

## 'Reorientation' from Le Monde (26 May 1984)

**Caption:** On 26 May 1984, the French newspaper Le Monde considers the national and European consequences of the speech given to the Strasbourg European Parliament on 23 May 1984 by French President François Mitterrand.

**Source:** Le Monde. dir. de publ. LAURENS, André. 26.05.1984, n° 12 233; 41e année. Paris: Le Monde. "Inflexion", p. 1.

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## Reorientation

On 24 May, Mr Mitterrand addressed the Members of the European Parliament, focusing on two different ideas. First of all, he proposed a series of reforms (a ‘multispeed’ Europe, majority voting, the creation of a European Secretariat to prepare the work of the Council more effectively, etc.) which aim to reduce the bottlenecks and obstacles that the EEC knows only too well. These reforms are realistic, based on common sense, and more promising in the short term than other ambitious projects.

Then there is the Draft Treaty that France declares itself to be ‘willing to consider’ which was adopted on 14 September last year by the European Parliament. Mr Mitterrand has given this controversial text on the European Union a real boost. It had been in danger of remaining, for quite a while longer, and despite the support of a large majority, the most beautiful exhibit in the gallery of the still-born major projects of European integration.

Conversely, could it in fact be said that the French support for the ‘inspiration’ behind the draft will be enough to make it a reality? That would be somewhat premature. Besides, the President of the Republic has merely suggested that ‘preparatory talks’ should be opened on this subject, and it is these talks that might prompt the ‘interested Member States’ to organise a conference. No one could say, therefore, that Mr Mitterrand’s speech has set in motion a rapid process of European integration. At best, it could be considered to have initiated a process of evolution.

This process of evolution, even if it probably does owe something to the impending elections on 17 June, nonetheless confirms that the Head of State has reached a turning point in his thinking about ‘Europe’, or rather in his means of expression. This does not mean that there has been a definitive break with his old and deep-seated attachment to the idea of unifying the Old Continent, nor does it mean that there is an inherent contradiction with his Socialist commitments. However, following, as it does, his other statements about the Community and his repeated calls for Western solidarity on defence, it emphasises that Mr Mitterrand will henceforth be taking up a position on Europe that, in times past, would have placed him closer to the centre than many of his friends, even if there has always been a marked pro-European strand in the French Socialist movement. Moreover, the French Socialists had chosen to abstain from last September’s vote, and their Communist allies in the coalition government had voted decidedly against the motion.

The Spinelli draft should come before the European Parliament this year, once the legal experts have finished their fine-tuning. While its general outline is well known — legislative powers over the EEC to be jointly shared by the European Council and by Parliament, executive power being explicitly entrusted to the Commission — there remain numerous practical details to be resolved before it can be submitted to the parliaments concerned for ratification. This will be necessary, in any case, for its implementation.

Campaigning in France for the elections on 17 June is, as is the case almost everywhere, so little ‘European’ that Mr Mitterrand’s speech probably stands little chance of changing the outcome. Nevertheless, it will serve as a starting point for renewed debate about what is really at stake in these elections. While the President of the Republic’s initiative may cause some embarrassment to the opposition (Mrs Veil had voted in favour of the Spinelli draft, whereas the RPR had not wanted to take part in the vote, considering the text to be ‘utopian and badly timed’), it will hardly encourage the majority to unite (the Communists were the only French Members of the European Parliament to vote against the Spinelli report). It is true that the Communist Party (PC) and the Socialist Party (PS) are not standing on a joint list. Maybe that is because they are not interested in practising joint diplomacy.