# Address given by Harold Wilson (Strasbourg, 23 January 1967)

**Caption:** On 23 January 1967, speaking from the platform of the Consultative Assembly of the Council of Europe, the British Prime Minister, Harold Wilson, argues the case for the United Kingdom's application for accession to the European Economic Community (EEC).

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Mr. President, I am honoured to have been invited by you to address this Assembly this afternoon. I am particularly happy that this should take place under your Presidency, for your election not only gave pleasure to all your friends in the British House of Commons, but it held out hopes which have been abundantly realised that, in you, Britain was contributing a great European to the service of Europe for this period. Equally, we knew that the voice of Europe would never be silent in the British House of Commons.

My mind goes back over seven years to the last time when one of our colleagues presided with such distinction over this Assembly, my very close friend — and a friend of so many here — the late John Edwards, whose tragic and untimely death took place here in Strasbourg. In all those years, John lived close to me, as he was close to me. We used to go to the House each morning in my car and return together, usually late at night. And well I remember how often he spoke of the great tides sweeping to and fro here in this Assembly, and of his great vision of the Europe that was to be, the Europe in which we all know he would have played a great and historic role.

This Assembly, and all the other manifold activities which have come to fruition under the Council of Europe, represent unity in diversity: a unity of purpose and vision made the more real by the diversity from which it is being created. For the unity of Europe, so far from being in conflict with the fact of diversity, is indeed enriched by the diverse contributions which so many countries — with their widely differing gifts of geography, of history and of culture — can contribute.

We who are citizens of this great continent have the right to take pride in the part we have played in history, not least in the creation of great — and themselves diverse — nations beyond the seas. And if, in a rapidly shrinking world, the great challenge we now face is that of coming to terms with the thrusting urgency of new, populous, hungry nations, on a basis no longer so much of what we can take from them as of what we can give to them, there is nothing inward-looking or complacent in drawing on the richness of our own past here in Europe. And we can put forth, in all the massive strength of which we are collectively capable, the effort we should make, and must make, on behalf of the new nations in Asia and Africa and Latin America — an effort that will call for really massive strength — we can do this only if our Europe itself is united and strong.

Nor again, can those nations here represented, with all the unexampled contribution we have it in our power to make to the achievement of peace, make that contribution unless we can achieve a greater unity of purpose. A unity of purpose which must be directed not only to the solution of our own problems in Europe — of that wider Europe whose true boundaries transcend the man-made divisions deepened by two world wars — but which year by year constitute the pattern of international discussion at the United Nations.

It has been wisely said that no statesman can hope to approach the problems, whether of his own country or of international affairs, unless he is endowed with a rich even an imaginative sense of history. Certainly, no one can accept the privilege which has been granted to me here today without a deep and, at the same time, moving realisation of the history of the thousands of strands and threads of gold and silk and homespun wool, which have combined to weave this rich European tapestry of ours.

We live still in an age of nation States. Against a backcloth of history, the concept of nationhood for each one of us is unbelievably recent: a racial concept for any one of our peoples is non-existent, or the product of a psychopath’s nightmare.

A week ago a distinguished anthropologist announced discoveries suggesting that man — if not quite as we know him now — is 20 million years old. Two thousand years ago — the last one ten thousandth of that time, less than half a second of man’s hour of history — the British people were already indistinguishably created from the colonisation of a score of areas represented here today. A thousand years ago, the name England itself reflected the community of invaders and settlers — the Angles and the Saxons commingling with the Danes and our older Celts, with their diversified European origin. And if democracy as we have come to know it in Britain began to stir in those village communities on the basis of the forms which had

been brought to us by the seamen farmers of Europe, the institutions which gave form and substance to that democracy were created through the superimposition of Norman French laws and forms of law, brought to England 900 years ago by men from France, themselves of Scandinavian origin.

So, too, the great democracies across the Atlantic were themselves created by European colonists and settlers, by the emigration of those who, in earlier years, fled from Europe in search of the religious freedom they held dear, and, in later years, by those who turned their backs on tyranny or starvation — the United States itself is a creation based on European diversity — its laws, its culture, its civilisation, breathing a hundred forms of European inspiration. Indeed, at a recent Anglo-American function in memory of Sir Winston Churchill, I found myself reminding our American friends that not only was their system of government built on British foundations, using ideas from France and other parts of Europe — but their Constitution itself is based on a tripartite division of authority, derived from Montesquieu's *Séparation des Pouvoirs*, thus creating a constitutional system which every American schoolboy is taught to revere — and which when they grow up they continue to revere with varying degrees of enthusiasm — but, also, that it was a system which, as a matter of history, must be regarded as based on a Frenchman's misreading of British constitutional practice in the 18th century.

I referred just now to Sir Winston Churchill, than whom there has never been a more patriotic Englishman. Yet it was he who, in the days of darkest hunger in 1940, had the vision to propose to a beleaguered France an indestructible Act of Union between our two countries. It was the same vision which impelled him and so many of all parties from Britain and from every other country represented here today to propose the initiatives which led to the Council of Europe; and to me the historical significance of the Council of Europe, and the wider European movement of which it is one manifestation, is this. Feet planted firmly in the realities created by the last century and a half of European history, heart and head occupied with the realities and needs of this present century in which we live, eyes fixed unwaveringly on the coming century in which our children and grandchildren will live — this is the posture in which we are working.

For if the 19th century, the age of nationalism, was illuminated by the heroism which created the great nation States, the 20th century, equally, will go down to history as the age in which men had the vision to create, out of those nation States, out of the destruction of two world wars arising from the conflicts of European nationalism, a new unity based on cool heads and warm hearts. And a unity the greater and more real because it builds on — and does not reject — the diversity of the nation States whose national traits and characteristics will become stronger and more fruitful by being merged in a wider, outward-looking unity.

Just as, in a wider sense, if the last century and a half was the age of empire when French and Dutch, Portuguese and British, and others, who had gone from the long crenellated coastline of our maritime Europe — were followed by traders, soldiers, administrators, teachers and missionaries — this age of empire has now yielded place to a new age and to a new concept. Not the "retreat from imperialism", not "decolonisation" — these phrases accentuate the negative in what is being achieved. Rather must we see it as an age of enfranchisement, of development, of co-operation, as one colonial Power after another has handed over responsibility, the responsibility of government, to their once subject peoples and, while surrendering power, has forged a new association which, in the greater part of the newly enfranchised world, has invoked a quality of friendship which the colonising nation could never know.

So it is in the Commonwealth, a Commonwealth of equals. So it is in the continuing association of France and our other neighbours with those whom they once ruled. So it is in the work of this Council, of the European Economic Community, and of OECD: that through international co-operation and bilateral effort and sacrifice we in Europe have extroverted our economy and our industry to meet the needs of a developing world.

But, as I have said, this effort can never achieve its full purpose, whether in terms of development or of peace, unless we learn the way to build up, through a more real unity, our common economy and our mutual political strength. For economic strength and political unity must develop together. And, just as we are all dedicated to the proposition that economic strength should be developed in an outward-looking sense, so, equally, every one of us is resolved that the political objective is not only to end the series of conflicts which

have torn Europe apart twice in this century, but to create first a dialogue and then a real and living peace with our neighbours to the East, and, even more widely, to strengthen the voice of each one of us in the councils of the world.

It was in this spirit that the European Economic Community was created. My own party, in a statement endorsed by an overwhelming majority at our party conference in 1962 said:

"The Labour Party regards the European Community as a great and imaginative conception. It believes that the coming together of the six nations which have in the past so often been torn by war and economic rivalry is, in the context of Western Europe, a step of great significance."

For where there has been controversy in Britain, this has not been on the historic achievement which the creation of this Community represents, nor on the hopes it holds out for a Europe free from threat of war — the controversy has been on the question whether and on what terms it would be right for Britain herself to seek entry to this Community.

Ten weeks ago I announced in Parliament that the British Government had conducted a deep and searching review of the whole problem of Britain's relations with EEC, including our membership of EFTA and of the Commonwealth. Every aspect of the Treaty of Rome itself, of decisions taken subsequent to the signature of the Treaty, and all the implications and consequences which might be expected to flow from British entry, had been examined in depth. In the light of this review, I said that the Government had decided that a new high-level approach must now be made to see whether the conditions existed — or did not exist — for fruitful negotiations, and the basis on which such negotiations could take place.

I said to the House of Commons:

"I want the House, the country and our friends abroad to know that the Government are approaching the discussions I have foreshadowed with the clear intention and determination to enter the European Economic Community if, as we hope, our essential British and Commonwealth interests can be safeguarded. We mean business."

That, Mr. President, is our position. We mean business.

And I am going to say why we mean business. We mean business because we believe that British entry and the involvement of other EFTA countries, whether by entry or association, will of themselves contribute massively to the economic unity and strength of Europe. What is today a market of about 180 million becomes a potential market of nearly 280 million, the biggest among all the industrially advanced countries, west or east. Not only consumers, but producers, too. The adherence of most or all of the EFTA countries would bring to the existing Communities not only a wider market, but also the skill, the expertise, the science and technology of millions of workers and thousands upon thousands trained in the highest refinements of modern technology.

We mean business, again, because the interests of Europe as a whole — wider Europe no less than those of Western, Northern and Southern Europe — will be served, as equally our own separate interests will be served, by creating a greater and more powerful economic community. I have always made it clear that, in my view, the concept of a powerful Atlantic partnership can be realised only when Europe is able to put forth her full economic strength so that we can, in industrial affairs, speak from strength to our Atlantic partners. Let no one here doubt Britain's loyalty to NATO and the Atlantic Alliance. But I have also always said that that loyalty never means subservience. Still less must it mean an industrial helotry under which we in Europe produce only the conventional apparatus of a modern economy, while becoming increasingly

dependent on American business for the sophisticated apparatus which will call the industrial tune in the ’70s and ’80s.

We mean business in a political sense, because over the next year, the next ten years, the next twenty years, the unity of Europe is going to be forged and geography, history, interest and sentiment alike demand that we play our part in forging it — and working it.

There may be those who believe that to widen the Community will be to weaken it, or to dilute its existing sense of purpose and its institutions. Change there will be, as there has been throughout these ten years. For he who rejects change is the architect of decay. The only human institution which rejects progress is the cemetery. We within Europe will play our full part in generating change, whatever that may mean for vested interests or for the protectionist-minded, whether in Britain or elsewhere. It will be not on stagnation, but on movement, continual movement, that the momentum created in post-war Europe can continue, and, indeed, accelerate. Widening, therefore, based on change will mean not weakening but strengthening.

I have said that Britain will gain if the right conditions can be established for a decisive and urgent move forward. But, equally, let no one here underestimate what Britain can also contribute. We shall be bringing, not only to the council chamber but to the power house of Europe, a new, more determined Britain, a Britain whose answer to the sick gibes of some commentators is being given not in words, but in deeds.

I give you the facts. In 1964, when Britain’s new Government took over responsibility, we were running a deficit at an annual rate of about £800 million. In 1965, this was cut below £320 million. Last year, despite the momentary setback of the strike in our shipping industry, which the Government stood up to, despite the wave of monetary panic in the markets of the world, the deficit was cut again. This year, it will be eliminated and we intend to move steadily into surplus.

It has been achieved because we have had a Government not afraid to take unpopular decisions, and a people ready to accept those decisions; because we have given national priority to exports and our business have accepted that priority; because we have put investment and modernisation ahead of easy living, and our people know it is right; because we are changing the face and structure of British industry, attacking restrictive practices on both sides of industry as industry itself — jolted into a new sense of cost consciousness and cost of effectiveness — cuts out the dead wood which in too many of our board rooms has been the consequence of an inheritance from an effete industrial dynasticism, and in our labour practices an inheritance from a past generation of underemployment.

I have referred to the balance of payments. I do not apologise for giving one more set of figures — the balance of trade on which all else depends. Over the last half century Britain has only rarely balanced her trade. We have relied on the gains from our invisible exports — another area of expertise where we can contribute to the greater welfare of Europe. But on direct trade, in 1964 our monthly export/import deficit was £45 million. In 1965, that monthly deficit was cut to £23 million. In 1966, it was halved again to £12 million and in the last three months of 1966, as the measures we took last year bit more deeply into the problem, we had a surplus more than twice as big as in any previous quarter since the war, indeed probably more than twice as big as in the lifetime of most of us.

Besides an economy growing in strength, we bring all that British technology has to offer. Let us not be defeatist about Europe’s technological contribution compared with that of the United States. Each European country can speak for itself. But what would the American industrial economy look like today without jet aircraft, directly based on a British invention, freely made available as part of our joint war effort; antibiotics — similarly made over; the electronic revolution based on the British development of radar; indeed, the entire nuclear superstructure which could never have been created except on the basic research of Rutherford and other British scientists?

All right, this is blowing trumpets, and why not? What’s wrong with too many of us in Europe is that we seem to have lost that art; that our salesmanship and public relations have not kept pace with our technological achievements. But equally, in referring to American dependence on the European discoveries

of a generation ago, there is no question of living in the past. I am taking American industry today in relation to the European achievements of yesterday which have made it possible. And what we have to see is that the European industry of tomorrow does not become dependent on an outside technology, with all that can mean in terms of industrial power and independence.

I give one example only. In the past two years, the British Government — as a matter of policy — have saved the British computer industry and safeguarded its independence. For computer technology holds the key to the future. This approach — and not only for computers — must now be applied on a European scale.

These, Mr. President, are some of the reasons why we mean business.

Now, at the outset of the tour which the Foreign Secretary and I are making of the capital cities of the Six, we are fairly asked: where do we stand on the Treaty of Rome? In my announcement of the Government's intention to Parliament on November 10th, I said that we would be prepared to accept the Treaty of Rome subject to the necessary adjustments consequent upon accession of a new Member, and provided that we received satisfaction on the points about which we see difficulty.

What I had in mind in saying this was that the Treaty itself provides, in Article 237, that the conditions of admission and the adjustments to the Treaty necessitated by it should be the subject of an agreement between the existing Member States and the new applicant. Clearly, there have got to be — and this is envisaged — adjustments to the Treaty to cover such questions as British membership of the institutions, with appropriate representation; provision for an appropriate number of British votes in the Council of Ministers; and no doubt other changes such as this which will be necessary in the percentage contributions to the Community budget and funds.

We shall be discussing the various difficulties which we should see in accepting without reservation a number of the policies which have been worked out by the Community over the years. It is clear, also, that such questions as the timetable on which we should be applying various provisions of the Treaty, is, of course, different from that laid down in the Treaty because of the lapse of time since the Treaty was signed.

But provided that the problems that we see can be dealt with satisfactorily, either through adaptations of the arrangements made under the Treaty, or in any other acceptable manner, then the Treaty itself would not be an obstacle; and those rules to which we set our name and seal — those rules we will observe.

Of course, the Treaty of Rome has difficulties for us, as it had difficulties for every one of the original signatories. But we have this advantage, that in the ten years since the Treaty was signed it has been possible for us to study not only the text, but also the way in which it is operating, what we might call the common law as well as the statute law, and we are encouraged by the results of our study.

It is still too early in our tour to draw conclusions from our discussions. At the end of the day, it will be for the British Government to decide, in the light of the best appreciation we can make of the problems that will lie ahead, and the hopes of overcoming them, whether it will be right for us to enter into definitive negotiations for entry. If this is our decision, I hope the negotiations will be on a minimum number of broad issues and not on an infinity of details. Many of the details, many of the consequential decisions — important though they be — can best be settled on a continuing basis from within the Community. Nor can the ultimate decision be based on a computerised analysis of finely balanced economic considerations. Wordsworth once wrote:

"High heaven rejects the lore
Of nicely calculated less or more".

I am not suggesting that Britain's representatives in any future negotiations will be poets rather than hard-bitten politicians, economists and administrators, but with such vast issues at stake for the future of Britain,

for the future of all our countries, and of Europe it will be a tragedy and a reproach if this historic initiative is compelled to flounder in a mass of detail. We must maintain the momentum.

This is not to say that there will not be major problems of extreme difficulty. I am not going to outline them now. Rather is this a matter for detailed and confidential discussion with the Heads of Government whom we are meeting these few weeks. But I should be less than frank if I did not at least refer to the problems created particularly by the financial aspects of the Community's agricultural policy, by arrangements made, and appropriately made to secure fairness and equity between the agricultural interests of the six countries concerned, but arrangements which do not reflect — indeed clearly, they could not reflect — the problem created by the entry of a major food-importing nation such as Britain. For they would mean a financial contribution which would fundamentally affect not only the balance so painfully worked out over the past few years but also the balance of equity, as well as the balance of payments, between Britain and other countries who would seek to join — and the existing Six.

To outline this question, and to be aware of others, is not designed to evoke any spirit of depression, still less of defeatism. These problems are there to be overcome. I believe that they can be overcome, given the same spirit of constructive ingenuity, tolerance, understanding and give and take which have animated the relations of the six Members in their dealings with one another from the outset. For their solution is necessary not only for all of us here, but for what we can all achieve in removing tension and creating a wider unity — that wider unity of which you, Mr. President, spoke a few minutes ago — embracing all Europe, East and West, and, looking outwards still more widely, for what we can contribute to world development, to the only war we seek, the war on want and hunger, for what we can all contribute in our own distinctive way to solving the problems of racial tension which more and more are embittering relations between nation and nation, between man and man.

I believe still more strongly that they can be overcome if all of us, while treading our way through the complicated economic and political issues involved, can keep our eyes firmly fixed on the vision that we have proclaimed.

I believe that, given that understanding, that spirit of give and take, the creation of the right conditions, the task on which we have embarked will enable us to carry the good will and support of the vast majority of all of our peoples. And, above all, the good will and support of the young people of Britain and of the other countries represented here today.

Those of us who are entrusted with the responsibilities of government have the challenging duty — and it is an exciting one — of leading an impatient generation. It is a generation impatient of the mumblings and bumblings and fumblings of what has too often passed for statesmanship. And it will — this generation — as history will — for this new generation will write the next chapters in that history — it will condemn beyond any power of ours to defend or excuse the failure to seize what so many of us can clearly see is now a swirling, urgent tide in man's affairs. If we do fail — I want this to be understood — the fault will not lie at Britain's door. But the cost, and, above all, the cost of missed opportunities, will fall, and in increasing measure, on every one of us.

I began by referring to the central themes of European history a century ago and now. In the last century, the creation of the nation States of Europe called on the citizens of those nations to sacrifice their lives. In this century, the future of Europe, and the world, has twice required a generation of men to give their lives in the defence of freedom. The Europe of today, the Europe it is in our power to fashion, with all that this means for a wider world, calls for no such heroic sacrifices. The sacrifices which are asked of this generation are sacrifices only of supposed short-term interests, of short-term prejudices and stereotyped modes of thought. I believe that this generation has decided on its answer.

Mr. President, I thank you.