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The Neutrals Out in the Cold

Ten years ago, EFTA, the European Free Trade Zone, was formed as an act of defiance against the construction of EEC. Now again, it is the attraction radiating from EEC which is the underlying cause for the conspicuous split between disparate groups of EFTA countries: the UK, Denmark, and Norway are holding talks about their accession to the Common Market. In the event of these talks being crowned by success—every genuine European can only hope that this will indeed be the case—the inevitable effect will be the death of EFTA. Unfortunately, the desirable by-product of this demise—putting an end to Europe's economic division—will not in the same way be inevitable, for the question has not yet been conclusively answered of what kind the future relations will be between the EEC and the remaining EFTA countries, especially the neutral powers.

It goes without saying that, at the present juncture, absolute priority must be given to the current negotiations between the UK and the EEC. This is the reason why the remaining EFTA governments have indicated that their own relations with EEC will be decisively influenced by the outcome of these talks. However, these will last for a long time, for the difficulties which must be overcome are too serious for permitting hopes for a quick and successful conclusion of an agreement. Yet this period must be profitably used for finding an approach, at last, for clearing away all obstacles for other EFTA countries contributing to an enlarged EEC.

It seems to be the case that the need for taking preventive measures is clearly seen by the two camps of EEC and EFTA. Thus, the chairman of EFTA's Council of Ministers has gratefully acknowledged, during its last meeting at Geneva, that Brussels, later this year, intends to hold talks even with those countries who have not applied for membership but intend to make special arrangements with the EEC. This will enable the negotiators to move on parallel lines with the talks about membership, and to lay down principles for economic cooperation with non-member countries to be put into force simultaneously with EEC's actual enlargement.

The most acute problem which must be overcome is the apparent inadmissibility of EEC's political aims within the framework of the certain EFTA states' neutrality. All past approaches of these states to EEC, which in some cases went so far as to seek admission as associates, have foundered when the EEC emphasised its political aims, which allegedly do not harmonise with their fundamental neutrality.

However, the reference of the Brussels authorities to their political tasks pertains to the realm of wishful thinking rather than to the world of hard facts. Actually, neither is there much fundamental political agreement to be found among EEC members, nor do they move towards such agreement. It has not even been possible to adopt voting by majority in the EEC Council of Ministers. National interests are in the foreground, and it is well known how little love is lost between certain member governments and supra-national authorities. To hope for real improvement in this state of affairs, after the number of members round the common table has been increased from six to ten, means building castles in Spain. It is not surprising to hear the German Federal Chancellor, Willy Brandt, state that political unification of Europe is a task that must be left to future generations. He is not the only one among his colleagues in the EEC who thinks along these lines. If it should be true that political union can be usefully discussed only after several decades, this can certainly not be used as a valid reason for declaring the forging of close links between the economies of Western Europe's neutral states and those of the EEC here and now impossible.

Otto Gustav Mayer