

## Address given by Edward Heath (London, 21 July 1971)

**Caption:** On 21 July 1971, addressing the House of Commons, Edward Heath, British Prime Minister, discusses the progress of and the issues involved in the negotiations being held in Brussels on the United Kingdom's accession to the European Economic Community (EEC).

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## Address given by Edward Heath (21 July, 1971)

The long debate on which we are now embarking and the White Paper of which the House is invited to take note is an important stage in a process which has been going on now for ten years. It began in 1961, when the Conservative Government first put in an application for membership to the European Communities. It was renewed in May, 1967, when the House by an overwhelming majority of 426 approved the Labour Government's decision to make their application and reopen negotiations.

It was continued when the last Government arranged to begin negotiations in June, 1970, and one of the first acts of the present Conservative Government on taking up office was to send their negotiator to Brussels to sit at the table with the representatives of the Six.

[...]

In the course of the last 10 years, there have been many debates on this question, in almost all of which I have taken part. In those debates, a broad measure of agreement has evolved about the kind of Europe that most of us want to see and about Britain's place in that Europe.

I accept, of course, that there are some people in the country and on both sides of the House who have always, in principle, believed that Britain's place lay elsewhere and that Britain's destiny lay outside Europe. This is a point of principle which I have always respected but which I personally have never been able to accept. It will be expressed in different forms on both sides of the House in the course of this debate. It is one which those of us who hold a contrary view will continue to respect.

[...]

After this, we have all had to decide whether this should be brought about by means of an enlarged European Community, whether the Community is the kind of community with which we want to be associated to achieve these purposes, and whether it has the kind of institutions to which the United Kingdom would wish to belong.

Again, there is a good deal of common ground here in the House. This is only natural, because the decision to negotiate, taken by three Administrations in three different Parliaments, involves an acceptance of the basic Community and its institutions. It meant that we accepted the Treaty of Rome, with any such adjustments as might be necessary as a result of new members acceding to it, such as the voting strengths which are set out in the White Paper, and provided that we received satisfaction on any point about which we might see difficulty in the course of the negotiations. The Conservative Government of 1961, the Labour Government of 1967, and the present Government of 1970 have all accepted it.

It meant accepting the common agricultural policy of the Community, whether it was approved by many in this House or not, with any such adjustments as were considered necessary and desirable for new members over a transitional period.

[...]

I will now deal very briefly with the common agricultural policy. By 1961 that policy had not yet been fully formulated. Therefore, there would have been great advantage to us in becoming a member and helping in its formulation. By 1967 that policy was a fact of European life.

Finally, the negotiations meant accepting the other Community institutions as they developed before we became full members, and this the Governments of 1961, 1967 and 1970 have also fully accepted.

In the last 10 years neither the Community nor its institutions have changed except that they have developed, matured, prospered and proved themselves. In my experience, I have found in meetings with the Commission and with the Community — and it has been shown in the recent negotiations — that they have

an infinitely greater degree of flexibility of approach now than they had in 1961 when we were first negotiating with them.

This was the situation when we started negotiations in June of last year. The Community had developed in its own way. Successive British Governments had reached the conclusion that, provided satisfactory arrangements could be made on certain major issues, the security, influence and prosperity of Britain would be better served by joining the Community as it had developed than by staying outside.

What these major issues were had been defined by our predecessors. I do not think that there is any difference of view here. They defined the crucial issues, we accepted them as such, and we embarked on the negotiations.

The first set of issues all related to the interests of our existing trading partners, notably the Commonwealth. It was necessary to ensure that they were able to make as easily as possible whatever adjustments might be necessary to take account of the changes in our trading arrangements which would result from our joining the Communities.

The interests of the Commonwealth in these respects have been a major concern for everyone. All British dependent territories, except Hong Kong and Gibraltar, will be offered association under Part IV of the Treaty of Rome, which I think practically the whole world agrees offers them tremendous advantages. Indeed, much of the rest of the world is envious of it, and some are critical because the advantages are so great. All independent Commonwealth developing countries — Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific — except those in Asia, will also have the choice of association with the Community under a renewed Yaoundé Convention or of a separate trade agreement. The negotiations will begin in 1973 between all the existing and potential associates and the enlarged Community, of which we would be a member with our full rights.

It is obvious that France and Britain have by far the greatest interest here, because the great majority of the States to be associated under the Convention have formerly been connected either with France or ourselves. It is apparent from my discussions with President Pompidou that here we have interests in common: to ensure that the position of these countries in particular as raw material producers is safeguarded.

The independent Asian Commonwealth countries will enjoy considerable benefits from the generalised preference scheme. We and the Community have said that it will be our continuing objective to expand and reinforce trading relations with these countries:

[...]

On our contribution to the Budget, the Community has declared that if unacceptable situations should arise, “the very survival of the Community would demand that the institutions find equitable solutions.” On New Zealand, we have the review procedure and the promise of continuing special arrangements for butter. On sugar, we have the Community’s assurance of its firm purpose to safeguard the interests of the countries concerned. On capital movements, we have the provisions of Articles 108 and 109 of the Treaty of Rome. These safeguards have already been, and are being, used by some of the present members of the Community.

On each of these aspects we have an assurance from the Community or a provision in the Treaty which defines the Community’s obligations. The fundamental question for the House is really this: do we believe that the Community is now, and will be when we are in it, the kind of body that will approach these matters in a positive, constructive and reasonable manner? The answer must be — in my view — undeniably “Yes”. [Interruption.] Because anybody who has watched the operations of the Community since its coming into existence knows that it operates in a positive, constructive and reasonable manner in order to deal with problems which arise in its member countries.

Joining the Community means joining a body which has the institutions and the means of adjusting to the problems of its members as and when they arise. It has demonstrated this over the 12 years of its life and it

has shown that it is able and willing to use and develop the powers which it has got.

If we did not believe that — if we believed that the members of the Community would not act responsibly to each other and in international trading relationships — then, indeed, the question would not be whether the terms are right, or even whether we ought to join the Community; the question would be whether we ought ever to have applied for membership at all.

It is because we believe that it is the kind of body to which we can reasonably and conscientiously belong — the kind of body that, having resolved differences of view, will act responsibly, with full regard to the vital interests of each of its members; the kind of body that will carry out what it has undertaken to do — that we can regard the safeguards which we have negotiated on these matters, for others as well as for ourselves, as not just adequate but as fully satisfactory.

[...]

It seems to me right that, as Prime Minister, I should try to answer one question of principle which I know is uppermost in the minds of many right hon. and hon. Members. That question is: how can Britain continue to exert in the world a strong and constant influence — in defence of her own interests, certainly, but also in the interests of common sense and of humanity?

No one who has sat through these last Parliaments can doubt that this is a question of immense concern to the House.

[...]

Whatever the rights and wrongs of any particular situation, there has been a clear desire that British influence should be felt, and there has been an impatience with the constraints under which British policy has sometimes been forced to operate.

The fact is — and I think that almost all of us would recognise it today — that neither our membership of the United Nations, nor our membership of the Commonwealth, nor our natural relationship with the United States, has provided us with that leverage in world affairs for which the instinct of this House continues to ask. The same is increasingly true of our power to influence international agreements covering world trade and payments, which are so important for our international trading position and so for our prosperity.

It is broadly true, also, of the contribution which Britain makes to the relief of world poverty and the promotion of world development. Ministers in different Governments have come to this Box and said, quite justifiably, that we are doing all that we can. That is fair enough. But most of us know that we ought to do more, and that it is in the interests of our country as well as of other countries that we should do more.

Now we have the opportunity to join a Community which has a better aid record than ourselves. It is a Community with a lower average external tariff than ourselves. It is a Community which has provided special arrangements of a unique and remarkable kind for the countries which once formed part of the colonial empires of its members.

Thanks to the success of our negotiations, we have ensured that the vast majority of the countries associated with us in the Commonwealth can either share those special arrangements in the future or else work out trading arrangements of their own with the Community to suit their own particular needs. At the same time, through membership of the Community we have the opportunity to develop the resources out of which we can improve our own record in aid, in trade, and in overseas investment.

These could be substantial gains for Britain in the developing world. But there is another prospect which is perhaps even more important. We are now entering a phase of rapid movement in world affairs which provides opportunities for statesmanship which, if rightly taken, could break down many of the barriers which we have come to take for granted in our modern world. This is certainly the view of the President of

France and the President of the United States. I believe that we in Britain will be far better placed to take our share of these opportunities once we are a member of the European Community.

Her Majesty's Government have often expressed support for the efforts of Chancellor Brandt and the West German Government to reach an understanding with the Soviet Union and with the other Communist countries of Eastern Europe. Here is a great opportunity for advance towards lasting peace in Europe, an opportunity which no Member of this House would wish to see thrown away.

The Federal Chancellor has always made it clear to me that his task in reaching an accommodation with his neighbours to the East will be much easier once there is a European Community enlarged to include Britain and pledged to work towards a common European foreign policy. He has always taken the view, which I endorse, that, so long as the countries of Western Europe are divided, there will always be some who are tempted to exploit those divisions. Once we have an enlarged Community and a common foreign policy then the prospects for understanding between the two halves of Europe will be that much greater.

But the argument runs beyond Europe. We are now seeing a dramatic and welcome renewal of contacts between the United States and China. At the same time, the United States and the Soviet Union are deep in conversations on nuclear matters which intimately affect the future of every citizen of this country and of Europe. We cannot be sure today about the outcome of either of these developments. What we can say is that they are, or should be, the concern of Europe.

So the decision which we are called upon to take on this great matter in the autumn is not simply a decision about our own prosperity. It is not simply a decision whether to join a Community which offers us a chance to do more in the developing world. It is also a decision whether we should join with others in working out a European policy which would give Europe an effective voice in these overwhelming developments which vitally affect her future.

This is no longer a choice which can be postponed into the future. It is no longer a choice which is contingent on the decisions of others, because all the members of the Six now welcome us — that is the great change which has taken place since 1961 and 1967. It is a choice offered to Britain here and now in 1971. It is a choice which depends on our own courage and our own farsightedness.

The choice is clear, and the prize is a great one. As a nation we must show the wisdom and the energy to seize it and make the most of it.