

'What is at stake' from 30 jours d'Europe (December 1978)

Caption: In December 1978, the monthly publication 30 jours d'Europe publishes a speech by Emilio Colombo, President of the European Parliament, highlighting the issues involved in the forthcoming and first European elections by direct universal suffrage.

Source: 30 jours d'Europe. dir. de publ. Fontaine, François ; Réd. Chef Chastenet, Antoine. Décembre 1978, n° 245. Paris: Service de presse et d'information de la Commission des Communautés européennes. "L'enjeu", auteur:Colombo, Emilio.

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What is at stake

On the eve of the first election of the European Parliament by universal suffrage, which represents one of the European Community's new opportunities, I should like to clarify what is really at stake in this election, since the debate on the issue has given rise to some confusion.

Firstly, with regard to the question of its powers, which has been the centre of attention recently, I should like to emphasise that the powers of our Parliament are set out in texts ratified by all the Member States. The present European Parliament, which has 198 Members, has carried out its duties in strict compliance with the powers entrusted to it. It has performed its budgetary role, its role of proposer and scrutiny and has participated in the Community legislative procedure in an effective way so that areas that exceed the remit of national governments — which is the case in certain areas of Community policy — are subject to democratic scrutiny.

Its powers and responsibilities

The Parliament to be elected by universal suffrage corresponds to the one established by the Treaties and will carry out its work in strict compliance with its powers and responsibilities. No one has ever thought that a directly elected Parliament would exceed its rights and powers or that a Member of the European Parliament might abuse his mandate. It would even be unseemly to think that a Member of the European Parliament would seek election in order to infringe a Treaty.

It is, however, quite reasonable to want to expand the powers and responsibilities of the European Parliament. If that is to be done, all the Member States must agree. The Treaties must be changed, and I, personally, am in favour of that, since everything in life must evolve and progress. To say that no change is possible within the Community seems to contradict the very idea of the Community.

There will be no unilateral decision taken by the directly elected Parliament, because that is impossible. Nor will there be a coup d'état by the European Parliament. We must always remember that Members are not elected to oppose national executive or legislative bodies but to exercise democratic control over the policies of the Community with popular support. What is at stake in this election is firstly, the implementation of the Treaties, since this election was provided for in Article 138 of the Treaty of Rome as long ago as 1958. It is also the means of giving to this Parliament, which should be the conscience of Europe, a direct link to the people of Europe who have a right to be included in the development of its institutions. Through direct elections, they will construct this Continent and judge its progress.

Institutional balance

The European Parliament has always promoted the development of the Community and even encouraged political cooperation between the Member States of the Community. It has successfully striven to achieve a new balance between the Community institutions, especially between itself and the most typically 'European', the Commission. This Parliament, which has always, even in times of crisis within the Community, helped to overcome major problems, will hand over this legacy to a directly elected Parliament that will in turn enhance its status through popular support. The election of the European Parliament by universal suffrage is an important step towards a People's Europe.

As Europeans, we must not be content with a debate between experts on constitutional law. The Europe in question, the Europe that we are building, is one based on hard facts, since no national economy is able to recover from the crisis on its own nor maintain any degree of prosperity on its own. Because of the interdependence of our economies, and so as to ensure that Europe is not simply a trading entity, we must perfect it and allow complete democracy to prevail.

Being European

There are, as it turns out, two reasons to favour this Union, two reasons for being European. Firstly there is

the fellowship that arises from the union of countries with the same culture, tradition and human rights, and then there is self-interest. If you were interested only in the future of yourself and your country, you would choose the path of European integration, because a country on its own is condemned to isolation and paralysis.

If one's aim is peace and prosperity, there is virtually no alternative to Europe. The election of the European Parliament by universal suffrage is one step along the road towards its realisation.