

'A new phase' from the Corriere della Sera (22 May 1971)

Caption: On 22 May 1971, the Italian daily newspaper Corriere della Sera, welcomes the success of the Paris meeting between Edward Heath and George Pompidou, as it enables many problems related to Britain's accession to the European common market to be solved.

Source: Corriere della Sera. dir. de publ. Spadolini, Giovanni. 22.05.1971, n° 118; anno 96. Milano: Corriere della Sera. "Una fase nuova", p. 1.

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A new phase

An important new step has been taken on the route towards European integration. The talks between Georges Pompidou and Edward Heath in Paris seem to have been staged with care and skill worthy of the great French tradition. A certain amount of suspense during the course of the encounters, no official statements, the absence of both countries' Foreign Ministers at the tête-à-tête between two men, a Head of State and a Head of Government, each one hardly speaking the other's language. At the end, a joint press conference by the French President and the British Prime Minister: an imitation, almost, of the lavish Gaullist scenario, but no longer presented as 'a one-man show', no longer against the backdrop of the gladiatorial spectacle of the General 'reciting' to an audience of journalists summoned to hear a series of pre-arranged answers to no less pre-arranged questions.

The final declarations of Mr Pompidou and Mr Heath symbolise an attitude of rational optimism, proving that various rough edges have been smoothed out and many of the big problems still pending between the two Channel shores are set to be solved. Most importantly, however, a psychological 'thaw' of inestimable consequence and extent has been achieved. The 'hard feelings' of the Gaullist era seem to have been overcome; the dialogue has been resumed, and not merely on the subject of techno-economic differentiations or contrasts, of agriculture, Caribbean sugar or monetary relations, which had already been tackled and partially solved during the last European Community session in Brussels.

France and the United Kingdom have proved that they are aware of the new global situation, that they can see a third world power, China, emerging alongside the Soviet Union and the United States; they have also shown that they have understood that only the dimension, at first economic and then political, of a Europe committed to Federalism can prevent the total submergence of the old Continent and its transformation into a passive player in a history in which it no longer plays a part, degrading it to a sad spectacle of its former glories.

The sharp rise of the German mark has certainly contributed to a significant extent to the 'change of direction' in Paris. There is growing suspicion in France of the policy from Bonn, and not merely of the 'Ostpolitik', which the General had anticipated from his arrogant point of view, perhaps partly to prevent it from passing into the hands of Federal Germany. The special link that Charles de Gaulle had created between Paris and Bonn was unable to survive the General's disappearance. His successor at the Élysée, a representative of a pragmatic and slightly disillusioned French realism, symbol of France's bourgeois tradition, has returned to the classic course of the Republican France of Théophile Delcassé before the first world war and initiated a rapprochement with the United Kingdom in a spirit not dissimilar to that of the 'Entente cordiale'. But the future of an integrated Europe goes beyond such points of departure; the influence of Federal Germany is a reality and ignoring this would be both dangerous and absurd.

The solution is to discover, along the way, the balance and counterbalance necessary to establish, alongside the economic union, the Continent's political union. President Pompidou has not ignored the problems that are still impeding the attainment of this objective nor the obstacles that have to be overcome.

As for Edward Heath, the situation he finds on his return to London will be far from easy. The atmosphere of the British Parliament is hardly reassuring. A fairly sizeable bloc of Conservative Members of Parliament, in a House of Commons where the Tories have a far from overwhelming majority, is lukewarm if not downright hostile towards Europe, while almost two thirds of the Labour Opposition are inclined towards the old and tenacious line of British isolationism. A direct agreement will have to be reached between the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition (Harold Wilson's pro-European line is well known) on how, in the autumn, to get round the numerous parliamentary obstacles in order to seal and sanction the restored understanding between France and the United Kingdom.

But other Community countries can also greatly contribute during this crucial transition phase. Italy for one, provided it succeeds in temporarily restraining the wretched arguments surrounding the Presidential elections (some far from edifying polemics have already started) and in looking beyond the borders of domestic division and municipal competition. Because Europe, in the current state of chaos and national

degradation, also remains the ultimate hope for Italy too.