

'The Russian swing towards the Common Market' from the Corriere della Sera (22 March 1972)

Caption: On 22 March 1972, the Italian daily newspaper Corriere della Sera describes the criticism of the European Economic Community (EEC), by Leonid Brejnev, First Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.

Source: Corriere della Sera. dir. de publ. Ottone, Piero. 22.03.1972, n° 67; anno 97. Milano: Corriere della Sera. "La svolta russa verso il Mec", auteur:Josca, Guiseppe , p. 22.

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After Brezhnev's address

Russia softens its attitude to the Common Market

CPSU General Secretary acknowledges the 'reality' of the Community — a decisive influence on this change of tactics has come from the Security Conference and the ratification of the Treaties with Germany

From our correspondent

Moscow, 21 March.

Two subjects in Leonid Brezhnev's address to the Congress of Soviet Trade Unions — the Peking 'Summit' and the negotiations between the Soviet Union and the United States — yesterday caught the attention of the observers. Their interest was understandable considering that this was the first time that the Kremlin had taken a stand on developments in the 'multipolar strategy'. Some of the other subjects covered by the Communist Party Secretary are also worth analysing, however, in particular the problem of the relations between the Socialist bloc (the Soviet Union in particular) and the EEC.

Brezhnev in fact wasted little breath on the subject. 'It is not true' he said, 'that our policy on continental Europe aims at undermining the European Economic Community. We acknowledge the existence of this grouping and watch its development with great attention.'

Some people, especially in Communist circles in the West, have interpreted this statement as evidence of a reversal in Soviet policy with regard to the Common Market: it is no longer one of uncompromising ostracism, but an offer of dialogue, if not cooperation. The majority of observers, however, felt that Brezhnev did not want to venture that far, even though certain considerations have induced him to tone down the harsh attitude so far displayed by the Kremlin.

It is a known fact, for example, that China has adopted a favourable attitude to the negotiations for the construction of the 'great Europe', and has apparently also considered establishing diplomatic relations with the Common Market in Brussels. The USSR, witnessing with alarm the Chinese attempts to penetrate the continent and interpreting them as a threat to the union of the 'Socialist bloc', cannot remain indifferent.

Soviet hostility towards the Common Market is mainly rooted in politics: a strong, united Europe is an obstacle to the hegemony of the superpowers. Furthermore, Moscow does not approve of the 'technological subjection' of its satellites to the West, fearing that it might encourage centrifugal movements and make it more difficult for the Soviet Union to exercise control over its allies. It is for this reason that, over the past years, it has always maintained that cooperation with the West should be established on the basis of bilateral or multilateral, but not Community, relations.

According to official propaganda, 'closed' communities like the Common Market are unacceptable because they 'impede détente' and ultimately complicate rather than promote the process of economic integration. For some time now, however, there have been signs of a relaxation in what has for so long been a rigid line. Last June, when in principle the decision was taken to enlarge the Community to ten members, the Soviet press threw no more than a few perfunctory jabs in the direction of Great Britain, which until then had always been described as the 'Trojan Horse' of the United States in Europe. A few weeks later, while talking to some Western journalists at a reception at the Argentinean Embassy, the Soviet Foreign Minister, Andrei Gromyko, said on the future of the enlarged Common Market, 'I am no magician and cannot foretell the future.' Previously Gromyko would not have missed the opportunity to reiterate his Government's criticisms and reservations on this subject.

All things considered, the Kremlin has acknowledged the Community's evolution and decided to face up to the consequences realistically. Yesterday, during his address, Brezhnev merely kept to this evaluation: rather than opening fire, he merely corrected his aim, in anticipation of possible future developments of the

problem.

The decision to change tactics was certainly also greatly influenced by the desire to smooth the path for the two projects closest to the hearts of the Soviet leaders: the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe and Germany's ratification of the Treaties with the USSR and Poland. In the 'Bundestag' as well as in other European circles, Moscow's hostility to the Common Market has caused perplexity. It was time to do something to reassure the doubters.

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