

'Where is Pericles?' from Le Monde (1 January 1981)

Caption: On 1 January 1981, commenting on Greek accession to the European Economic Community (EEC), the French daily newspaper Le Monde calls for a reform of the Community institutions and the way in which they operate.

Source: Le Monde. dir. de publ. Fauvet, Jacques. 01.01.1981, n° 39e année. Paris: Le Monde. "Où est Périclès ?", p. 1.

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Where is Pericles?

The tenth place in Europe's Common Market will, from 1 January, be taken by Greece.

At the forefront of the new arrivals, later to include Spain and Portugal, Greece has the merit — largely recognised by French diplomacy — of pulling Europe southwards, balancing out a structure which, to date, has been too much drowned in the northern fog. Was it right, moreover, that this land, one of the cradles of our civilisation, should play no part in European integration?

Unfortunately, there is no Pericles to give this integration the harmony beloved of the gods. For the imminent second enlargement of the EEC will shake up even further the Brussels institutions, already damaged and pulled in opposite directions by opponents and supporters of supranationality.

It will, however, be necessary for some of the heat to be taken out of this debate — something which should have been done a long time ago — if the Brussels institutions are to regain some kind of efficiency before the system breaks down completely. The most significant attempt so far made to find a solution — the Tindemans Report — was far too ambitious. The 'Three Wise Men', Mr Marjolin, Mr Biesheuvel and Mr Dell, who, in December 1979, delivered to the European Council, at its request, a report on the problems raised by the second enlargement of the EEC, benefited from the experience and took care not to become bulls in the Community china shop. Remaining highly pragmatic, they propose to make the primary task of each institution to promote dialogue between the 'powers' born in the Treaties and, above all, to reinforce understanding between the Member States and the institutions.

The latest enlargement is, no doubt, a pretext not to delay decisions on this matter. However, the state of the principal cogs in the mechanism, and the way in which they are turning, would give ample justification for action to be taken now.

The example of the heated exchanges between certain EEC Member States and the European Parliament regarding the budget shows only too well that 'there is something rotten in the state' of the Community. That is just a recent example of the vicissitudes born of institutional deadlock. It is enough to recall the long nights of arguments over agriculture, the serious friction that brought them close to breakdown because of Mrs Thatcher's determination to contribute less to the budget of the Nine, the absence of any decision on fisheries (the question still remains unresolved after four years!), the European Council's backlog of the kind of problems that are meant to be resolved by Ministers, the impotence of the 'decision-makers' when faced with subjects of major topical importance: the rise in the price of energy, the requisite industrial redeployment, unemployment, etc.

The 'Three Wise Men' spoke of the 'decline of the Commission'. It is true that its role has, in all respects, been weakened: right of initiative vis-à-vis the Council, guardian of the treaties, executive body of the Communities. In a recent interview with *Der Spiegel*, its new President tried to make his presence felt from the outset by advocating an end to the need for unanimity. It is certain that enlargement will make decision-making even more difficult if the 'practice' of the right of veto remains inviolable. For, if it is acceptable that unanimity be required when 'very important' interests are at stake, it is not acceptable for unanimity to be applied to all matters.

The issue raised by France before the accession of the United Kingdom is still apposite: enlargement must go hand-in-hand with the deepening of the European Community. However, who is still defending it?