



Quelle

European Free Trade Association, Sitzung des Ministerrats, November 1964¹

(...) The Chairman [Douglas Jay], speaking as the United Kingdom Delegate, opened the discussion. He emphasized the great importance attached by the new Government of his country to EFTA, both in the present and in the future. It was, therefore, somewhat ironical that within so short a time after taking office that the Government had had to institute measures which must have surprised and disappointed many of its EFTA partners. (...) In his Government's opinion it was no less in the interests of the other EFTA countries and many other sterling countries that the currency [pound sterling] should be strengthened and its strength demonstrated. Action had had to be taken to that end. (...) It could be argued that it would have been better in the circumstances for the United Kingdom to impose quotas rather than a surcharge. The reason why that had not been done was that the necessary machinery had been dismantled and it would not have been practicable to institute quotas before the growth of imports became too great. (...) In either case the effect on imports in total would have been the same. (...) The same would have been true had internal deflationary measures been taken. (...) Moreover, in the short term it would have been as damaging to the other EFTA countries as either quotas or import charges. (...) Since his Government regarded the strengthening and cohesion of EFTA as a major aim of British political and economic policy, it had been extremely anxious to frame and conduct the measures taken as to minimize the temporary disadvantage caused to Britain's EFTA partners. As Ministers were aware, his Government had considered very carefully the possibility of unilateral acceleration of the protective industrial tariffs that it still maintained within EFTA. (...) The responsibility for having to sacrifice that solution did not lie with the United Kingdom. (...)

The United Kingdom Delegate [Patrick Gordon-Walker] said that from the point of view of foreign policy his Government regarded the continuing success, expansion and prosperity of EFTA as one of its major national interests. Commenting that it was the first time a British Foreign Secretary had attended a meeting of the Council, he suggested that it might be useful if the Foreign Ministers of the EFTA countries met from time to time to discuss the whole range of common problems and policies. EFTA, which he regarded as having great permanent value, had been steadily acquiring a role of increasing stature in the world and greater account was being taken of it on both sides of the Atlantic. One sign of that was the fact that it was now the subject of attack from people outside who did not wish it well. (...) A strong EFTA and a weak Britain or any other Member state was impossible. He assured Ministers that the United Kingdom Government would do all it could, in the immediate difficulties and thereafter, to help EFTA: it felt itself wholly and completely a part of the Association. (...) The question was not whether the charge could be abolished immediately or in the very near future but what else would have to be done in that case. (...) He thought all alternatives would have the same, if not worse, effects for EFTA. (...) Turning to the time factor, he said it was the firm intention of the Government that the charge should be only temporary. However, an exact date for its removal could not be given. (...) In conclusion he said that the United Kingdom was very ready to agree to proposals for an economic policy committee within EFTA to consider the economic situation and problems of Member countries and other matters of common interests. (...)

1 Joint Council FINLAND-EFTA, 25. Sitzung, 19.-20.11.1964, EFTA-Archiv Genf, FINEFTA/JC.SR 25/64, 22.1.1965, Transkription durch Wolfram Kaiser (10.01.2008). Eine Druckversion der Quelle befindet sich in: Hartmut Kaelble, Rüdiger Hohls (Hgg.): Geschichte der europäischen Integration bis 1989, Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag 2016, S. 147—150, Band 1 der Schriftreihe Europäische Geschichte in Quellen und Essays.

The Swiss Delegate [Hans Schaffner] thanked the United Kingdom Delegates for the positive aspects of their statements (...) He would only point out that the development of trade with Switzerland had been very encouraging for the British economy ever since the foundation of EFTA. From 1960 to 1963 British exports to Switzerland had increased by 62 per cent and British imports from Switzerland by 36 per cent. At the same time the trade balance in favour of Great Britain had shown an increase of 77 per cent. (...) If the total of British exports was unsatisfactory, that was definitely not due to the trade with Switzerland. However, as to the methods applied by Great Britain to improve its balance of payments, in his opinion they ran counter to a policy of integration, were incompatible with the rules of the Stockholm Convention, and had shaken confidence in the future of EFTA. (...) The measures were contrary to integration for they cancelled unilaterally the advantages conceded on tariff cuts (...). The measures were in effect protectionist and represented, from the EFTA point of view, a reversal of the integration so far achieved. (...) In his opinion there was little doubt that the 15 per cent charge, if not abolished within a few months, would not only perpetuate a unilateral disintegration but also start a vicious circle fraught with the risk of leading to the devaluation of sterling. (...) The 15 per cent charge was not compatible with the Stockholm Convention. (...) The Association was now faced with a breach of the Convention and that was most damaging in a closely knit association with precisely defined objectives. If the rule of law were not quickly restored the disruption would go further, causing more uncertainty and distrust. (...) In the circumstances the Swiss Government urgently requested the Government of the United Kingdom to give the following assurances: (a) to reduce the charge from 15 to, say, 10 per cent in a matter of weeks; (...) (b) to eliminate the charge altogether in a matter of a few months; (...)

The Swiss Delegate [Friedrich Traugott Wahlen] drew attention to the effects of the British measures. In EFTA itself there was no doubt that a great deal of damage had been done to the confidence linking the eight countries. A step had been taken which, in the eyes of the small EFTA countries that also had very difficult economic problems to solve, might seem like an invitation to take unilateral measures that were indefensible under the Convention. That, of course, would be the beginning of the end. As to integration as a whole, in the last few years EFTA had grown in appreciation whereas the European Economic Community had experienced great difficulties. The disintegrating factor introduced into EFTA by the British action went beyond the boundaries of EFTA and affected the Members of the EEC, strengthening their approach while weakening that of the EFTA countries. (...)

The Swedish Delegate [Gunnar Lange] said his Government had taken note with great apprehension and anxiety of the message from the British Foreign Secretary (...) regarding the introduction (...) of a 15 per cent charge on imports from all sources, thus including also imports from the EFTA countries (...) If imports into the United Kingdom from EFTA countries had increased by 26 per cent in the first nine months of 1964, at the same time imports from the EEC had increased by 25 per cent and imports from the United States by even more. EFTA was, therefore, not in a special position in that respect. On the other hand, the reduction in trade resulting from the British measures would hit the small EFTA countries harder than the EEC and the United States because the United Kingdom was a much bigger market for them. That was one of the reasons for the very critical attitude taken within EFTA. The import charge was obviously incompatible with the Convention. The measure itself and the way it had been handled contributed to the crisis of confidence in which EFTA now found itself. (...) Unintentionally it had dealt a severe blow to the Association which he could only hope would not be fatal. (...) In the Swedish view the first step to be taken must be to create efficient machinery to handle not only the present critical situation of the United Kingdom but also to prevent similar situations from arising in the future. Had such machinery been operating the British difficulties could probably have been tackled already in the summer and solutions arrived at that would have been much less detrimental than those now adopted. (...)

The Danish Delegate [Per Haekkerup] said his country was the least affected by the import charge (...), as only 13 per cent of Danish exports to that country would come under the rule. He, therefore, wished to speak (...) rather of the question of general principle involved in the British

action. (...) He associated himself with those speakers who had said that the most important consideration was that the step taken by the United Kingdom Government was against the letter and the spirit of the EFTA Convention. (...) What would be the consequences of it? Other EFTA countries were experiencing balance of payments difficulties. In the case of Denmark the deficit in the balance of payments for the first six months of 1964 had been half that of the United Kingdom, but on a per capita basis it was seven times as great. (...) When the United Kingdom introduced methods that merely resulted in part of its balance of payments difficulties being transferred to Denmark, all the arguments were on the side of the element in the country that desired affiliation with the EEC. It gave them a basis for saying that EFTA was not really the solution for Denmark. Thus the previous week the two big opposition parties in the Danish Parliament [the Conservatives and the liberal Venstre], which held 40 per cent of the votes, had come forward for the first time with resolutions demanding a reversal of Denmark's marketing policy. The Government had succeeded in avoiding a vote on that and in getting a compromise solution voted. (...)

Ministers then held an informal discussion of this item of their agenda, of which the following is an agreed minute: (1) Ministers have considered the report of the working party which had been studying the recent British economic measures and their implications for EFTA. (2) The other Ministers pointed out to the British Ministers that the application of the 15 per cent charge on imports into the United Kingdom was inconsistent with the United Kingdom's obligations under the Convention and the Association Agreement [with Finland]. It was generally urged on British Ministers that a firm date in a few months' time should be fixed for removing or reducing the charge. (...) (3) British Ministers, while not claiming that the charge came within the terms of the Convention and the Association Agreement, pointed out that Article 19 provided for the use of quantitative restrictions on imports to correct a serious balance of payments deficit. Although such measures would have brought the United Kingdom within the terms of the Stockholm Convention, they would, in the British view, have been more damaging to EFTA and to the development of EFTA trade in the United Kingdom market. British Ministers affirmed that the charge was a temporary measure and that the British Government was firmly resolved in the interests of the United Kingdom, as well as that of their EFTA partners, to reduce it and to abolish it at the earliest possible moment. (...) (6) The Council of Ministers agreed to keep the situation under close and continuous review. (...) (8) Furthermore, in order to provide better means for giving effect in future to the consultations provided for in Article 30 of the Convention, Ministers decided to set up an Economic Committee of senior officials from capitals to meet as frequently as necessary. (...)

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