

Address given by Edward Heath to the WEU Council (Paris, 27 February 1961)

Caption: On 27 February 1961, Edward Heath, Lord Privy Seal, gives an address to the Council of Western European Union (WEU) in which he sets out the British conditions for cooperation between the Six (European Economic Community) and the Seven (European Free Trade Association).

Source: Archives Nationales du Luxembourg, Luxembourg. Coopération politique européenne. Relations avec la Grande-Bretagne et les autres pays de l'EFTA 1960-63, AE 15456.

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Summary of speech by Lord Privy Seal (Rt. Hon. Mr. Edward Heath, M.P.) at Western European Union Council Meeting in Paris on February 27th, 1961

United Kingdom relations with the Six

The development of two separate economic groups in Europe must hamper the expansion of production and trade in Western Europe and will lead to wasteful use of resources. These economic effects will eventually lead to ill feeling which in turn must have political consequences detrimental to unity. That is why we in Her Majesty's Government have been lending our efforts through the last year to finding a solution.

2. Another breakdown such as occurred in 1958 would be disastrous to us all throughout Europe. So Her Majesty's Government did not want to start formal negotiations until a real basis existed to carry them through to a successful conclusion. Five months ago we began a fresh approach. The Prime Minister saw Dr. Adenauer, Sr. Fanfani and General de Gaulle. I have had helpful individual talks with most of my colleagues assembled here. We have been in touch with the Commonwealth Finance Ministers and the Ministers of E.F.T.A. There have been official talks with the Germans and Italians and talks are beginning today in London with French officials.

3. The results have been reasonably encouraging, and as a result of them we can see more clearly what the problems are and what arrangements have to be made

4. The main point of the new approach is that if the Six can meet Commonwealth and agricultural difficulties, the United Kingdom can then consider a system based on a common or a harmonised tariff on raw materials and manufactured goods imported from countries other than the Seven or the Commonwealth. This is a fundamental change of principle in Her Majesty's Government's position. They have never before envisaged adopting a common tariff over a sector of the economy.

5. Her Majesty's Government also visualise special arrangements for tropical products. In addition in response to enquiries by the German and Italian officials at our talks, Her Majesty's Government have said that, as part of an overall settlement, the United Kingdom would see no difficulty of principle in the way of discussions between the Six and Commonwealth countries about possible reductions in the tariff preferences which we now enjoy in those countries.

6. Her Majesty's Government suggested in these talks that the best methods would be to isolate individual technical problems and to try to find solutions for each of them. By this means we would see better what sort of framework they require to cover the agreed arrangements. We do not want at present to express a view on the suggestion that an arrangement be made which would result in the United Kingdom acceding to the E.E.C. as a full member. We cannot tell what the framework will be until we know what the contents will be. Nor can Her Majesty's Government see clearly what their general relationship with the Six will be until they have learned more from the Six about the latter's attitude to these particular problems. But we are not afraid of common institutions. Her Majesty's Government recognise there would have to be common institutions to control a common or harmonised tariff. But no arrangements would be satisfactory to us which did not involve a political as well as an economic relationship with the Six.

7. In these discussions Her Majesty's Government have kept their E.F.T.A. partners fully informed. As regards the Commonwealth Her Majesty's Government have every hope that an arrangement on the lines mentioned would be acceptable to them. Further discussion with them would of course be necessary. What remains is to continue this series of explorations and informal exchanges until one can see clearly enough ahead to justify more formal negotiations.

United Kingdom Relations with E.C.S.C. and Euratom

8. As regards British accession to the E.C.S.C. and Euratom Her Majesty's Government would be ready to consider any proposal for the United Kingdom to join these two communities.

Political consultation in Europe

9. On the subject of political consultation Her Majesty's Government have no desire whatever to weaken the ties of the Six Power Community or to dilute or impede the flow of this great European organisation towards new forms of unity.

10. Her Majesty's Government have no desire to force their way into political discussions between the Six related to or arising from the business of the communities. But when broad European and world-wide problems in which Her Majesty's Government too are concerned are to be discussed then they believe firmly that Her Majesty's Government should participate. Until Her Majesty's Government and the Six have settled their relationship on the economic and political planes the Council of the W.E.U. can provide a forum for any necessary European discussions. As regards the question of the British Prime Minister taking part in possible conferences of Heads of Governments it should be recalled that the Prime Minister said in the House of Commons ten days ago that if Her Majesty's Government were to receive a unanimous invitation from the Six to join them in this type of political consultation they would consider it favourably.

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