

Statement by Louis de Guiringaud (Paris, 31 May 1977)

Caption: On 31 May 1977, Louis de Guiringaud, French Foreign Minister, explains to the Senate the complexity of future accession negotiations with the European Communities and argues in favour of a reform of the Community institutions before any further enlargement takes place.

Source: La politique étrangère de la France. Textes et documents. dir. de publ. Ministère des Affaires étrangères. 2e trimestre 1977. Paris: La Documentation française. "Déclaration de M. de Guiringaud, ministre des Affaires étrangères, au Sénat, sur l'élargissement de la CEE (31 mai 1977)", p. 72-74.

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[...]

The question is whether a Community whose achievements, cohesion and decision-making capacity are being threatened by external developments and by some internal contradictions, can still find enough resources and the impetus to overcome its weaknesses and face up to the risks of an enlargement that, in itself, is desirable. No one can remain indifferent to the force that propels our southern European neighbours towards the Community which, in its turn, identifies with their struggle for democracy. First, because this force provides a reminder, if one was needed, of the deeper significance of the task that has been undertaken. The Community is not solely an economic endeavour. It is a union of freedom-loving nations, brought together by shared support of the principles of political pluralism and the defence of human rights in a world in which the exercise of democracy is a fragile and threatened privilege. Even if we tend to forget it, this is the image that the countries that turn towards us today think of first of all. In their eyes, being part of the process of European integration is the symbol of restored democracy and the way of guaranteeing that it retains a solid basis. There is here both a hope and an appeal that Europe cannot rebuff.

This is particularly the case since Greece, Portugal and Spain obviously belong to the European family. Few nations have contributed so much to forming the cultural, economic and political foundations of our continent's civilisation. Their history and their traditions are part of our common heritage, and that is a reason for believing that, together with us, they can, and must, contribute to defending the European identity and to giving Europe a future that is worthy of its past.

However, with regard to these political concerns, there are facts that we must be capable of considering and weighing up.

The first fact is the very state of our Community. The Nine have certainly been able to maintain, throughout the crisis, the main elements of their cohesion in the face of external demands and the temptations of self-interest. They have devised corrective measures that have allowed the Common Market to survive monetary chaos and economic divergence. In a particularly difficult economic environment, they have been able to maintain and increase their exemplary efforts in support of the Third World. Internally, they have even sought to achieve what limited progress could be made to deepen integration and develop more genuine and more effective instruments of social and regional solidarity. These disparate efforts should not, however, let us forget the imperfections, the weaknesses and the threats.

[...]

... Two of these threats appear to me to be particularly serious.

The first is obviously the one which looms over our common agricultural market, to which we are so attached not only because it guarantees our farmers a stable income and consumers guaranteed supplies but also because it is, to this day, the only genuine common policy that corresponds with the organisational and solidarity principles that are the foundations for European integration. Floating exchange rates have not only altered the way in which this policy works; they have, above all, revealed its shortcomings. They have done so by hitting the unorganised markets more than the others and by highlighting their shortcomings and the injustice, often deplored by France, of rules that do not give the producers of wine, fruit and vegetables and other Mediterranean products the same guarantees and protection as those enjoyed by producers of milk, cereals and processed products in the north. The disorder that this absence of rules has caused is now much too blatant for the Community to ignore much longer without damaging its credibility.

The second threat is more diffuse but still very real. It is the threat facing the Community institutions. These institutions were devised for a Community of six Member States. They became cumbersome, because they were not reformed when three new Member States signed up in 1972. The slowdown that has resulted in the operations of the European machinery is being felt more and more. It is inconceivable that the Member States that were able, in 1974, to create the European Council, the supreme body for initiatives and decision-

making, should not now undertake a review of how the Community machinery functions and how to increase its effectiveness.

These difficulties, in the agricultural and institutional fields, share a common feature, and that is that they constitute immediate problems for the Community and that they call for urgent consideration and speedy action. This consideration and action are not prompted or justified by the Community's enlargement plans. They are required irrespective of any application for accession or future prospect of membership. They will determine, even within the Nine, the maintenance of cohesion and the Community's chances of development. However, it is clear that the situation that needs to be resolved would become untenable if nothing were done before new countries acceded to the Community. It should, therefore, be obvious that the creation of a genuine common policy for Mediterranean agriculture and improvement to the functioning of the institutions must be agreed before any new accession.

In this regard, I would recall that the only application for accession on which the Nine have given a positive verdict, and unanimously, is that of Greece, with whom the Community began formal negotiations last July. The opening of negotiations means that everything will be done to ensure that agreement is reached. We must keep this promise: there will be neither slowing down nor any hindrance of the process that is under way. There can be no question of making the definition of the negotiating mandate with Greece dependent upon a review of Portugal's application, submitted on 7 April last, but on which the Council took no decision apart from asking the Commission to submit a report. Nor can it be dependent on Spain's application, which is still a mere possibility. Negotiations with Greece will be conducted on the merits of that application alone, taking account of the special link between Europe and Greece and, in our case, France's friendship towards the Hellenic nation. The President of the Republic himself has given assurances to the Athens Government publicly on many occasions, most recently when it received Konstantinos Karamanlis at the Elysée on 12 May 1977.

We are, therefore, determined to ensure that the negotiations with Athens, which are proceeding well, should be successfully completed within a reasonable timeframe. But I can assure the rapporteurs and the Senate of the Government's determination scrupulously to defend our interests and to accept only solutions that are in the Community's interest. That interest is governed by the need to which I just referred, first of all to streamline its organisation but also to bring greater logic, coherence and responsibility to the reassessment of how our economic union is evolving. It is true that the Nine, who had the courage and generosity to define a policy of special links with all the countries bordering the Mediterranean, have not always been consistent in that policy, whose cumulative effect is now being felt. We can no longer follow the path of these commitments by improvising as we go along. In order to make informed decisions, we must have an overall assessment of their impact and repercussions, including indirect ones. In a word, that means seeing the overall picture whenever necessary. The Greek application, even if it does not in itself raise serious problems, could, if we are not careful, have such serious repercussions in certain circumstances. We must assess them in a clear-minded and frank manner, taking into account the different types of relations already established with the countries bordering on the Mediterranean, and, in particular, the various possible scenarios in our relations with Portugal and Spain, who, we realise, want to join. It would not be prejudging a decision on these applications that must be taken at a later date if we already start to consider the impact of any change in our relations with these countries. It would not mean denying Greece the specific character of its application if we keep this global assessment in mind when we define the conditions for Greek accession.

The resolution now (prior to any new accession) of the problems that already exist in the Community of the Nine, including Mediterranean agriculture, the way that our institutions function and a global assessment of enlargement, should not be seen as weakening or negating the commitment that has already been made to the Government in Athens.

Our Greek friends are themselves aware that well-conducted negotiations must include an open consideration of all existing problems and, firstly, taking stock of those problems. It is only once the problems have been listed and defined that relevant solutions can really be found.

This was the method jointly agreed by the Community and Greece. The listing of problems has begun and is

progressing well. However, if it is to be done properly, it will take several more months. The most reasonable scenario is that the negotiating mandate could be adopted towards the end of this year. That gives the Community more than enough time to carry out an overall review of the problems raised in the context of those negotiations and to set out, firstly amongst the Nine, the measures that the EEC needs to take to pull itself together.

In order to encourage and speed up this reassessment, the French Government, which has, over the past two months, already submitted two memos to its partners on the specific issues facing wine and fruit and vegetables, intends to submit to the Council, in the near future, a general note on the problems of Mediterranean agriculture.

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