

EUROPEAN RECOVERY PROGRAM

Interview With

EELCO VAN KLEFFENS

Chief Representative in the United Kingdom of the European Coal and Steel Community.

London, England

June 11, 1964

By Philip C. Brooks, Director
Harry S. Truman Library

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EUROPEAN RECOVERY PROGRAM INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS

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[1]

DR. PHILIP C. BROOKS: Mr. Ambassador, as I understand it, you were with the Security Council in the United Nations in 1946, but were largely occupied with other problems, and then you came to Washington as Ambassador in late July of 1947, and were largely engrossed in matters such as Indonesia and not particularly concerned with the Marshall Plan.

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MR. VAN KLEFFENS: That's right.

BROOKS: But we would be interested in any memories that you have, any incidents that you remember of your period in Washington or any general comments as to the motivation or policy of the United States or of individuals in the Government or in the Congress of the United States.

VAN KLEFFENS: Well, so far as motivation is concerned, I think the only general considerations I can remember that were in my mind in the time, were what I should like to call "historically unparalleled generosity, coupled with and dictated by enlightened self-interest." That was one thing, and that was the general directive, as I saw it. It then became very largely a question, how are we willing to carry through this policy. And that of course, President Truman had to carry along with the Administration,

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the Congress of the United States. Perhaps I should say in the theme of foreign relations, particularly the Senate, and the key figure was, at the time, Senator Vandenberg, whom I remember very well. He was of Netherlands origin or perhaps Flemish origin. He never seemed to be quite clear whether it was one or the other. But in any case, my wife and I got to know both him and his wife very well, and we have had many talks about these things in Washington at the time.

So far as my main preoccupations of the period permitted, and by that I mean, that I was not only Ambassador to Washington, but my government had asked me, thinking that I was perhaps the only diplomat of my country who had any experience with the Security Council. Then the Security Council was dealing with Indonesia, and that was at that time, for us,

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the major preoccupation so far as Marshall help was concerned, or was what later came to be known as Marshall help. We were one out of many, and decisions in that respect were big at the Hague, in accordance with the contacts they had with other states who were in a similar position. So, I really cannot say that I played any part in these things. I got my instructions which I carried out. And I must say that I very much admired the way in which Senator Truman -- President Truman -- and Senator Vandenberg directed this orchestra which had to play in unison, and finally did play in unison by accepting the foreign aid bill that was then before Congress.

BROOKS: Then in 1948 it was finally passed.

VAN KLEFFENS: But it took, as you will remember, a long period of gestation. That was only natural,

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because you have only to look at the document and its length and its intricacies to realize what an enormous amount of spade work it must have required.

BROOKS: One thing that has interested me was the extent to which there were impatience, or there were immediate problems in Europe, because of the fact that this did take a long time to develop. General Marshall's speech was June 1947, it was the spring of 1948 before the bill was passed and the OEEC was set up. Then it was really 1949 before there were tangible results in the way of funds. During that time, the ECA was set up with Mr. Hoffman as the head. Did you have some dealings with him?

VAN KLEFFENS: Oh yes, because you see, administration was on the way. I really was the head contact man for the Netherlands in Washington. The daily

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work I left to my economic number one, who had the rank of Minister for Economic Matters in the Embassy. But I got to see Paul Hoffman many times. In fact, we got along famously. Sometimes, we started by having different views, but we always managed to bridge whatever differences of opinion there were without any difficulty. I have the most pleasant memories of the numerous visits in his office.

BROOKS: One of the things that Mr. Hoffman was particularly interested in was the strengthening of the cooperation among European countries, and perhaps leading toward economic union or the common market, although they may not have been specifically thought of. Did you expect that this would lead to a further unification, economic union or the common market or something?

VAN KLEFFENS: I didn't expect it at that time. I

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must be careful that I do not mean to say that I expected that it would not come about, but I had no concrete vision of what form any such cooperation could possibly take.

BROOKS: Actually, the degree of cooperation among the various countries that was called for by General Marshall was rather striking in view of the fact that it was just two years after the war. Did this seem possible and practical to you? Did you think that this could be done?

VAN KLEFFENS: Well, we had very great preoccupations at that time. We were still a devastated country. I'm speaking about Holland. No country had been looted more thoroughly by the Germans, let me say, by the Hitler regime, than Holland had. We had to build our harbors from the ground up; we had to build our railways from the ground up; we had to start all our factories anew (they

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were empty shells). We had all sorts of specific problems, and there was not very much time for problematic planning on something that might or might not come about. That came later; it did come, but it was not on the agenda, let us say, in 1946 or 1947 or 1948. I cannot honestly say that it was on the forefront of our thoughts. Then the Marshall help started.

BROOKS: I believe Mr. Hoffman was one of the people who felt strongly that it should be one of the goals at that time, to work toward European economic union. Well, in general, would you say that in this process of reconstructing the economy of Holland, the Marshall Plan aid was pretty significant?

VAN KLEFFENS: Yes, it was, undoubtedly. You only have to look at the figures to realize what it meant. It helped a very great deal, indeed.

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BROOKS: Did you have any occasion to see or to talk with Mr. Truman, or did you feel that you know him at all?

VAN KLEFFENS: At first I didn't bother him directly. Then I did. I think it was more about Indonesia than anything else. At that time, that was our main item, in the Embassy in Washington. I mean, the perspective from the seat of the Netherlands Government in the Hague may have been quite different.

BROOKS: Mr. Truman incidentally said that he remembered you with pleasure, when I was coming over and told him I was going to see you.

VAN KLEFFENS: I hope you give my respects to him when you go back.

BROOKS: I certainly shall.

VAN KLEFFENS: The last time I met him was when I was

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president of the United Nations General Assembly commemoration session in San Francisco in 1955, and he came one evening and we had a very pleasant time. That was because of the part he played in 1945 when he had just become President.

BROOKS: This is one of the things that gives him pleasure and satisfaction, the fact that he did have a part to play. Another person who spoke highly of you was Dean Acheson.

VAN KLEFFENS: Oh yes, that's another real friend.

BROOKS: You had considerable dealings with him, I take it?

VAN KLEFFENS: Yes, I've known him for years, and got to know him, I think, in Washington -- well, even during the war. During the war I paid repeated visits to Washington in the war years, you see, and there I got to know Dean Acheson

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and his wife and they have remained friends ever since.

BROOKS: He told me that it would be worthwhile to talk to you.

VAN KLEFFENS: I'm sorry I cannot be more specific, but you will appreciate the circumstances in which I worked in Washington. I think you'll get much more precision about the reactions in Holland from the people who were in Holland at the time, particularly as members of the government. van der Beugel, Dr. Brooks, is a very young man, but since then he has studied this period, he probably has all the facts.

BROOKS: He was in Paris with Mr. Hirschfeld in 1947.

VAN KLEFFENS: Yes.

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BROOKS: Would you be in a position to say anything about the attitude in Holland toward close cooperation with Germany and Russia at this time? This has interested me very much because it was only shortly after the war, and there was a natural animosity, for example, toward Germany; and yet most of the people in European countries have told me that they recognized the need for German reconstruction.

VAN KLEFFENS: Well, the feelings of Holland for Germany, in Holland for Germany at that time, were the opposite of cordial, which was almost inevitable after all that had happened. You must not forget that there is hardly a family in Holland who had not lost a member of their family through the German invasion, who had been shot, or at least imprisoned. At the end of the war there was sort of a cruel joke, people said,

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"Have you been in jail and if not, why not?" So that precluded any enthusiastic feelings about help for Germany. It was the last thing we thought of. That was in the sphere of the emotions, of course, but it doesn't mean that in the government where people had to think with their intelligence and not with their feelings, that they did not recognize that something might have to be done in order to counteract Communist influences.

BROOKS: The cooperation was called for when the organization was set up, and it depended to a certain extent on the economic recovery of Germany as a unit in the European trade picture.

I gather this was important in Holland, as in other countries.

VAN KLEFFENS: We saw the point of it, but it was not a popular point at all.

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BROOKS: How about Russia? Was there any particular feeling you would say, one way or the other, as to whether Russia should have been invited to join in the Marshall Plan, and was there surprise that they didn't join?

VAN KLEFFENS: No, because we understood Russian policy well enough to expect something like what happened.

BROOKS: That early?

VAN KLEFFENS: Yes, because you see, the Russians, especially at that time, were interested in keeping Europe divided, discontented, economically poor, so as to increase the discontent, and the frustration and all that. We did not expect anything but opposition to a plan which was calculated to put Western Europe on its feet.

BROOKS: I've run into some differences of opinion

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as to how early people developed this attitude towards Russia and different countries.

VAN KLEFFENS: What people hoped, so far as I know (because I was not in Europe at that time), was that a country like Czechoslovakia, for instance, would be allowed to part...

BROOKS: As they wanted to.

VAN KLEFFENS: ...and then the Russians prevented that and that simply confirmed what we felt all along.

BROOKS: It certainly was no surprise?

VAN KLEFFENS: No, no.

BROOKS: Are there other individuals that you particularly remember? Mr. Harriman was in Europe a good deal of the time himself. Did you know him?

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VAN KLEFFENS: Yes, I had known him, also from the war years. And then after that he was Secretary of Commerce and I went to see him, having known him before.

BROOKS: Do you remember any particular incidents involving any of these people, particularly President Truman? Are there any particular memories or impressions of your years in Washington?

VAN KLEFFENS: I can't say I remember any particular incidents. It was my daily bread, more or less, once the Indonesian affair did not occupy too much of my time. It all went extremely pleasantly. There were differences of views, of course there were, but we always got along.

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