

'Not just plaudits for the Werner Plan', from Süddeutsche Zeitung (24 November 1970)

Caption: On 24 November 1970, the German daily newspaper Süddeutsche Zeitung comments on the first debates held in the Council of Ministers on the Werner Report on European economic and monetary union. Germany and France are quick to contest some of the conclusions reached during those debates.

Source: Süddeutsche Zeitung. Münchner Neueste Nachrichten aus Politik, Kultur, Wirtschaft und Sport. Hrsg. DÜRRMEIER, Hans ; Herausgeber HEIGERT, H. 24.11.1970, n° 28. München: Süddeutscher Verlag GmbH. "Nicht nur Beifall für den Werner-Plan", p. 29.

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Not just plaudits for the Werner Plan

Opinions divided on common action in the European Council of Ministers

(From our Brussels correspondent) — Preliminary discussions at the meeting of the European Council of Ministers held in Brussels on Monday on the plan to establish economic and monetary union by stages were described as ‘constructive and positive’ by the Council President-in-Office, Karl Schiller, the Federal German Minister for Economic Affairs. They have, of course, revealed that opinions in the Member States still vary, with particular regard to parallelism between economic coordination and monetary integration and to the final stage, which is to be achieved in ten years.

The Committee of Permanent Representatives, together with senior officials from the Member States and the Commission, has been given the task of preparing alternative draft decisions on which the Council of Ministers will take a decision at their meeting on 14 December. It would be a free declaration of intent by the Member States on the objectives to be attained, as well as several decisions on the tangible steps that may be taken immediately, because the first stage is due to begin as early as 1 January 1971.

Schiller’s nine points

What is known as the Werner Report and the proposals submitted by the Commission on the subject formed the basis for the first round of discussions. They were summarised by Schiller in nine points:

1. The opinions of all the Member States represented by their Foreign and Economic Affairs Ministers had been positive and constructive.
2. Some Member States had reacted more favourably to the proposals put forward by the President of the Commission, Franco Malfatti — dealing with the political options to be selected, the treaty amendments that were becoming necessary and the transfer to the EEC of powers exercised hitherto by the nation states — than they had to the Commission papers relating to these same subjects, which were felt, particularly by the Federal Republic of Germany and the Netherlands, to be too cautious.
3. At the end of the first three-year stage, progress made on the road towards economic convergence should be reviewed at an intergovernmental conference, in which the applicant countries would also probably take part, and a timetable should be agreed for the amendments to the EEC Treaty that were becoming necessary.
4. The majority — but not all — of the Member States wanted a guarantee of an effective parallelism between the common economic policy and the common monetary policy. The process that restricted national economic and monetary political powers and, at the same time, created Community powers must also move forward in parallel so that no gaps appear.
5. Opinions were still divided on the corresponding extension of the powers of the European Parliament.
6. Economic stability and growth must be pursued simultaneously and given equal importance.
7. Commencement of the first stage should take place as quickly as possible. However, while a majority of the Member States already wanted to be clear about the political concept of the final stage, France would apparently like to make a start without any special commitment on the final stage.
8. In the opinion, above all, of the German Government, the individual responsibility of the Committee of Governors of the Central Banks must also be guaranteed.
9. The Commission, supported by Italy, would like to have a common regional policy established right from the first stage, while others did not think that the matter warranted such urgent action.

Ministers from all the Member States except France emphasised in particular that, right from the launch of

the first phase, it must be clear that a final stage with a precise political direction was the ultimate objective, the outlines of which had to be clear, even if they lacked institutional details. As German spokesman, Johann Schöllhorn, Permanent Secretary at the Federal German Ministry of Economic Affairs, who received the strongest support from the Netherlands Minister for Economic Affairs, Johannes Witteveen, declared that all the partners must be prepared to complete economic and monetary union with its institutional and political boundaries. Only then would it be justifiable to enter into monetary policy commitments such as narrowing the range of exchange rates, creating a monetary fund or reducing the opportunities for independent exchange rate fluctuations.

The French Foreign Minister, Robert Schuman, declared that no one could doubt the political will of France to complete economic and monetary union. Furthermore, nobody had the intention of using this process to develop a weapon in Europe with which to fight an international monetary war. The efforts made to coordinate economic and monetary policy should not now be overshadowed by an argument about institutions, particularly not while negotiations with the applicant countries were still under way. It was important for the first stage to commence at the beginning of 1971 with a general outline of the ultimate objective, the guidelines of which should be balance, progressiveness and efficiency.