

Interview with the foreign minister of the Netherlands from the Corriere della Sera (11 June 1969)

Caption: In an interview with the Italian newspaper Corriere della Sera on 11 June 1969, Joseph Luns, Dutch Foreign Minister, states that he is completely in favour of the enlargement of the European Economic Community (EEC).

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Interview with the Foreign Minister of the Netherlands

Opening the gates of the Common Market

According to Joseph Luns, in order for a revival to take place in Europe, ‘The Six’ must welcome Britain and the other applicant countries into the Community. If the French Government does not abandon its Gaullist policy, there is the possibility of forming a political union outside the EEC, without France

From our special correspondent

The Hague 10 June, night.

If the next French government persists with Gaullist policies and continues to oppose the accession of Britain to the European Economic Community, some kind of political union without France, developed outside the Common Market, is a distinct possibility. This is the conviction of the Foreign Minister of the Netherlands, Joseph Luns, who, on 1 July, will become President-in-Office of the EEC Council of Ministers.

Mr Luns, who has held the post of Foreign Minister in his country for more than twelve years, has already chaired the Council of Ministers three times. He is convinced that, during his next presidency, in the second half of 1969, the Community will finally tackle ‘the biggest and most urgent’ of its problems: the admission of new candidates. This is one of the opinions expressed in the following interview, which he recently gave us in The Hague.

Question: On 1 July you will become President of the EEC Council of Ministers. Do you plan to take any particular initiatives in order to stimulate a European revival?

Answer: I shall at once try to obtain a statement of intent from the Governments of the Member States on the issue of the Community. It may not be possible to get the negotiations with the new candidates (Denmark, Ireland, Norway and the United Kingdom) underway immediately, but I believe that it will be possible to come to an agreement over a joint declaration by the Six.

Q: What makes you think that France will join the other five members in supporting Great Britain’s accession?

A: I am not saying that it will be especially easy to obtain France’s participation. July may be too early for France to change its policy. I think, however, that the statement made by Pompidou during the election campaign was quite positive. We cannot, therefore, rule out the possibility that, if he is elected, he might agree to join us in making a simple statement of intent.

Q: During Western European Union’s latest meeting, in The Hague, German Foreign Minister Willy Brandt floated the idea of convening a summit meeting in autumn between the United Kingdom and the Six. Do you believe this to be possible?

A: Yes, I do. I believe that we could come together early on and that the negotiations with the United Kingdom could begin this very autumn.

Q: Do you believe that the United Kingdom will accept the principle of the supranationality of the Community institutions?

A: One thing is certain: if it wants to become part of the Common Market, the United Kingdom must fully accept all the principles of supranationality implicit in the Treaty of Rome.

Q: Michel Debré has nevertheless stated that he does not wish to consider other candidates before the issue of how to finance the agricultural policy is resolved.

A: This is true, but the wishes of the new President will be a decisive factor, as will the composition of the new Government. In order to gauge accurately what the future attitude of the French will be, we need to know who will make up that Government, and what the political consequences of its composition will be. It will be important to know, for example, whether Giscard d'Estaing will be included in the Government, and what role he will play.

Q: You will be President of the Council of Ministers for six months. Is there anything else you propose to do before the autumn?

A: There are other issues to be addressed and we shall address them. The will is there and we have seen proof of that when we met Pietro Nenni, who is such a strong advocate of the idea of Europe. But there is no other issue that could, or should, take priority over the enlargement of the Community. Each time we refuse an accession application, we do something that is neither logical nor justified. There is talk of reorganising and reinvigorating our institutions. The first and best way to do this is by admitting the new candidates.

Q: Which other issues need to be addressed?

A: There is an important point to be made here. It would be illogical to address, for example, the issue of agriculture, when we know full well that we will soon need to review it, together with the United Kingdom. It would be better to conduct a single review. We must also, however, democratise our institutions, for example granting greater powers to the European Parliament. There is the issue of harmonizing our tax systems and also the issue of putting an end to the Community's transitional period.

Q: Do you think that the forthcoming elections in Germany will slow down activity in one or other of the Community sectors?

A: No. For the most important and controversial issue, the accession of the United Kingdom, we expect that the next German Government will be as much in favour as the current one is.

Q: People are once more talking about a European nuclear force. What are your opinions on this matter, and those of the Netherlands Government?

A: It is not an issue on our agenda and it is not yet the time. A European military force might be conceived of as the result of a long unification process. The Netherlands Government reserves its judgement on this issue.

Q: One last question. Let us imagine that the new French Government continues with its Gaullist rejection of the enlargement of the Community. What would be the reaction of the other five Member States?

A: In my opinion, if Pompidou were to persist with the policies of General de Gaulle, the Community would find itself in an extremely uncomfortable position. But, more important, I predict that political initiatives would be adopted outside the Community in order to secure new and lasting ties with the United Kingdom outside the Common Market and to guarantee the progress of European unity, again outside the Common Market. In other words, the Community would cease to be the driving force behind our desire to promote European unity.

Alfredo Pieroni