

'Direct vote', from Corriere della Sera (1 December 1970)

Caption: During an interview for the Italian daily newspaper Corriere della Sera on 1 December 1970, Walter Hallstein, President of the European Commission from 1958 to 1967, calls for the strengthening of political cooperation at Community level.

Source: Corriere della Sera. dir. de publ. Spadolini, Giovanni. 01.12.1970, n° 273; anno 95. Milano: Corriere della Sera. "Voto diretto", p. 11.

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Direct voting

CORRIERE: What is your view of progress towards European unification?

HALLSTEIN: European unification is passing through a new and crucial phase. The process of economic and social integration has reached such a level of intensity that it is forcing the partners to put in a good word for political unification following on from the economic integration whose final stage is currently under way. Answers are now needed to the many current problems. These can be found only if there is a common denominator: political union.

This union has two aspects: on the one hand, the extension of the specific areas of common policy, especially foreign and defence policy and, on the other, the completion of the organisational structure of the existing Community, from which political union should organically follow. This is why the problem of the direct election of the Members of the European Parliament is now taking centre stage.

At the Hague Summit meeting, there was useful talk of the political aims of the European Community, but nothing has happened. The Foreign Ministers' mandate to examine how better progress could be made in the area of political union, with a view to enlargement, gave the optimists further hope. The results have, however, been very disappointing.

The Dutch Foreign Minister, Joseph Luns, was right: 'The mountain has given birth to the mouse.' What the Foreign Ministers decided and set in motion in Munich is, in terms of organisation and terminology, a late fruit of the school of Gaullist thought. The result, judged by the criteria of an integrated community, is very paltry. The Ministers want no more than to continue along the road of simple diplomacy, with no duties of consultation, to be wound up in two days every year. They are steering clear of the term 'common policy' as though it were some sort of sin: the result is that the Ministers are lagging well behind European public opinion. The latest polls show that 60 % of Italians, 69 % of Germans in the Federal Republic and 67 % of the French are in favour of transforming the European Community into the political community of a united Europe.

The Foreign Ministers also seem to be of the view that European experience as a whole can be disregarded; it is naive to believe in an automaton from which solid practice will grow by itself, through consultation. Experience shows that this goal can be achieved only by a binding agreement and a progressive plan. Solid institutions are needed, ones that have organic links with the existing Community. Only in this way can the necessary common policy be achieved. Anyone who says that union should come before institutions is putting the cart before the horse.

Right from the start, the Hague Summit meeting was disappointing as regards the direct election of the European Parliament. The European Parliament's proposals have been lying in the drawers of the Council of Ministers since 1960 and, following The Hague, they seem set to stay there. However, the public in the Member States of the Community has long been interested in this issue. In Italy, Belgium, the Netherlands and the Federal Republic, work on national initiatives for direct elections is enthusiastically under way. If simultaneous elections are impossible in all the Community's Member States, at least those who so wish — it is suggested — should directly elect their Members of the European Parliament. Obviously, such initiatives are not a complete substitute for the European solutions that are still on offer. I believe, however, that bringing forward partial answers has a certain force by exerting political pressure and promoting the European order. In any case, the democratisation of the European institutions cannot be put off any longer.

Can any citizen or government stand by in all conscience and watch the decision-making power of the Community institutions gradually increase, while they continue to be democratically underdeveloped and weak?

There can be no doubt: those who want economic integration must also want political integration. Time is pressing. Those putting off political union are meanwhile worrying the Americans (who accept economic preferences only in exchange for European political union), encouraging the Russians (who would like to

prevent the union of western Europe) and bewildering the candidates for accession (who no longer know whether what they are taking on will be merely economic or political as well).