that the cohesion of all its members, who would be very numerous and very diverse, would not hold for long and that in the end there would appear a colossal Atlantic Community dependent on the US and under American leadership which would soon completely swallow up the European Community.

This is an assumption that can be perfectly justified in the eyes of some, but it is not at all what France aspired to and what France still aspires to i.e. a strictly European construction.

Then, it is possible that Britain would one day come round to transforming itself enough to belong to the European Community without restriction and without reservation, and placing it ahead of anything else, and in that case the Six would open the door to it and France would place no obstacle on its path, although obviously the mere membership of Britain in the Community would completely change its nature and its size.

It is also possible that England is not yet prepared to do this, and that indeed appears to be the outcome of the long, long Brussels talks. But if this is the case, we should not rutake a drama out of it. . . .