

'The Parliament of the Ten intends to create a more united Europe' from Le Soir (15 February 1984)

Caption: On 15 February 1984, the Belgian daily newspaper Le Soir analyses the content of Altiero Spinelli's Draft Treaty establishing the European Union, adopted the day before in Strasbourg by the European Parliament.

Source: Le Soir. 15.02.1984, n° 39; 98e année. Bruxelles. "Le Parlement des Dix entend réaliser une Europe plus unie", auteur:Labaki, Maroun.

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The Parliament of the Ten intends to create a more united Europe

From our special correspondent, Strasbourg, 14 February.

On Tuesday evening, the European Parliament laid down a political act that, despite any lack of impact, has great symbolic value: the MEPs of the Ten have actually approved the draft treaty for a new, more united Europe that would replace the current Communities. The text (a complete, ready-to-use 'constitution') is an act of faith in the future of Europe and a call for the creation of a united Europe so as to ensure a happy and peaceful future for Europeans. A broad consensus was secured among the MEPs to support this draft treaty, brought about by the persistency and conviction of the Italian MEP, Altiero Spinelli. The document will now be presented to the parliaments and governments of the Ten. It has to be submitted to the national parliaments for ratification.

Tuesday was marked by lengthy debates that only vaguely dealt with the heart of the issue, with the need to supplement 'more Europe' in an attempt to be better equipped to face the challenges of tomorrow. Some wondered whether, in reality, the impasse in the Community was really the fault of its current institutions or whether it was not more a matter of lack of political will from the capital cities. Others, without doubting the utility of a European structure equipped with new institutions, said that Spinelli's draft treaty was too vague, just at a time when people everywhere are expecting tangible solutions to the problems that they face in everyday life. They stressed the importance of immediate Community action to help the economy, in order to ensure that Europe does not miss the boat for global recovery and its own economic revival.

Yet others felt, however, that the text they were given to review was too 'soft', that it did not go far enough towards a genuine European Union. Supporters of this hypothesis were backed by the President of the European Commission, Gaston Thom, who spoke out against the retention of the possibility of a national veto (in order to protect vital interests) in the Spinelli draft. Other speakers also referred to and deplored the Union's lack of any powers in the field of defence.

Filling the gap

What is to be done with this draft treaty? Should it be sent to the various national parliaments with a note saying: take it or leave it? Should they be given the option of amending it? Between these two extremes, MEPs opted to take the middle road: they instructed the next European Parliament to organise all the contacts and to take all the necessary measures so that the positions and observations of the national parliaments may be taken into account. Over and above these technical considerations, it is obvious that the draft treaty must soon serve as a reference document in the forthcoming European election campaign and as a vehicle for rallying public opinion.

Let us not forget that the British Tories, the French Communists, the Gaullists and virtually all the Danish MEPs, all hesitant about the idea of a more united Europe, generally refused to approve the Spinelli draft. But the most 'interesting' attitude is that of the French Socialists, almost all of whom abstained, thereby highlighting once again the French Left's hesitations about the concept of Europe.

It remains to be seen what the future holds for Altiero Spinelli's initiative. At all events, it has already demonstrated the difference between the aspirations of the MEPs and those of their political friends serving in the governments of the Ten. The future of the Treaty on European Union will depend on how this gap is ultimately filled.

Maroun Labaki