

'Europe edges forward — but gets exhausted by concessions' from Le Soir (4 December 1985)

Caption: On 4 December 1985, the Belgian newspaper Le Soir harshly criticises the mediocre outcome of the Luxembourg European Council and draws attention to the divisions existing between European countries on the issue of reform of the Treaty of Rome.

Source: Le Soir. 04.12.1985, n° 282; 99e année. Bruxelles: S.A. Rossel. "L'Europe avance à petits pas et s'essouffle à coups de concessions", auteur:Waersegger, Serge de , p. 1; 24.

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Europe edges forward — but gets exhausted by concessions

From our special correspondent

Luxembourg, 3 December.

This should have been a sumptuous monument: the cathedral of Europe which would encompass within its walls everything that has already been done towards European unification, in the economic sphere — the EEC — and in the sphere of foreign policy — political cooperation — all crowned with the spires of the future: a European Technology Community, an area without internal borders, political cooperation extended to include security and culture. But if you look at the small suburban shack, cobbled together any old how, with concessions on the left and compromises on the right, that the Luxembourg European Summit tried to shore up, you get some idea of the disappointment that might be felt by a holiday-maker who, believing that he has rented a villa with a terrace overlooking the sea, finds instead a three-room flat, with a kitchen looking onto the backyard.

Obviously, compared to the beginning of June, when the principle of reform of these treaties, which are the European Community's constitution, itself seemed to be totally utopian, some progress has been made. However, this progress is not total, since the fragile agreement reached in Luxembourg might still be destroyed by the European Parliament and the Italian and Danish Parliaments.

More specifically, the Heads of State or Government of the Europe of the Twelve found themselves with four main points to be incorporated into a reformed European treaty: transformation of the Common Market into a large frontier-free area where persons, goods, services and capital can freely circulate; giving a formal legal basis to the monetary cooperation which operates informally through the European Monetary System; strengthening the role of the European Parliament in the EEC decision-making process and codification of political cooperation (coordination of foreign policy) within the treaty, as well as extending it to the new area of security.

On each of these points, positions seem widely divergent, and very clear cut. The European Commission, and the Luxembourg Presidency, along with its Benelux partners, are trying to apply the domino theory: securing first of all, for example, French support, thereby winning over Germany, which, in turn, would bring with it the United Kingdom.

This exercise was undertaken with some success, but that success was slow, laboured and fragile.

However, at each of these stages, new concessions have had to be made.

So much so that some — for example, the Italian President of the Council, Bettino Craxi — suddenly had the impression that the process of reform was losing its substance. Consequently, Italy registered a general reservation about everything that would be done. What that really means is that it will not give its overall agreement until the European Parliament has delivered its judgment. If Parliament rejects the agreement, it seems highly likely that the Italian Parliament will do likewise.

Denmark left on the platform?

The Heads of State or Government were already faced with the general reservation of Denmark, whose government (a minority, and weakened by the latest municipal elections) had not received any mandate for negotiation from the Folketing, the Danish Parliament. That resulted in the Danish delegation taking a systematically contentious attitude, so much so that its partners seemed ultimately to pretend to ignore them during their negotiations.

If, at the end of the day, Denmark did not want to ride the reform train, then it would be left on the platform. That said, however, that cannot be the end of the matter.

The partial agreements which succeeded each other during Tuesday afternoon seemed like steps forward compared to the static position prior to the June 1984 Fontainebleau Summit. They acknowledged responsibility for the monetary system, something which should encourage financial and economic circles to continue to invest in it. They drew up a principle for apparently balanced development between poor regions and those in industrial decline in the 'prosperous' countries. Political cooperation was acknowledged, codified, strengthened, and opened up to the new areas of the political and economic aspects of security.

On the whole, however, it seems to be singularly exhausted and lacking in enthusiasm.

Serge de Waersegger