

Statement by Georges Pompidou (Paris, 21 May 1971)

Caption: On 21 May 1971, during a visit to Paris by the British Prime Minister, Edward Heath, the French President, Georges Pompidou, emphasises the importance of the future accession of the United Kingdom to the European Economic Community (EEC).

Source: Western European Union Assembly-General Affairs Committee: A retrospective view of the political year in Europe 1971. November 1972. Paris: Western European Union Assembly-General Affairs Committee. "Statement to the press by Mr. Pompidou, President of the French Republic, after his talks with Mr. Heath, British Prime Minister (Paris, 21 May 1971)", p. 178-179.

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URL: http://www.cvce.eu/obj/statement_by_georges_pompidou_paris_21_may_1971-en-667a8476-fc33-4321-8c28-d6f175e823dc.html

Last updated: 17/10/2014

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[...]

The aim of these talks was not and could not be to resolve all the questions that are under discussion in Brussels. Since the start of the negotiations on the adhesion of Britain and the other candidates, France has always held the position that it was the Community that was negotiating, that consequently the Community should first reach agreement on the proposals it was making to the British negotiators. That is why we have not settled those problems that we were not qualified to settle.

You would not believe me if I told you we did not discuss them. We tried, above all, to mutually understand the deep-seated political and economic reasons on which each of our two governments base their positions. As you will see from the communiqué that is going to be distributed, these issues were discussed and are mentioned in outline in the communiqué. All that I can say is that it would be unreasonable at the present time to think that an accord between Britain and the Community will not be reached during the negotiations next June and that in any case, the spirit of our conversations yesterday and today allows me to believe that these negotiations will be successful.

Do not conclude however that Mr. Schumann and his colleagues in the Community, as well as Mr. Rippon, will not again have long periods of discussion. They are used to them and, as seen from Paris, I even have the impression that they like that.

But the central theme of our discussion has been on the overall concept of Europe, its organisation, its functioning, and its future, and all this, in the general framework of major world problems, between European countries and others, and among these European countries. On a certain number of major problems, we have concluded that our viewpoints were similar and even identical. On others, we have also concluded that although certain differences, divergences might have existed, they were in no way an obstacle to our co-operation, since we are in complete agreement on the goal to be attained.

I think I can say that we were aware, the British Prime Minister and I, that this was an important moment in the history of our two nations and in the history of the countries of Western Europe. Our talks, by their very length, prove that we wished to get to the bottom of the problem. Begun and continued from one end to the other with the greatest frankness and the greatest freedom, they are ending with trust. This trust is and must be that which two people have in each other and which they have in their partners, present or future within the Community, to build a Europe composed of nations concerned with maintaining their identity but having decided to work together to attain true unity, first in economic matters and progressively in all others, including, of course, political matters.

Many people believed that Britain was not and did not want to become European and that it wished to enter the Community only to destroy it or to divert it from its goals. Many also thought that France was ready to use all pretexts to finally impose a new veto on the entry of Britain.

Well, Ladies and Gentlemen, you see before you this evening two men convinced of the contrary.

Source: French Embassy, New York.