

'How are the EFTA Seven getting on?', from Communauté européenne


Caption: In December 1965, Jean Lecerf describes relations between the European Economic Community (EEC) and the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) in the monthly publication Communauté européenne.

Source: Communauté européenne. Bulletin mensuel d'information. dir. de publ. Fontaine, François ; Réd. Chef Chastenet, Antoine. Décembre 1965, n° 12; 9e année. Paris: Service d'Information des Communautés Européennes. "Où en sont les “Sept” de la zone de libre-échange ", auteur:Lecerf, Jean , p. 12.

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How are the EFTA Seven getting on?

[...]

The main concern

The European Free Trade Area is not just ‘rubbing along’.

‘EFTA is generally recognised as the most successful, harmonious and dynamic of Europe’s economic groupings at the present time’, said the President of the Board of Trade, Douglas Jay, in Copenhagen. He was able to boast of an 80 % increase in internal trade within the area from 1959 to 1964 $\frac{3}{4}$ an increase almost as rapid for agricultural as for industrial goods $\frac{3}{4}$ and the existence since 1967 of a free market of nearly 100 million people with a very high standard of living.

But EFTA’s main concern is still to restore links with the Common Market. This was the main theme of the Ministers’ meeting in Vienna last May, which Mr Wilson insisted on attending personally. He put forward a modest bridge-building proposal to hold joint talks on relatively minor technical matters such as patents or the harmonisation of certain regulations, arguing that if Ministers met in this fashion, there might one day be an opportunity to talk politics.

Initial reactions to the proposal were not very enthusiastic either in Brussels or in Paris, and the crisis of 30 June soon removed it from the agenda.

It has now been revived in Copenhagen. Calculating that the crisis in the European Community could be a good opportunity for an initiative of this kind, the Danish Foreign Minister, Mr Haekkerrup, went round the European capitals in an attempt to devise a plan for a rapprochement between the Seven and the Six.

But several EFTA countries were not prepared to consider closer ties as long the British surtax remained in place. Nor did they wish to involve themselves in an initiative that had little chance of success at the present time. It was, however, decided to send the Six a gentle reminder, not requiring an answer, that the EFTA countries were prepared to discuss the future of European trade and the outlook for world trade with them in whatever context appeared most propitious. A note to that effect was delivered to the ambassadors of the six countries in Copenhagen. There has been no reaction so far.

The Seven were hoping, and still hope, that a rapprochement between the two groups could be part of a package deal to resolve the Common Market crisis.

Impossible? Maybe not.

Until now, France has often been the most reluctant to go down that road. But there are now various reasons to believe General de Gaulle is less opposed than formerly to an arrangement that would enable ‘the whole of our continent to advance together towards peace and progress as soon as possible’, as he himself put it on 4 November.

Certainly, this must not involve abandoning the three principles that have ensured the strength and cohesion of our Communities so far: a community body with wide-ranging responsibilities and means of action; common policies; and the ultimate goal of a United States of Europe.

But neither can the Community forget that its vocation is to embrace the whole of Western Europe as soon as possible.

Jean Lecerf