'A great day' from Le Monde (23–24 January 1972)

Caption: On 22 January 1972, in its coverage of the solemn ceremony to mark the signing, in Brussels, of the Acts of Accession to the European Communities by the four applicant countries (Denmark, Ireland, Norway and the United Kingdom), the French daily newspaper Le Monde discusses the implications of a new Europe of the Ten.

Source: Le Monde. dir. de publ. Fauvet, Jacques. 23-24.01.1972, n° 8.407; 29 année. Paris: Le Monde. "Un grand jour", p. 1.

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A great day

It is a great day, a day that significantly changes the face of the West and, by the same token, the world map. By acceding to the Treaties of Rome and Paris, four countries whose traditions and geography have always inclined them to look seawards have now decisively joined themselves to the continent. Ireland was neutral. For Denmark and Norway, the Swedish model was very attractive, and the temptation to form a Nordic bloc was stronger among much of the population than the desire to join the Community. There is still a risk that the forthcoming referenda in these two countries will not endorse the choice of the political leaders. In this respect, the resignation of Norway's Minister for Fisheries, deeply concerned about the impact of membership of the Europe of Ten on this key sector, is particularly significant.

The fact remains that the British decision is of capital importance. Fifty years ago, Britain was the greatest world power, ruling the largest empire of all time. A quarter of a century ago, it was still one of the Big Three, who, in Yalta and in Potsdam, believed themselves to be fashioning the post-war world. A few years later, the political leadership in London continued to regard their country, in all modesty, as the common centre of three circles: the Atlantic, Europe, and the Commonwealth. It took the loss of the empire, the proliferation of conflicts within the Commonwealth, and the passing of the torch to the United States as leader of the free world and guardian of the seas, for proud Albion to change its view of the Common Market from disdain to opposition, from opposition to an attempt at destruction from within, and thence to genuine conversion to the ideals of the European Community.

This is not to say that nostalgia has disappeared and there are no Britons for whom this 22 January is a day of mourning. But on the level of political strategy a very clear choice has been made. Mr Heath has embraced the exact opposite of Churchill's famous warning to de Gaulle on the eve of the Normandy landings. He has chosen Europe over the high seas, no longer having any illusions about the influence that Britain alone can have on American policy or about the power it derives from the existence of the Commonwealth.

The governments will now concentrate on preparations for the summit conference of the Ten to be held at the end of this year or perhaps even by the end of the summer. Only then will we see whether the countries of Europe are capable of giving substance to their Community. There is no point in taking one's wishes for reality. The Treaties of Rome and Paris have first and foremost economic objectives, and the extremely timid beginnings of political cooperation between the Six, inaugurated in November 1970 by quarterly meetings at ministerial level, show the limits of the undertaking, even if Britain is likely to try to take initiatives in this area. Those who already speak of Europe as a third superpower also ignore the fact that there is nothing to suggest that the Ten will be able, in the foreseeable future, to establish so much as the embryo of a military community. Unfortunately, this point is as decisive in the world of today as in the past.