

Statement by Geoffrey Rippon (London, 10 December 1970)

Caption: On 10 December 1970, Geoffrey Rippon, head of the British Delegation on the accession of the United Kingdom to the European Economic Community (EEC), informs the House of Commons of the progress of accession negotiations with the Six.

Source: Parliamentary Debates. House of Commons. Official Report. First session of the Forty-Fifth Parliament of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Nineteenth year of the reign of her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II. Dir. of publ. Hansard. 1970-1971, n° 808; fifth series. London: His Majesty's Stationery Office. "European Economic Community", p. 690-691.

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[...]

With your permission, Mr. Speaker, and with that of the House, I should like to make a statement on the progress of the negotiations for British membership of the European Communities made at the Ministerial meeting of the conference which I attended in Brussels on 8th December.

At this meeting agreement was reached that the alternatives listed in the Declaration of Intent made by the Community in 1963 would be open to certain African countries, namely Gambia, Ghana, Malawi, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia. I remind the House that these alternatives comprise association under the Yaoundé Convention ; other association agreements with mutual rights and obligations, particularly in matters of trade ; or commercial agreements to facilitate and expand trade between the Community and these countries.

The Community said that it could only state its position with regard to other Commonwealth developing countries in the Indian Ocean and Pacific, and the Caribbean, for which we proposed that the same options be available, in the light of discussions taking place with respect to the Commonwealth Sugar Agreement.

The conference also discussed further the basis of Gibraltar's customs arrangements with the Community following the agreement already reached-and reported to the House on the 29th October-that the provisions of the Treaty of Rome would apply to Gibraltar under Article 227 (4). It has been accepted that as Gibraltar is not a part of the United Kingdom's customs territory there would be no reason to include Gibraltar in the customs territory of the enlarged Community.

I again expressed the hope that the Community would shortly be able to make known its views on the arrangements to be made for Hong Kong.

The principles of the United Kingdom admission to the European Investment Bank were agreed.

In the course of a statement I made dealing with the question of transitional measures, I proposed on behalf of Her Majesty's Government a transitional period of five years for adaptation in both the industrial and agricultural fields and for adaptation to the Community's rules regarding capital movements and fiscal harmonisation. I stressed that, in putting this proposal forward, we thought it essential that, within the common period of five years in the four fields, effective provision should be made for arriving at a mutual balance of advantage between the United Kingdom and the existing Community.

In the industrial field, we thought this could be done if we could provide for a suitable accelerated rhythm for tariff rates and adaptations. For agriculture and horticulture, we should require that the adaptations be made with reasonable flexibility over five full years.

I said that the five-year period should not, in our view, apply in the cases of Community finance, New Zealand butter and cheese and sugar from developing Commonwealth countries, nor to the European Coal and Steel Community and Euratom.

The Community noted our proposals upon industry and agriculture with satisfaction and said that they would examine our suggestions on capital movements and fiscal harmonisation in a positive spirit. Deputies were instructed to pursue the discussion of all these questions in preparation for the next Ministerial meeting.

The Community said that it would establish its position on all of these questions within a global framework. This is naturally our own position. The agreements reached hitherto must all be regarded as provisional pending the outcome of the negotiations as a whole.

At the meeting I also outlined certain considerations which we believe the Community should take into

account in dealing with the question of the British contribution to Community finance. I pointed out that the United Kingdom would be likely to enjoy only relatively small receipts as a result of Community expenditure in its present form. I recalled also that the existing members of the Community had had an extended transitional period in which to move to the agreed Community system of financing, and that correctives had been provided for governing member countries' contributions during a period of years after the final stage of Community direct income had been started. I noted that the Commission had stated in its observations on our estimates of the effect of Community financing upon the United Kingdom that, should unacceptable situations arise within the present Community or an enlarged Community, the very survival of the Community would demand that the institutions find equitable solutions.

I said that we would be making detailed proposals in this field as soon as possible.

Finally it was agreed that Ministerial meetings should take place next year on 2nd February, 16th March, 11th May and 22nd June, and that the timetable of meetings could be speeded up if necessary.

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