

'Six nations, three presidents, one capital' from Le Monde


Caption: In 1958, the six Member States of the European Communities had to choose three presidents (one for each of the Communities) and a European capital.

Source: Le Monde. dir. de publ. BEUVE-MÉRY, Hubert. 20.12.1957, n° 4 015; 14e année. Paris: Le Monde. "Six nations, trois présidents, une capitale", auteur:Drouin, Pierre , p. 1; 4.

Copyright: (c) Translation CVCE.EU by UNI.LU
All rights of reproduction, of public communication, of adaptation, of distribution or of dissemination via Internet, internal network or any other means are strictly reserved in all countries.
Consult the legal notice and the terms and conditions of use regarding this site.

URL:
http://www.cvce.eu/obj/six_nations_three_presidents_one_capital_from_le_monde-en-3db5d758-770e-4ae9-87a4-fed1ecf7d57e.html

Last updated: 06/07/2016



Six nations, three presidents, one capital

Hardly have the last echoes of the Atlantic Council faded away, and the Foreign Affairs Ministers of the Europe of the Six are about to reassemble in the morning for discussions that may be less far-reaching, but equally difficult. 1 January 1958 marks year zero for the Common Market and Euratom, but no one knows as yet where the institutions of the new Communities will be located nor which eminent Europeans will preside over their fate.

A formidable task lies ahead, because although Europe certainly exists as ‘an expression of will and a representative body’, it does not exist in the minds of the negotiators to the point where they ignore concerns over national prestige, allocation of political parties and influence, etc. The difficulties that arose when deciding where the ECSC should pitch its tent (it still has only a provisional seat in Luxembourg) gives a foretaste of future disputes. They may well be even more serious this time, since the stakes are higher.

Yesterday, some Ministers, aware of these difficulties and tired of the interminable sessions at the Chaillot Palace, said they wanted to go back home as soon as possible, postponing the real Conference of the Six after just a brief exchange of views in the morning. But two of them quite rightly observed that time was short and that it would be a disaster if the first meeting of a Committee of Ministers of the European Economic Community should break up on a failure to act. A cabinet review will take place at the Hôtel Matignon in the late afternoon to finalise the French ‘position’ before the meeting of the Six.

Of all the questions that will be submitted to the Six, only one seems already to have found a solution: the Presidency of Euratom. There has been no objection so far to the only name put forward, Mr Louis Armand. The way in which he laid the groundwork for the Treaty in Brussels and defended the case for Euratom before the National Assembly, as well as the report on its objectives, published on his return from a mission with Mr Etzel and Mr Giordani which took him across Europe and the United States, seem to point quite naturally to his appointment.

Two individuals stand out as candidates for the Presidency of the EC Commission: Mr Rey, Belgian Minister for Economic Affairs, and Mr Mansholt, the Netherlands Minister of Agriculture. Italy made it known that it was not putting forward candidates for the Presidency so that it might be in a better position to push the case of Turin or Milan as the new capital. If Belgium maintains so strongly the candidature of Brussels – and nothing indicates it will not keep up the pressure – Mr Rey might have to give way to Mr Mansholt, unless a third candidate appears *in extremis*. Apart from the choice of capital, which will also affect the choice of men, there is currently another problem: it was always understood that the replacement for Mr René Mayer at the High Authority would be a German. Mr Bluecher has even been nominated by his government for the job, but a number of countries in the ECSC feel he is not the *right man*. Will the Federal Republic put up another eminent candidate?

Whatever happens, the give and take that will have to take place over the presidencies are child’s play compared to what is involved in choosing the seats of the different institutions. Already there are rumours that bilateral agreements have been made. Some say that France and Germany have concluded a pact in support of Strasbourg-Kehl. Others say that the Federal Republic has given assurances to Brussels or that Luxembourg will vote for Belgium provided that Belgium does not want to take the ECSC as well, and so on.

Of course, there have been conversations in the wings. Attempts have been made to find common ground, but promises made in this way are very breakable, because decisions involving the Six are taken not by majority vote but ‘unanimously’.

At the moment, two different types of ‘pressure’ have been brought to bear from outside. The first is very strongly in favour of the ‘institutions’ being concentrated in one place. The other, more recent, but growing from day to day, is the creation of a ‘European district’.

We have already become aware during the past few weeks of the views of certain politicians and trade unionists on the subject.

Certain basic facts need not be repeated. Just one example will give the flavour: it has been calculated that an Italian Member of Parliament, serving on the Social Affairs Committee of the Common Assembly, would have to spend *two months* a year on a train if the institutions were located in Brussels, Luxembourg and Strasbourg.

What is a European district?

Although the need for concentration seems obvious when one realises the absurdity of the practical consequences of having several different seats, this idea of a 'European district', advanced by the Action Committee of the United States of Europe, chaired by Mr Jean Monnet, is less easy to grasp.

Misunderstanding the concept, some people have objected to the idea on the basis of the inalienability of the national heritage. It is feared, for example, that France would not allow Strasbourg to be 'internationalised' if that city were chosen to accommodate the new Communities. There is obviously no question of making a city or even an area into a 'federal district'. That would entail the total transfer of sovereignty within the 'district' to common institutions, assuming they had 'general powers', which is not the case for Euratom, the ECSC or the Common Market.

The present plan is more limited. The whole of the ECSC, the Common Market, Euratom, their staff, third-country delegations, offices of trade unions and professional organisations, would be concentrated in the same area. It would be natural for this area to be owned by the Communities. It would also be appropriate for a special Urban Planning and Management Committee to ensure the architectural unity of the establishments. A protocol annexed to the Treaty of Rome already grants certain privileges and immunities to the Community institutions. In this way, an administrative entity, within a properly demarcated territorial zone, would be created, or in other words, a 'European district'.

The support of several countries for this idea does not, alas, help pinpoint the exact spot on the map of Europe where the first brick should be laid. All the candidate countries have drawn up urban development plans for a 'European zone'. What are the respective merits of the proposed solutions?

Symbolism or practicality

'Strasbourg welcomes Europe', 'It must be Brussels', 'Milan, city of Europe', and so on. Glossy brochures, printed on art paper or card, illustrated with photos or seductive colours, have recently added to the already well-stocked bookshelf of the 'honest European'. Before appearing before the jury of the Six, the candidate cities are showing off their charms, recalling the 'cursus honorum' that strengthens their European credentials, exhibiting their plans for expansion, their easy rail, road and air links with their neighbours, the glories of their cultural life, etc. Unable to choose between their charms, the Six might well end up wishing for a travelling capital.

The natural beauty of a site will play little part in this debate, but each Minister must provide evidence of some unbiased motive for his city being chosen as the seat of the European institutions. Which major themes will be put forward?

Strasbourg will certainly have a symbolic motive. At the root of deadly rivalries between France and Germany, this city, if selected as the capital of Europe, will become the symbol of reconciliation. Does not the fate of the Common Market, Euratom, the ECSC and perhaps, one day, a political Europe depend on the sincere efforts of two great countries, France and Germany, to build a stable future? Without this deep determination of two nations to break with the tradition of perpetually fighting to the death, would Europe have even had a chance?

To find ‘historic origins’ of this understanding, we need to go back to the year 842, when Charles of France and Louis of Germany sealed the first pact of friendship between the two countries with the ‘Strasbourg Oath’.

Its ‘European’ destiny was so widely recognised that Strasbourg was chosen in 1949 to accommodate the first institutions. Why not continue? With this in mind, Strasbourg is offering three development projects, three ‘sites’: Robertsau, Oberhausbergen and Scharrach.

These plans would obviously have to be changed if the idea of using both sides of the Rhine took hold. With the Community institutions in Strasbourg and Kehl, the symbolic impact would be even more striking.

It is not the symbolic but the practical advantages of Brussels that Mr Victor Larock, the Belgian Foreign Minister, will put forward. Undoubtedly, this city occupies a fairly central position geographically: 300 kilometres from Paris, less than 250 kilometres from The Hague, Bonn, Luxembourg and London. The transport infrastructure is well developed. International express trains cross Brussels with no problem now that the links between the North and South Stations have been put underground.

Traffic at Melsbroek International Airport is continually growing. Brussels is also linked by helicopter to Lille, Rotterdam, Paris, Bonn, Maastricht, Eindhoven, Cologne, Duisburg and Dortmund.

As for the roads, they have been completely transformed in the last two years. Access is easy, and traffic within the capital has been greatly helped by major construction projects (tunnels and flyovers).

Lastly, no other European city can offer so much accommodation. Hotels alone can accommodate more than 10 000 people. Apartments of all sizes are immediately available for new residents.

Brussels is also proposing a ‘European district’ for the definitive seat of the European institutions: the Heysel plateau, a former royal estate covering 123 hectares, left to the State by King Leopold II, 15 minutes by car from the city centre. As the focal point of the 1958 World Exhibition, this area is fully equipped to accommodate all the European buildings. Huge parking areas have been designed as well as a heliport, two auditoriums, one with 2 500 seats, another with 700, etc., all usable after the Exhibition.

Luxembourg and ‘the status quo’

The ‘favourites’, Strasbourg and Brussels, are immediately followed by Luxembourg. This candidature is presented in a very special light. Mr Bech, the Prime Minister of the Grand Duchy, feels that his capital has served Europe well because of the way it has welcomed, and got up and running in record time and under excellent conditions, the departments of the ECSC. But his ambition is limited to the confirmation by the Six of the permanent presence in Luxembourg of the Coal and Steel Community. The Government is conscious of the tremendous structural upheaval, for a country of three hundred thousand inhabitants, that would result from the arrival of an extra thirty thousand people (civil servants and their families, services, etc.). Mr Bech also let it be known that he would accept the concentration of all the European institutions in Luxembourg only if the five other Member States were in full agreement.

The official ‘eleventh hour’ candidate, Italy (with Milan or Turin) does not seem ‘a priori’ to have much of a chance of success. Undoubtedly, both Milan and Turin are rapidly growing cities that could accommodate this new international ‘colony’, but they are inconveniently placed with respect to the ‘backbone’ of Europe (the Ruhr, Lorraine, northern France, the Benelux countries).

However, if the choice between Strasbourg and Brussels becomes impossible, anything might happen during the next few meetings. One cannot rule out the success of an outsider, Italy for example or even the *Département* of the Oise.

In favour of a ‘night of 4 August’

This endless circle may well repeat itself this time and even come up with more complex configurations. The worst that could happen would be abandoning the debate in the early hours of the morning and the Six choosing the easiest option, which would be the scattering of the institutions.

This sign of weakness on the eve of the Common Market would seriously damage the European cause. If the first act of the signatories to the Treaty of Rome was to horse-trade in this fashion, how could the convictions expressed in their speeches be taken seriously?

But without going as far as a general scattering of the seats across the six countries, some people have thought of compromise solutions. A 'hard core', composed of the executive bodies of Euratom, the Common Market and the Common Assembly, might eventually attract the High Authority from Luxembourg, with the seats of the satellite bodies: the Bank, the Court of Justice, even perhaps one day a European university, etc., being allocated throughout the Six.

It may seem more attractive, but is this solution still not a sign of impotence? If one country starts receiving compensation, however meagre, for not being chosen as the capital of Europe, other demands will soon be raised. Not a very impressive setting for Europe.

If, during the 'night of 4 August', no agreement can be reached on a definitive seat, it would be better to choose a temporary capital, as was done for the ECSC, rather than split up the institutions. This idea is gaining ground, and there could be an understanding on the fundamental 'principle' of having a single seat. Europe, after all, will not be built in a day, and the United States Government was established in New York and Philadelphia before finally settling in Washington.

Taking their seats around the table, the Foreign Affairs Ministers of the Europe of the Six will be aware of the importance of their discussions and their decision. The Common Market and Euratom exist only on paper, in treaties that are far from being accepted as a 'declaration of rights'. Faceless as yet, the Commissions will soon be filled with names, three Presidents are about to be appointed, and, sooner or later, there will be a capital. Europe is seeking an identity. Will the Ministers of the Six give it one that will, from the outset, inspire natural confidence or general scepticism?