

The German-Italian proposals

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URL: http://www.cvce.eu/obj/the_german_italian_proposals-en-4a9f82f2-fa09-4ecb-8c03-46df4003bcd8.html

Last updated: 08/07/2016



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Wishing to give fresh impetus to Europe integration and to find a way out of the political stalemates in which Europe was bogged down, the Federal Republic of Germany, together with Italy, put forward reform proposals that emphasised the political objective of European unification.

On 6 January 1981, in Stuttgart, the German Foreign Minister, Hans-Dietrich Genscher made a speech, sometimes referred to as the 'Epiphany Appeal', in which he argued for greater political cooperation between the Ten. These ideas were reiterated by his Italian counterpart, Emilio Colombo, during an address he gave in Florence on 28 January 1981 to the 8th Congress of the European Association of Local Authorities. The German and Italian Governments fleshed out these ideas, which resulted in the Genscher-Colombo Plan submitted to all the Member States on 6 November 1981 and to the European Parliament on 12 November 1981. A draft European Act was submitted to the European Council meeting in London on 26 and 27 November 1981. The joint plan, purely political in nature, consisted of a declaration of intent by the Ten who, in adopting it, made a solemn commitment to move towards the European Union. The prime aim of the European Act was to reinforce Europe's common foreign policy. It buttressed the role of the Council and of the European Parliament and recommended greater use of majority voting within the Council of Ministers. The London European Council of 26 and 27 November 1981 noted the tabling of the draft European Act and instructed the Council of Foreign Ministers to set up an intergovernmental working party that would have more than a year to review the German-Italian proposals.

These deliberations led to the drafting of a document adopted by the Stuttgart European Council in the form of the Solemn Declaration on European Union on 17-19 June 1983. While not challenging the benefits stemming from the Luxembourg Compromise that, since 1966, had sought unanimity for all Council decisions, the Stuttgart Declaration recognised the special achievements of the existing Communities and appealed for the strengthening of common policies. It recognised the European Council's role in providing the general policy impetus, proposed extending the use of majority voting in the Council of Ministers and involved the Commission and Parliament in the work related to European Political Cooperation (EPC). The Stuttgart Declaration defined four fields of activity for the European Union: the European Communities, foreign policy, cultural cooperation and approximation of national laws.

Although it did represent a solemn commitment by the Member States to further European integration, the Stuttgart Declaration was not legally binding. Arrangements for the practical implementation of its provisions were also quite modest. Some countries actually protested that the Declaration appeared to threaten the right of veto, the ultimate political weapon in the Council.