

Television interview with Maurice Couve de Murville (25 January 1967)

Caption: On 25 January 1967, in his comments on the meeting which took place the previous day in Paris between the British Prime Minister, Harold Wilson, and the French President, Charles de Gaulle, the French Foreign Minister, Maurice Couve de Murville, gives his impressions of the Franco–British exchange of views on the United Kingdom's accession to the European Communities.

Source: Western European Union Assembly-General Affairs Committee: A retrospective view of the political year in Europe 1967. March 1968. Paris: Western European Union Assembly-General Affairs Committee.

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Television interview of Mr. Couve de Murville, French Minister for Foreign Affairs, after a meeting with Mr. Wilson and Mr. Brown in Paris

26th January 1967

Question: Minister, a great deal of ink already flowed beforehand concerning Mr. Wilson's journey. It was even written that he was coming to put, as it were, the question of confidence to General de Gaulle. Judging by everything we have heard, this is not at all what actually happened?

Answer: No, Mr. Wilson did not come to ask General de Gaulle questions. He came, as he had stated, and as he is going to do with our other Common Market partners, to exchange views with us on the highly important question of what would be for Great Britain the possibilities of joining the European Economic Community. He wanted, as the British have been saying for some time, to find out whether the conditions are right for negotiations to begin on the subject. And indeed, we have not started negotiations, but exchanged views on the questions arising in connection with this problem of Great Britain's possible candidature for entry into the Common Market.

Question: Does this mean that the chief difficulties were reviewed? They are all political and economic in nature. If you had to choose the one you regard as most important, which would it be? There is of course the agricultural problem, whose importance everyone has known for along time, since it was discussed at such length in Brussels before 1962, but I believe that others are now emerging.

Answer: Indeed, this is really what we discussed. We talked over the two most important problems that arise. You have mentioned agriculture, and one can add, of course, the Commonwealth, which we also discussed. There is further the monetary question, that is to say, not so much the present difficulties of sterling — which the British are trying to cure by means of a very stringent economic programme ...

Question: Was their attitude optimistic on this subject?

Answer: Yes, they are fairly optimistic over their present situation, but our discussions concerned rather more the problems resulting from the existence of the sterling area, that is to say the question of what would be the consequences for the Six of Britain's entry with the sterling area, and which commitments we would enter into or what risks we would possibly have to run, since, apart from Great Britain, the sterling area is mainly outside Europe.

Question: Therefore, in your opinion, there were no French prior conditions on these subjects?

Answer: It was not a matter of prior conditions, nor, I repeat, was it a matter of negotiations. We exchanged views, we put our cases to each other in the friendliest possible frame of mind. I would say that, as is normal when French and British meet, we put our cases very objectively and very frankly, and I think we understood each other very well on the questions considered in these discussions.

Question: Without any possible misunderstanding?

Answer: I do not believe that there are any misunderstandings. Furthermore, there was no conclusion in the true sense of the word.

Source: French Ministry for Foreign Affairs.