

'A compromise', from Le Monde (4 December 1969)

Caption: On 4 December 1969, the French daily newspaper Le Monde emphasises the joint efforts of the German Chancellor, Willy Brandt, and the French President, Georges Pompidou, to make the European Summit in The Hague a diplomatic success.

Source: Le Monde. dir. de publ. BEUVE-MÉRY, Hubert. 04.12.1969, n° 7 742; 26e année. Paris: Le Monde. "Un compromis", p. 1.

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A compromise

Who would have thought, a few months ago, that an agreement like that signed in The Hague was possible, when Europe was still rife with suspicion? Even on Tuesday morning, the discrepancies between the statements made seemed so great that many delegations made no attempt to hide their pessimism. And then something happened which would undoubtedly have been difficult to imagine under General de Gaulle. Instead of trying at all costs to impose his point of view, the President of the Republic approved a compromise. He secured the promise of a financial settlement before the end of the year — his chief objective — but he had to abandon his frequently stated refusal to fix a date for the opening of negotiations on the enlargement of the Community.

The Head of State had a very strong argument for opposing the fixing of that date. Nothing is sure as to whether the Six will have reached an agreement before 1 July on the terms of the mandate that they will give to the negotiators. They may well begin the discussion in a disorganised manner. Accordingly, the EEC must be strengthened beforehand, so that the sudden 'sea breeze' which will necessarily accompany the arrival of applicants all more in favour of free trade than the next man will not endanger the principle of Community preference upon which the Common Market is based.

It is clearly in this spirit that the President of the Republic put forward a certain number of specific suggestions which can only be welcomed. In this context, one notes in passing the stance taken in comparison to de Gaulle. While de Gaulle constantly battled against Euratom, his successor does not hesitate to endorse a very extensive plan which goes from the adoption of a research programme to the construction of a joint isotope separation plant. These suggestions have been well received by our partners, but it will be noted that only the research is specifically referred to in the memo.

The subject of this is to study the European reserve fund of which Mr Brandt spoke on Monday, but it remains silent on the French proposal of appointing a joint spokesman to the IMF, a significant step forward whose adoption would have clearly borne witness to the reality of European solidarity.

Finally, the memo reiterates the political objectives of the Community several times and uses terms such as 'integration' or 'European University', which were out of favour at the beginning of the year in Paris. It will not be regretted here. What may be regretted, on the other hand, is the type of timidity which held back Mr Pompidou, whose European commitment is otherwise so strong, from taking advantage of the exceptional opportunity given to him of showing the way forward for all of Europe. In failing to do so, either because of natural prudence or because he did not wish to displease his majority, he allowed Mr Willy Brandt to steal the limelight at the conference. Brandt knew how to sound like an inspired statesman, and he will be able to boast to his countrymen that he made Paris capitulate on the question of the British application.

The character of the Federal Chancellor is without blemish, and it is even something of a miracle to see such a man at the head of his country twenty-four years after the death of Hitler. But it goes without saying that anything which contributed to the impression of a German ascendancy does the cause of European unity a disservice. Once upon a time, it would have been easy for General de Gaulle to have taken control of the movement. Mr Pompidou's task, at The Hague, was certainly less easy. The impression remains, however, that an opportunity was offered to him and to our country which will not recur so soon.