

'Europe relaunched at The Hague' from Corriere della Sera (30 November 1969)

Caption: On 30 November 1969, the day before the Hague Summit, the Italian daily newspaper Corriere della Sera ponders on the real chances of bringing about a revival of European integration and lists the issues awaiting consideration by the Heads of State or Government of the Six.

Source: Corriere della Sera. dir. de publ. Spadolini, Giovanni. 30.11.1969, n° 275; anno 94. Milano: Corriere della Sera. "Aja: rilancio europeo", auteur:Pieroni, Alfredo , p. 1; 2.

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Last updated: 06/07/2016

Heads of Government and Foreign Ministers to meet at tomorrow's summit

Europe relaunched at The Hague

The basic issue is still political: whether or not to build Europe – The French position and Britain's entry to the Common Market – The dangers of postponing any decision

From our special correspondent

The Hague 29 November, late at night.

The Europeanism of the governments of the Common Market countries may be half-hearted, but they will have to show their hands or shuffle the cards at Monday and Tuesday's Hague summit of heads of government and foreign ministers. The summit preparations have been masked by a smoke screen of technicalities that yet again seem to reveal a desire to avoid the basic issue of whether or not to build Europe.

The few hours available to the delegates will certainly not be sufficient to tackle the many technical problems that have for some weeks now been mentioned in these pages. The only issue that matters and that can be resolved in the few hours of discussion is the announcement of a new political will. That can only be founded on the consideration that the Common Market lacks a common economic, financial and monetary policy. It has an agricultural policy, but one that is absurd and very costly. And it has destroyed the principle of a scientific and technological policy upon which it had launched.

A verbal smoke screen

The decisions should therefore be based on broad principles. Do we want an economically and politically united Europe or do we prefer to proceed on an individual nation basis? If we want unity, in what fields should we take action? Foreign policy? Financial policy? Agriculture? Defence?

Since our political leaders do not lack verbal resources, the realists will have to put the genuine issues on the table if they are to penetrate the verbal smoke screen. It seems certain that President Georges Pompidou, who is making his debut on the international stage, will demand that the current system of financing Community agriculture be made permanent. That system has resulted in the Community stockpiling 400 000 tonnes of butter and 400 000 tonnes of milk powder — and nobody knows what to do with it. The Common Market is committed to paying 1 084 lire per kilo for butter, and makes consumers pay far more, when the surplus is so great that in all probability it will have to be destroyed. It is a system that maintains and funds one and a half million milk producers in France alone, and at the expense of all of us. But if the American system were adopted, that number could be cut to 60 000 and still produce the same quantity. The situation is much the same for other agricultural producers.

That is the system that Pompidou wants us to perpetuate, while being committed to considering changes, because all European farmers benefit from it, although France derives far greater benefits, which are a burden on the finances of the other member countries. In exchange, he will probably make some concessions. He will almost certainly agree to opening negotiations with Britain, but will ask for the date to be deferred until the Six are able to finalise the system among themselves.

Without Britain

If those pessimistic forecasts prove correct, it will mean that, at best, the Six will finalise their agricultural policy without taking account of British agriculture, which is incomparably more efficient. They will establish the bases of a common financial and monetary policy without taking proper account of the pound sterling, the only European currency with a financial and banking network on an international scale. They will try to correct their industrial and technology policy without taking account of the fact that British technology ranks second in the West and substantially outstrips that of the other European countries. If

approval of the agricultural and financial regulations is to precede negotiations with Great Britain, British entry will be conditional on acceptance of a system that we ourselves consider absurd and too expensive and that we have proved incapable of changing.

The technical issues cannot be allowed to obscure the basic problem, which is political. The Fouchet Plan was rejected years back because it sought to re-establish among the Member States a system of relations that reflected little of the Community spirit. Pompidou is now believed to intend relaunching an initiative along fairly similar lines, and the Five might now accept through weariness a proposal they rejected when their Europeanist spirit still burned bright. Pompidou's financial background has made him a realist, and he may suggest gradually adopting a unitary financial and monetary policy, perhaps with a common currency as its corollary.

It would be well to accept the latter proposal. But it would not be realistic to devise a common financial and monetary policy without taking account of Britain, Ireland, Denmark and Norway, who are soon to join the Community. Nor will it be easy to put such common policies into effect without an executive to implement them. It is essential that the EEC should have its own resources. Those resources should be guaranteed and controlled by the European Parliament. We need therefore to establish a concentration of power that will result in greater integration. Will France accept that integration? Will Britain accept it? The process may be gradual, but the broad lines must be laid down and declared before the event by all the states concerned.

At their meetings, the ministers will face the obstacle of taking major decisions. The construction of Europe is far from accomplished, and, at any moment, it could revert to the old nebula of nationalisms linked by a vague customs union that, currently at least, operates very imperfectly. But progress, if real, cannot result in a compromise, because a halfway house between nationalisms and an integrated Europe is very difficult, perhaps impossible, to devise.

Meanwhile, time is pressing. Months ago, when Pompidou was elected, it could already be predicted that American interest in a united Europe would diminish and perhaps reverse. We have almost reached that stage. And it is now easy to envisage German interest one day diminishing or reversing. If The Hague is not the Rubicon of unity and it is unlikely to be, a change in German interests is the one thing Europe can logically expect.

Alfredo Pieroni