

'Europe comes of age', from Le Monde

Caption: On 23 April 1970, in its coverage of the signing by the Six, the previous day in Luxembourg, of the Treaty amending Certain Budgetary Provisions of the Treaties establishing the European Communities and the Treaty establishing a Single Council and a Single Commission of the European Communities, the French daily newspaper Le Monde focuses on the future challenges to be met by the Six.

Source: Le Monde. dir. de publ. Fauvet, Jacques. 23.04.1970, n° 7 861; 26e année. Paris: Le Monde. "Une Europe majeure", p. 1.

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Europe comes of age

Nearly four months late, and after the classic ‘marathon’ sessions running late into the night, the Six have finally reached agreement on how to end the Common Market’s transitional phase. Once again, it was agriculture, specifically the wine issue, that slowed down the process. But the fact that agreement was reached despite the various vested interests, both economic and electoral, shows the power of persuasion of the European idea.

‘The European Economic Community has tonight officially come of age’ declared Pierre Harmel, President-in-Office of the Council of Ministers, after the meeting in Luxembourg. As you will recall, Maurice Schumann had spoken of the transition to the Common Market’s ‘second generation’. It does not matter how one describes Europe’s age. It is the same as for human beings: you are as old as you think you are. At all events, after some predictable setbacks, the Community now seems to be in good shape.

Now that agreement has been reached over wine, the final piece in the ‘Green Europe’ jigsaw puzzle, all the decisions of principle taken on 22 December 1969 in Brussels can be applied. The Community will have its own resources: from 1 January 1971, all agricultural levies will go into the Community kitty. On 1 January 1975, all the budgetary expenditure of the EEC will be covered by Community revenue, with customs duties being progressively allocated to the Community kitty.

Logically, attention should now focus on the second theme, the strengthening of the Common Market. However, there is very little time left before the third theme, enlargement, becomes operative. Mr Schumann has personally called for talks with Great Britain to begin in the ‘near future’. In all likelihood, negotiations will open before the summer recess. In practice, therefore, two months are left for the Six to think about how best to strengthen the Community in the areas which have, to date, been ignored because of the need to settle the agricultural issue.

Some of the issues that deserve to be dusted down and addressed include the abolition of technical barriers to trade, the unification of the legal, fiscal and financial framework in which industry operates, the establishment of European companies to stop the spread of national ‘giants’, and the organisation of job transfers so as to alleviate the painful effects of structural change.

Similarly, the gradual establishment of a true economic and monetary union, envisaged at the Hague Summit, is one of the tasks that should now be of concern to Europeans. This would certainly be the achievement of the coming decade, and we can understand why Raymond Barre stressed this aspect of ‘strengthening’ at the most recent meeting of the Six. It is certainly difficult to plan any ‘synchronisation’ between the period leading up to the British becoming full members of the Common Market and the establishment of economic and monetary union, but it is vital, as we have seen many times, to fix goals. At the same time, it would be advisable for the Six, before they allow the British to join their club, to know more or less where they want to go, how, and in what time frame. This is how they can show that they have ‘come of age’, facilitating negotiations on enlargement and smoothing the path for the arrival of new partners.