Opening of the Kennedy Round

STATEMENT MADE BY MR. JEAN REY, MINISTER,
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ON 4 MAY 1964

We are assembled here on the agreed date to open the most important of
the tariff conferences held within the framework of the General Agreement on
Tariffs and Trade. The European Economic Community is happy that the phase of
preparatory discussions are over and that we are embarking on the negotiations
proper.

Like all the partners in this great endeavour, the European Economic
Community expects a great deal from these negotiations; that shows the value
which it sets on them.

In our view the Kennedy Round - to use the term by which it is commonly
referred to - must yield four results, each of considerable importance:

- it must bring about a substantial reduction of obstacles to trade
throughout the world;

- it must lead to a better organization of world markets for agricultural
products and to expansion of trade in this field;

- it must contribute to solving the problems arising in the inter-European
trade;

- last but not least, it must create better conditions for exports by
developing countries.

Those are grand designs. As the conference opens we must set them before
us to guide our actions, and be the objectives we strive to attain.

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The problems to be solved are of considerable scope and complexity. One should not, therefore, wonder at the fact that the preparatory work for the conference has been long or that it has revealed a number of difficulties. The contrary would, in fact, have been surprising. Certain difficult problems, such as the problem of exceptions or that of non-tariff barriers are still as yet hardly explored. One should not be surprised or concerned at this. Still less, at every difficulty still outstanding, should one cast doubts upon the success of the endeavour as a whole. Only in the course of the negotiations and once all the problems have been explored will it be possible to draw up overall solutions and reach the necessary compromises.

The European Economic Community goes into the negotiations with the firm resolve to make a substantial contribution to their success. As a major partner in the negotiations and, to use a technical term, as a key country, it is fully aware of its responsibility in this regard.

It may be recalled that in 1960 it was the Community which, fortified by the experience of the Rome Treaty, proposed the procedure on which the present conference is based, namely, that of linear tariff reductions. The Community has tried out this method, and believes in its value, and while special cases will no doubt have to be examined in order to solve certain problems, such as the problem of exceptions or matters still not settled in the field of disparities, that by no means implies that the Community is envisaging a return to product-by-product negotiations.

The Community has also accepted the working hypothesis of a 50 per cent linear reduction. The final result will naturally depend on all the decisions taken on other elements of the negotiations.

Lastly, the Community has proposed a new approach to agricultural problems. It hopes to be able to convince its partners that its proposals are realistic and effective. It is aware that it still has to reach some internal decisions in this regard, and will endeavour with all its political energy to do so in due course.

One often hears the question, "How long will the negotiations take?"

It is difficult to say for the moment. The problems are numerous, and unforeseen difficulties may still arise. Our Commission believes, however, that the whole of 1964 should be devoted to exploring in parallel all sectors of the negotiations: tariffs, exceptions, agricultural problems, non-tariff obstacles, aid to developing countries. The target should be that by the end of the year all the problems will have been explored and will be sufficiently mature for decisions to be taken. The first six months of next year could then be devoted to the elaboration and negotiation of global solutions and of technical and political compromises, so that the negotiations could be concluded towards the summer of 1965.
Is this time-table a realistic one? In its capacity as negotiator for the Community, our Commission believes so. For its part, it will spare no effort to be able to meet that time-table.

Once again, before leaving this rostrum I should like to say in the name of the European Economic Community that it sets great store by the success of these negotiations, and attaches considerable importance to their favourable conclusion. To bring the Kennedy Round to a happy issue is not only our duty it is also the last and the best tribute which we can pay to the memory of the great statesman whose name these negotiations bear and whose death was such a great loss not only for our American friends but for all those who believe in the worth and the future of the free world.

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