

'A step forward' from La Libre Belgique (5 December 1985)

Caption: On 5 December 1985, the Belgian newspaper La Libre Belgique sees the Luxembourg European Council as a step in the right direction along the road leading to a more in-depth reform of the Treaty of Rome.

Source: La Libre Belgique. 05.12.1985, n° 339. Bruxelles: Edition de la Libre Belgique S.A. "Un pas en avant", auteur:Theys, Michel , p. 2.

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A step forward

By Michel Theys

The nature of Europe is such that it will never incite real euphoria. Probably not even any enthusiasm. The Luxembourg European Council is no exception to this pernicious rule: the breakthroughs made during its nocturnal 'marathon' are not about to convince the average 'European citizen' that the history of his country and his continent is about to undergo a radical transformation.

Moreover, it is certainly true that 'European union' will not come about in the near future. By taking a further step in this direction, the Twelve have made clearer than ever the utopian nature of the enterprise. The breakthroughs made by the Heads of State or Government constitute no more than the few feet climbed with difficulty by mountaineers who can hardly see the coveted 'summit'.

Such laborious progress, which is unsatisfactory in more ways than one, is enough to annoy all those who consider European integration to be the last hope of our old countries, whom the United States, Japan, and other newly industrialised countries seem today to be condemning to eventual decline. However, it would be a mistake to reject it with scorn.

The point is really that Europeans have paved the way for union. It is that a very large majority of the Community's Member States have signalled their intention to take things a little further. Together. Rather than emphasising the 'minimalism' of the decisions taken in the capital of the Grand Duchy, it would be better to stress the fact that 11 of the Community's 12 Member States are still travelling in the same direction.

Why should we not celebrate the fact that the United Kingdom and Greece — who, six months ago, had refused any change to the Treaty of Rome — have (even if they have undoubtedly put the brakes on somewhat) followed their companions without causing too much fuss? Why should we not be pleased with the attitude of the Germans, whose commitment to Europe had lately seemed to be on the wane? In this respect, whatever the quality of the progress made, European unity has been reinforced. The Luxembourg European Council should be understood not as a historic 'summit' but as a step in the right direction.

So we are left with the Danish and Italian reservations, as well as the position which the European Parliament will take. Nobody wants to believe that Italy might cut off its nose to spite its face. The Danish problem is more fundamental: it is, henceforth, a question of whether Denmark can belong to the European Community. Is it not high time, however, that a clear answer was finally given to this question? The Luxembourg European Council has now brought this matter to a head. This is, perhaps, not the least of its merits. The truth, however cruel it may be, is always preferable to hypocrisy ...

As for the Strasbourg Parliament, it can feel nothing but disappointment. Any violent reaction on its part would, nonetheless, constitute a political mistake: such a reaction might well have the effect of marginalising it even further and of discrediting it, even in the eyes of those who, in the capital cities, defend its interests. It would do better to remember that Rome was not built in a day and that the Twelve have given it several additional weapons with which to continue its legitimate battle.