

'Everyone staying with the Treaty of Rome', from Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (25 March 1977)

Caption: On 25 March 1977, in its coverage of the 20th anniversary of the European Economic Community (EEC), the German daily newspaper Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung highlights the challenges to be faced by the Europe of Nine.

Source: Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung. Zeitung für Deutschland. Hrsg. EICK, Jürgen; WELTER, Erich; FACK, Fritz Ullrich; DESCHAMPS, Bruno; FEST, Joachim; REIßMÜLLER, Johann Georg. 25.03.1977, n° 71. Frankfurt/Main: FAZ Verlag GmbH. "Alle halten am Vertrag von Rom fest", auteur:Heinz, Stadlmann , p. 12.

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Everyone staying with the Treaty of Rome

Twenty years on, the European Economic Community faces new tests

By Heinz Stadlmann

Brussels, March

There will certainly be no elation when the Heads of Government of the European Economic Community commemorate the twentieth anniversary of the foundation of the EEC in Rome on Friday. Something that had been initiated by the founding fathers as a promising undertaking and was regarded in 1957 as a new stage in European history has now become a rather lacklustre and unattractive concern. In day-to-day political life, the Community today consists of meetings of Councils of Ministers who can hardly agree on anything, marathon debates on agricultural prices, a completely unfathomable agricultural policy and, it is generally believed, an enormous bureaucracy whose activities remain largely unknown. Most people are agreed that it is not worth making a big deal of this Europe.

In these circumstances, the most astonishing phenomenon is the fact that the Community, so unloved by its members, has a barely conceivable attraction to the outside world. Greece, Portugal and Spain are doing their utmost to become members of the EEC. The Eastern Bloc, which, for years, refused to recognise this Community, is now willing to acknowledge 'reality'. China sees this institution as an important factor in global politics, and more than one hundred States have granted the Community diplomatic recognition. The EEC acts jointly in the GATT international tariff negotiations, the nine Member States have a single spokesman in the North-South Dialogue in Paris, and the entire EEC is the party to all trade treaties with third states.

The disparity between external prestige and internal disdain may be explained in part by the unreasonable ideas that have been repeatedly rekindled over many years. In the Treaties of Rome, which are now 20 years old, there is no mention of an economic and monetary union. Article 105 of the Treaty establishing the European Economic Community merely refers to a coordination of economic and monetary policies — nothing more. Not until the end of the 1960s did the first major plans begin to be concocted, promising increasingly ambitious goals, going as far as a kind of economic integration. In The Hague, in 1969, the Heads of Government made plans for an economic and monetary union by the end of this decade. Blame for the failure of these projects has been attached to individual Member States and to time factors, most recently the major economic crisis since 1974. However, the question is rarely asked whether the initiators of these plans made a mistake. There was rather too much idealistic exuberance in floating the idea that it was possible to integrate separately evolved economic areas, with all their specific characteristics, into a single unit in such a short time.

Experience shows that frustrated hopes are worse than no expectations at all. The primary cause of the constant criticism of the EEC is the spectacular picture that is repeatedly painted of a great and united Europe. In this regard, the more modest format that actually exists is certainly worthwhile. It is undoubtedly thanks to the EEC that the most severe economic recession since the 1930s has been weathered without resorting to serious protectionism. The internal economic interdependencies have become so strong that no country now dares to disregard completely the interests of the others. Countries such as Britain and Italy, which are most severely affected by the economic crisis, have not, to date, made any significant departures from the principle of free trade. The internal cohesion works better than appears from the outside. In many areas, the EEC has made advances that do not appear to be very spectacular but have a greater utility value for daily life than the visionary plans of many politicians. The fact that, amongst all the criticism of the institutions and the shortcomings in the functioning of the Community, none of the Member States is thinking of terminating the Treaty speaks for itself.

The question of the way forward has been repeatedly asked, but no one has given a convincing answer. Despite all the bad experiences with the many plans for an economic and monetary union, Chancellor Schmidt, who is very cautious when it comes to major plans, surprisingly agreed to a new attempt along

these lines after his last consultation with the French President. By the end of the year, both Heads of Government want to submit proposals to their partners on this subject. At the beginning of March, Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher also spoke in favour of making a fresh attempt at an economic and monetary union. No one can have any objection to reasonable objectives, but it is still a mystery how new union plans can be realised when there are imbalances in the economic development of the individual Member States, which will certainly continue for some time.

In this phase, characterised by political and economic uncertainties, it will take sufficient effort to safeguard that which exists at present. Continued development can be considered only if the economic foundations start to look better again. The existence of the EEC is now threatened by dangers above all from the abstruse agricultural policy, whose costs — in their thousands of millions — threaten to destroy the budget. Uncertainties also arise from the planned enlargement of the EEC, which can only further aggravate the already difficult consistency of the Community of the Nine. Cooperation between the EEC institutions is unsatisfactory; the Commission and the Council of Ministers are becoming increasingly alienated, the proposals submitted by the EEC Commission are petering out, and the Council is degenerating into a fruitless debating club, in which often only routine matters are dealt with. The greatest danger to the Community's existence can be seen in the political arena. They do not like to talk about it in Brussels out loud, but internal deliberations along these lines are causing nightmares for the leaders. What will happen if the Communists help to form the government in France or Italy? France's Left wants nothing to do with this Economic Community. François Mitterrand, who has good a chance of becoming French Prime Minister next year, can, in his own words, imagine Europe only if it is Socialist. There is clearly no room for pluralism.

On the eve of the 21st year in the life of the European Economic Community, it is clear that the major tests still lie ahead. It is important for the future political debate that national parties are formed at European level. A directly elected European Parliament will also play a role. In the long term, moderate demands could be the most important factor. The Belgian Prime Minister, Leo Tindemans, who is certainly not giving up in the wake of the failure of his recommendations for the future organisation of cooperation in the EEC, delivered the right message: the building of Europe may be slow, but every stone counts.