

'A spiritual supplement' from Le Monde (21 October 1972)

Caption: On 21 October 1972, in its coverage of the opening, two days earlier, of the Paris European summit, the French daily newspaper Le Monde expresses its hope in the promises made by the European leaders to create a political Europe.

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‘A spiritual supplement’

How we had all been longing to hear such fine words about Europe! Sleeping Beauty has been captivated by her nine Prince Charmings. The French Prince — owing to his reputation at least as much as to his skills as a host — may have been the most eloquent on this, the first day of the Summit, but his colleagues also have their own ideas about how to revive the flagging Community.

Who would not wish that the Old World could indeed ‘speak with one voice’? Even then, it would need to have something to say. Today, it is no longer enough for experts, followed by Ministers, to agree on procedures and methods. It is the policies that need to converge, and the citizens of Member States must also be included in any dialogue.

Unquestionably, these needs have been recognised, as may be seen, more or less, in three ways in all the speeches: some promising plans for the more distant future, new and more specific plans for the short term, and rather more of an emphasis on ‘social’ policy than was seen during the Hague Summit. Mr Pompidou set the tone by advocating the creation of a ‘European Union’ during this decade. These words sound inspirational because, as yet, no one knows what lies behind them. At first sight, the concept may sound even more restrictive than ‘economic and monetary union’, the phrase used by the Head of State at The Hague, because of its more political connotations. In fact, the President of the Republic has been even further in the past; before the referendum he had spoken of confederation.

Stating that ‘Europe should not just be a Community of shopkeepers’ may also help to persuade those who had never considered before now that the Common Market might have any aims other than its commercial ones. In order to give Europe a more ‘human side’, Mr Mansholt proposes that citizens of Member States should gradually receive ‘European civic rights’, while Mr Andreotti even suggests a form of ‘European citizenship’.

However, it is not by words and symbols that people will judge whether Europe has a future, but by results. The Member States are so well aware of this that they have, through their representatives, balanced these largely long-term prospects against other far more practical considerations. Accordingly, even before Mr Messmer and Mr Brandt put forward a detailed ‘social programme’ outlining a loose collection of promises to deal with employment, the free movement of workers, employees’ participation in the decision-making process at the workplace, a European framework for collective agreements, professional training, consumers, etc., Mr Pompidou had already put forward to his guests the idea of a European Foundation for the improvement of working and living conditions. An appealing suggestion, but one which, should it be accepted, must also be judged by its results.

In the same way, concern for a regional policy worthy of the name has been expressed not only by Italy and the United Kingdom, who are in the vanguard on this issue, but also by France. Slight differences have arisen, nonetheless, over the way in which resources allocated to this sector will be granted. Here, too, the desire has emerged to build a Community that distributes its benefits more equally.

The Nine, conscious that existing projects (monetary cooperation fund, anti-inflationary measures, etc.) were mainly of a technical nature, wanted to give Europe a ‘spiritual supplement’. Let us hope that the cumbersome nature of their organisation does not shatter hopes too quickly once the discussions are concluded, the communiqués are signed ... and the elections are over.