

Debates in the European Parliament on European Political Cooperation (18 November 1981)

Caption: Addresses given in the European Parliament on European Political Cooperation by Gaston Thorn, President of the Commission, Willy Brandt and Mariano Rumor.

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Debates in the European Parliament (18 November 1981)

M. Thorn, *President of the Commission*

[...]

May I say in reply to some of Mr Blumenfeld's points, that every time you address the Commission it will be at pains to show that it intends working as closely as possible with the Parliament, even in the field of political cooperation, for which it has no particular responsibility. We have already said as much somewhat more explicitly in informal contacts and before your Political Affairs Committee. I must tell you immediately that, from what I know of the motion for a resolution to be voted on at the end of this debate, the Commission is fully in agreement with the contents of that document. I would now like to make a more general statement on our role in political cooperation. Now that new developments in political cooperation are being mentioned, I think that once and for all there should be a clear statement of the various roles of all concerned, which means that the role of the ministers of the ten Member States and the Commission in decision-making on cooperation should be made clear. The Commission is involved in the policy-making process in this connection, which for obvious reasons must remain confidential, witness the London statement which twice stresses the need for these discussions to remain confidential. It is therefore up to the policy-makers, that is the Council of Ministers, whose role is not included in the Treaties establishing the Commission, to announce the decisions they have taken as representatives of the ten Member States. The Treaties have not been amended, and I know many parliamentarians taking part in this debate who would be among the first to criticize us if we were to give the slightest impression of taking an active part in policy-making, thereby exceeding the prerogatives conferred on us by the Treaties. The right to announce political decisions, to justify them if need be with certain arguments, to comment and elaborate on them is the essence of politics, and often even the fundamental weapon of politicians. It is therefore up to the ministers to use it and they told us clearly enough last time that the Commission should be especially cautious in this matter. One thing on the positive side, in fact the only thing which has affected the Commission's position, is that in the last few weeks the ministers have been in favour of involving the Commission in their work to a greater extent. In other words they no longer intend asking the Commission to leave the room or not to attend a given meeting. These closer contacts will enable the Commission, whose role is fundamental to the Community, to keep in touch with the political discussions going on and to be aware of the line followed by our ten Governments in such vital fields as East-West relations, the Middle East, etc., where the Community can also play a major role, if only through the aid programmes which come before you.

All I know is that yesterday afternoon while I was speaking to you about the Mandate, the political cooperation ministers were meeting to discuss developments in the Middle East. I know that these discussions were inconclusive and as the situation is very fluid at the moment, it would hardly be the Commission's place to make any statements on problems of this sort.

Let us now move on to political cooperation structures and mechanisms, which are your main concern.

As I said before, the Commission is pleased at what has been achieved and now hopes that the London report will lay the foundations for future progress. In this connection I should like to tell those of you who are wondering what has been done, that these are only the first faltering steps. The London declaration was made only a very short time ago and it remains to be seen at what level and in what way it will be implemented. One thing I can tell you is that a week ago the Commission was allowed to sit in on a meeting of the Political Committee, as it was not able to do before. The Council has therefore honoured its promises to involve the Commission in its work to a greater degree, albeit only at senior official level, which we have not previously participated in, not so that we should become the eleventh policy maker, but rather a largely silent partner, except when consulted and in order for the Commission to be better informed and aware of the policy pursued.

I must make it clear once and for all that the London report brought about no changes in the rules governing political cooperation. Nevertheless, there is no denying that it is becoming more and more difficult to draw a clear distinction, as Lady Elles mentioned a while ago, between the external policies falling within the

Communities' responsibility and those pursued within the framework of political cooperation. Most of them are complementary and interdependent, and it would be a shame if this was not so, because it would demonstrate a lack of coherence on our part. The ministers could not go on ignoring this state of affairs, which is why as I said we are now more closely associated with the Council's work following the adoption of the London report.

Now what about the secretariat, as some of you already asked me. I think Mr Blumenfeld is hoping for a little too much - let the Council express its own views on the matter - but I would be happy if things turned out as he hoped, in other words if the secretariat could bring about closer relations and a more regular flow of information to the Parliament. What is really important is that the ministers have stated, and restated yesterday in less official meetings than this one, that they intend working more closely with the European Parliament in the future. There is every reason for us to be pleased at that.

I must give you a word of warning about the question put to me, which concerns the Commission's readiness to provide the political cooperation secretariat. The Commission is a Community institution with a specific role to play and it would be dangerous, even at civil-servant level to ask it to assume the duties of secretariat for a non-Community body where it would by definition not have the right to put forward any proposals. This would only lead us to confusion and could well lower the Commission as a whole in the eyes of the Council. I know you do not wish that.

As far as the European Union is concerned, I am rather sorry that this debate is taking place today in the absence of Messrs Genscher and Colombo. They will be coming tomorrow to discuss it with you and I do not think it would be proper to raise the subject today in view of this fact.

May I now reply to Chairman Fanti's comments by stating that the Commission welcomes this initiative? Even if it does not go the whole way or is not in line with the views of all, any initiative shows that there is an attempt at government level to widen discussion and make progress. We are sorry to see though that there are no plans to enshrine this in a treaty or extend the Community decision-making system at this stage. Nevertheless we hope that all these general principles, which we approve, will get further than mere wishful thinking. That is why the Commission immediately assured Mr Genscher and Mr Colombo at the Council yesterday that we were willing to work together to examine these proposals more closely and develop them further as much remains to be done. Examination of these proposals can only commence at Community level when this stage has been reached.

You are aware of the two major alternatives and you have put your finger on the major problem. Are we going to extend the Community action to other fields as a result of this initiative, or will it mean introducing the principle of inter-governmental cooperation in other fields? Those are fundamental questions and you know where we stand.

Our viewpoint is, firstly, that there must be side-by-side progress in the development of the institutions and policies. Equal attention should therefore be paid to preparing decisions at European level and to declarations on issues relating to economic integration. Secondly, it should be remembered that the Community institutions are in our opinion the foundations on which moves towards a European Union, must be based.

The establishment of other bodies on the fringe of the Community structures should be discouraged and toeing the Community line must be a precondition for all Member States participating in inter-governmental cooperation, even in fields which are not covered by the Treaties. Lastly, efforts must be made constantly to improve the way the institutions function and to forge closer links with the Parliament.

In the Genscher document, we are pleased to see that the European Parliament is given more prominence and there is mention of enforcing its right to play a part in and oversee policy-making. I agree with Mr Fanti that one major issue, the definition of the tasks of the European Council, is still undecided. I hope that the further explanations Mr Genscher and Mr Colombo give you tomorrow and which I am convinced they will also have to give the Council in the next few months, will allow us to make further progress. In conclusion, I

would like to say that hopefully a new phase started yesterday when discussions took place between ministers of the Ten and representatives from Parliament in a restricted meeting attended by the Commission. Representatives of the national governments will be here tomorrow to explain their viewpoints on Europe. At this very difficult time when we are not progressing as fast and certainly not as effectively as we might hope, we must agree that, with regard to the mandate and the European Union question, everyone seems to be facing up to the fact that present challenges cannot be met without showing a little more European spirit in decision-making and a determination to go still further in this direction. I hope that this will be an encouragement to all of us.

(Applause)

President. - I call the Socialist Group.

Mr Brandt. *(DE)* Madam President, ladies and gentlemen, it seems to me that the haggling about quotas and percentages tends all too often to blur the historic dimension of the process of European unification. All too often, we try to take the easy way out and shift the blame onto others to distract attention from the inadequacies in governments' and official bodies' relations with the Community.

From a purely objective point of view, nothing would be more appropriate at the present time than to develop the Community as a means of countering the effects of the world economic crisis. Unfortunately, there is precious little to report in this respect. Many people have by now set their expectations so low that they regard it as a success for the Community even to survive the turbulent times it is currently going through. Of course, no sensible European can have any objection to improvements being made to political cooperation between our governments and between those governments and the Community institutions; nor can anyone object to Community activities being meshed in better with inter-governmental activities. It seems to me, though, that what the President of the Commission has just said serves to confirm the old adage that it is no good putting the cart before the horse.

I am in favour of what is known as Political Union, so long as the resultant institution is worthy of the name. I am not in favour of sticking a new label on an old product.

(Applause)

Substantive shortcomings cannot be compensated for by political window-dressing and this is a point which is made in the Socialist Group's motion for a resolution.

In other words, what is the sense in opposing what the German Foreign Minister and his Italian counterpart are trying to set up? Despite all the disillusionment, why should we not make the point that there were certain risks involved in agreeing to the direct election of a European Parliament? Widening the scope of Parliament's powers and adding to its right of involvement would be not so much a present to the Members of this House as rather a boost to the credibility of those whose thoughts as to how to improve the work of the Community ran to no more than direct elections.

(Applause)

Perhaps the suggestions made by the French Government will help us to make progress - I do not know yet whether that is so, I can only hope so. As regards the suggestion of a development - in certain sectors at least - towards social union, I can only say that some of us were considering this question something like ten years ago. The economic and financial conditions have certainly not improved since that time.

There is no getting over the fact that we must make a better job of what are really the Community's original tasks if we wish to make additions to these in the form of restructuring the budget and reforming the Common Agricultural Policy. The Community must be made to work; after all, our people will judge the Community over the coming years by the contributions it makes and the influence it exerts as regards the safeguarding of jobs and structural improvements. These factors will also dictate the political clout of the

Community as a whole and the coordinated policies pursued by the Member States.

[...]

Mr Rumor, *Chairman of the Political Affairs Committee*. - (IT) Madam President, Members of the Commission, ladies and gentlemen, I am grateful to the President of the Commission and to Mr O'Kennedy for the reply to the question tabled by Mr Klepsch on behalf of the Christian-Democratic Group.

The questions involved are undoubtedly also of a structural and operational nature, but their content is essentially political.

I feel that my first duty is to acknowledge that the report on political cooperation approved on 13 October 1981 marks a number of significant steps forward in relation to some of the points in the resolution tabled by Lady Elles and approved by Parliament last July. Some of these points are already being implemented.

Of course, these steps are very cautious and do not fully satisfy either Parliament's demand or the real scale of a political cooperation which would be integrated in the development of the Community as an intrinsic and closely linked element.

We must move forward more quickly on this road.

Moreover, Madam President, what is the significance of the questions put to the Commission by my group, if not precisely to urge it to make a qualitative leap towards the integration of political cooperation in the unifying process of the Community, and to adapt structures and guidelines to the urgent demands now made by a complex and difficult international situation, which does not allow for reluctance or postponement?

The problem therefore arises of how to give the European Community as such the room, capacity and vigour for decision-making and initiating which are indispensable to such a great economic, cultural and civilized power.

I have mentioned the political significance of our questions to the Commission. They can be defined as follows:

Firstly, our group points out that we have entered upon a phase in world history and Community history in which it is necessary, but above all our duty, to be always ready and adequately prepared for an influential European initiative in the troubled and uncertain landscape of world politics.

Secondly, while bearing in mind the composite nature of the Community and the concern felt also here in Parliament about its specific responsibility, the political question of security urgently needs to be considered.

If we were to ignore the existence of, and the need to tackle, the political aspect of security, we would be burying our heads in the sand like the ostrich, and political cooperation would end up by being transitory and rhetorical instead of cogent, realistic and organically constructive.

Thirdly, we are aware that the wealth of timely political proposals produced by Parliament would run the risk of remaining pious hopes if the Ministers did not translate them into substantive attitudes and initiatives. For this reason, whereas the Carrington report stresses the importance of the 'association' of the European Parliament with political cooperation, it is not enough to talk of the possibility of making frequent references to our resolutions in the decisions and statements of the Ten. It is necessary, at the very least, for the political attitude expressed by Parliament always to be taken into consideration by the Ten. We shall stand firm on this point.

This leads us back to the initial statement, in which Parliament asks that the present mechanism of political cooperation be gradually transformed from an intergovernmental to a Community procedure, leading to a joint decision.

Indeed, the restoration of Parliament's political initiative and the influential presence of the Commission in political cooperation are the basic link in this chain which leads the general policy of the Community back to unity in the perspective of European Union.

We know that a subtle and corrosive suspicion is circulating in Community circles, aroused by a few indiscretions by people in positions of responsibility. It is that perhaps the most ardent advocates of political cooperation wish thereby to diminish the more specifically institutional and economic aspects of the process of Community development.

It seems to me that the joint Italian and German initiative for a 'European Act' - about which Mr Genscher and Mr Colombo will tell us tomorrow - in its political, institutional and economic aspects, tends to allay this suspicion.

Let anyone who is really tempted by such a ploy realize that an international political commitment such as that sketched out in the October report is unimaginable without the robust framework of a revived institutional organization and an economic policy moving towards more solid Community integration.

The converse is equally unimaginable - an expansion of Community policies without the scope and scale of a great international policy. We do not want to create monsters, and these two distorted hypotheses would create a monster of one kind or the other - either a large and well-nourished Community body with an undeveloped brain and political imagination, or a brain and political imagination languishing in a stunted and bloodless Community body.

The Ministers, too, are aware of this risk.

Moreover, the Carrington report itself acknowledges that further European integration and the preservation and development of Community policies on the basis of the Treaty will make a positive contribution to more effective coordination in the field of foreign policy and will increase the range of instruments available to the Ten.

We must regard one thing as certain. Political cooperation represents at the same time the necessary 'Epiphany' - if I may use that word - of the Community on the international scene, but it is also a moral and political imperative for a grouping of 269 million citizens which represents the major trading power in the world, and has various cooperation, trade and aid links with 119 Third World countries.

If this is the real and potential scope of our Community existence, then we must move more rapidly in the direction of a real and practical common foreign policy. The now lengthy history of the Community has accustomed us to realism and to not allowing ourselves to be carried away by excitement, hastiness or presumption.

But we must be realistic not only in terms of caution but also in terms of an ability to interpret the signs of the times - i.e. to interpret the expectations concentrated on Europe from every side, as if towards a pole of initiative and balance.

There are deadlines which do not permit procrastination, uncertainty or paralyzing divisions among the Ten.

Moreover, the questions tabled by Mr Cohen and others, Mr Fanti and others and Mr Bangemann and others, relating to the most harsh and urgent realities of the international situation, are enough to make us realize that political cooperation is faced with problems which do not permit an ostrich-like or disunited approach.

Is it conceivable that Europe should not be involved - in its proper role as a partner of equal standing in the democratic West - in the problems of strengthening peace and the inextricably linked problems of achieving balanced security, guaranteed at the lowest possible level of nuclear armament, with the optimum goal being the zero-option?

Is it conceivable that Europe should not be involved in the problems of real and honest detente, which must be on a global scale and therefore brings in all the problems raised by policies of power struggle, violation of the rights of peoples, terrorist practices and international violence?

Is it conceivable that Europe should not be committed to continuing courageously and wisely on the road which it chose at the Venice summit to achieve an overall solution to the Middle East problem in the form of a real and lasting peace with justice for all?

Is it conceivable that Europe should not itself be involved - by virtue of its Christian and humanist roots and consciousness - as a necessary and expected protagonist in the North-South Dialogue and in the fight against hunger and underdevelopment, which increasingly appear as a powder-keg of justified anxiety and protest threatening peaceful coexistence on this planet?

I said 'involved', but it must be involved in its entirety, for it would be paralyzing and damaging for one or other of our countries to delude itself that it could exercise real influence on its own.

No one can pretend to be taller than he is by standing on tiptoe. The age of national vanity is at an end, and the individual European nations are not equipped for a leading role. Today no country counts on its own merits, but on the basis of its role in Europe.

Of course the Community must set itself those all-round aims which were the generous but solitary dream of a great historical figure, which faded because it was confined to a single, albeit influential, country.

We agree with the honest acknowledgment in the Carrington report that the Ten are still far from playing a role in the world commensurate with their collective influence. On the other hand, we are more sceptical about the statement that the Community and its Member States are increasingly seen by other countries as a united force in international relations.

No, we have not yet reached that point, because Community development is slow, clumsy and sometimes contradictory, because at the institutional level powers are still disjointed and confused, and because political cooperation has not yet reached that stage of 'active unity' which is the precondition for a common foreign policy.

Only by overcoming these obstacles will Europe succeed in influencing events in a practical way - as the report hopes - instead of merely reacting to them as it does at present.

We believe - not from a corporative standpoint but from deep conviction - that the more Parliament is really involved in political cooperation, the more that cooperation will express both the intuitive wishes of the peoples and great political forces which we represent and the Council's views and initiative, if it is true that the latter wants to achieve - as it says it does - not merely common attitudes but common actions.

Madam President, Mr President of the Commission, we have put the questions to you not so much for its own sake as for the deep significance which we attach to involving you in the issue.

The European Act - whose weight and influence in progress towards European unity will be discussed tomorrow - states that the Commission is the guardian of the Treaties and the driving force in the process of European integration.

Indeed, it is your duty to be the institutional expression of Community supranationalism, just as we represent the convergence of peoples towards a united Community.

It falls to you and to us, not least in the field of political cooperation, to express the will and express the need for Europe to speak with a single voice in the world - the voice of a great, shared and universal civilization which, untarnished by a bloody and tragic history which is now behind us, can be decisive for a peaceful

outcome to our marvellous yet terrifying epoch.