

'The barometer of European public opinion' from Europe (18 July 1974)

Caption: In his editorial of 18 July 1974, Emanuele Gazzo, Director of Agence Europe, commenting on the publication of the results of the first opinion poll carried out by the European Commission in the nine Member States of the Community, welcomes the creation of the Eurobarometer with a view to promoting a better understanding of European public opinion.

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The barometer of European public opinion

Introduced by Mr Paul Collowald, the Information Director, Mr Jacques-René Rabier today made public, on behalf of the Commission, the results, still provisional, of the first of a series of public opinion polls which it proposes to carry out in the nine countries of the Community. These polls will take place regularly in the spring and in the autumn, and are intended, as the Commission indicates using an apt expression, to be a "barometer" of the attitude of the public with regard to topical questions directly or indirectly concerning the development of the European Community, and, more generally, the unification of Europe. We reserve the right to analyse the results of these polls in our Bulletins.

For a long time we had hoped that the Commission would make use of this "instrument" for gaining knowledge of the state of public opinion on general or specific topics. We had also pointed out that the Parliament had approached the Commission in this matter. We must then congratulate it on having taken this initiative, in the hope that it will take the greatest possible advantage of it. In fact, such an initiative has a value from the point of view of "knowledge" but also, and perhaps more so from the point of view of the political choices to be made. We all know that the Commission's chief task is to ascertain what the interest is in a given field, where necessary making it the subject of appropriate proposals. Now one of the means (although not the only one) of ascertaining where this interest lies, is to consult public opinion, by the appropriate, scientifically established methods. In this way the Commission may in addition check whether and how its own information action is "received" by public opinion and what reactions it prompts. Let us quote a concrete example. As the author of the "Brief Notes" on the political situation in Denmark (which we published as No 417 of this series on 8 July) writes, the polls carried out in this country have revealed that there are very few people who appreciate the real economic benefits EEC membership has brought Denmark. Our correspondent draws the conclusion that "this has something to do with a weak information policy on EEC affairs". He is evidently referring to the information policy followed by the Danish Government. It is however striking to note, in the "barometer" submitted to us today, that the main reason for lack of information is the lack of interest on the part of the public in research and information on Community problems. Here then are the elements making it possible perhaps to define the guidelines of a specific course of action to be taken in a very precise direction.

We have also spoken of the interest of these polls from the point of view of the political choices to be made. To govern well requires knowledge: the possibility of gaining knowledge, thanks to this "barometer", not only of the situation at a given moment, but also and above all the trends and variations, is a valuable element. It should not for all that be thought that he who governs should "run with public opinion", with the risk of taking a wrong turning or always arriving late. Knowledge of public opinion must enable him to precede public opinion and to select guidelines in conformity with the general interest.

We would add that for journalists the instrument provided by this "barometer" is also valuable. Are we not each day faced with the need to keep in touch, to ensure that our papers at one and the same time inform, correct, prompt, encourage?

Em. G.