

## 'The Tindemans Report', from La Libre Belgique (1 January 1976)

**Caption:** On 1 January 1976, in the Belgian daily newspaper La Libre Belgique, Albert Coppé, former Minister and former Belgian Member of the ECSC High Authority, analyses the main provisions of the Tindemans Report on European Union.

**Source:** La Libre Belgique. 01.01.1976-02.01.1976, n° 32/33; 93e année. Bruxelles: Edition de la Libre Belgique S.A. "Le rapport Tindemans", auteur:Coppé, Albert , p. 1.

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## The Tindemans Report

### What next?

We have heard it said that the great virtue of the Tindemans Report is that it exists. The position that it takes avoids too much commitment and, above all, is fairly ambivalent on certain key areas that Mr Tindemans has had the courage to address (or avoid), knowing that both the utopian maximalists and the advocates of minimalism in Europe would object.

To begin with, Mr Tindemans should have set out in his report the federalist aim of European integration. Admittedly, he was frank enough to declare his belief in federalism in an accompanying letter, but, for certain people, this was not enough. How can some commentators, supposedly well versed in European problems, fall into this trap? The inevitable and immediate consequence of mistakenly using the word federalism in the report would have been that, at the next meeting of the European Council in April, the nine Heads of State or Government would have had to hold a debate on the ultimate aim of European unification. It would then have been all too easy to set up a committee to look into some aspect of the report and to delay consideration of the remainder indefinitely. It is not hard to see who would have been first to wade in against federalism. It would not need to be France or the United Kingdom: it would merely have had to be the turn of the representative of Denmark to speak, and the report would have been rejected. Is that really what the maximalists want?

There is one point on which Mr Tindemans has behaved like an astute politician, by choosing the ground on which he was to stand. In our opinion, the 30 or so proposals that he put forward will less easily allow an escape (which certain governments will attempt anyway) than would a peremptory statement on the ultimate objective — federation or confederation — on which no one agrees, as we all know.

One more complaint. Mr Tindemans was apparently concerned more to please the governments, notably by introducing the European Council into the normal workings of the European Community, which was not the case hitherto. One can understand the fear of some people, especially Mr Bertrand, Chairman of the Christian-Democratic Party in the European Parliament, of seeing the European Community slide inexorably into a system of intergovernmental conferences, which, as we know already, with nine countries as with six, tend to lead nowhere. On the other hand, it would have been dangerous to try to rally support from the political parties. It is basic *Realpolitik* to avoid the road strewn with mines constituted by the European Programme. Have we not already heard that, as far as the French Socialist Party is concerned, the Tindemans Report does not address Socialist issues (\*)?

Admittedly, apart from the Christian Democrats and Liberals, all the main parties are divided on most of the issues. As for the European Socialist parties, their differences, over which no one should rejoice, have been brought to the fore on one issue in particular, that of cooperation with the Communists.

In deciding between parties and governments, Mr Tindemans had every reason to choose governments, because it is only when parties form part of a government that they are forced to find their highest common factor.

From the point of view of the European Movement, it was right to organise a congress between the date of the publication of the Tindemans Report and the meeting of the European Council on 2 April. Under the direction of Jean Rey, President of the Executive Committee, a number of resolutions will be put forward which, while acknowledging Mr Tindemans' hard work and dedication, will seek to specify some important deadlines.

Firstly, it is proposed that, in the spring of 1976, the European Council should adopt the draft convention drawn up by the European Parliament for its direct election. We are beginning to realise more and more that this is the crux of the matter: once Parliament has a real European legitimacy, it will inevitably mean that it will have a growing say in the running of the Community and in shaping its future development. It is during direct elections, with each main party having a single manifesto, that the choice between Christian

Democrat, Socialist or Liberal options should be made by Europeans, not in the headquarters of national parties.

Secondly, before the summer of 1976, the European Council must adopt the proposed measures for majority voting to be instituted where required by the treaties.

Thirdly, the European Movement expects the Commission, within three months, to refer specific proposals to the Council concerning the powers that could and should be delegated to it.

It is only when there is a deadline and positions have to be taken on each option that we shall see whether or not Mr Tindemans' fears are justified. One point that he has made forcibly is that, at the moment, it is impossible to develop a credible programme if one starts with the principle that every stage has to be reached by everyone at the same time.

For our part, we believe that Mr Tindemans may be right.

Albert Coppe

(\*) *Le Monde* , 20 January 1976, page 6