

'The Spierenburg Report: (1) First of all, a return to the sources' from Europe

Caption: In his editorial of 4 October 1979, Emanuele Gazzo, Editor-in-Chief of Agence Europe, expresses satisfaction at the proposals contained in the Spierenburg Report relating, in particular, to strengthening the position of the Commission within the Community institutional system.

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The Spierenburg Report: (1) First of all, a return to the sources

At a time when the European Commission is to meet for one of its reflection "conclaves", it is a good idea to make a succinct analysis of the document which Mr Dirk Spierenburg submitted to the Commission (and to the governments) on 24 September, presenting it to the press the same day (see EUROPE of the same date), and which is entitled: "Proposals for reforming the Commission of the European Communities and its services."

Two things should be pointed out in the first place.

(1) This report was requested by the Commission itself (precisely during one of its "conclaves") from a group of independent personalities. The latter are persons of very considerable specific and general competence, who have held management positions in administration, trade unions, private or public enterprises, on the national and international and notably European level. But at the same time they are persons with their own political physiognomy. They are neither "apolitical" nor "doctrinaire". Moreover it is not our intention to "give their biographies: we shall confine ourselves to recalling that Mr Dirk Spierenburg, originally Director General for foreign trade in The Hague, was then one of the negotiators of the ECSC treaty ("combative and obstinate temperament" discussing the competences of the institutions, recalls Jean Monnet in his Memoirs), then vice-president of the High Authority and successively Permanent Representative to the EEC and Euratom and then NATO, and one of the leaders in drafting a report on European Union for the Dutch government.

(2) The report submitted to the Commission was immediately made public at the explicit request of president Roy Jenkins. The political significance of this gesture seems obvious to us. This document contains proposals which the Commission as it stands cannot implement (for example reducing the number of Commissioners) but the fact of making them public is in itself significant. Which was confirmed on the occasion of the presentation to the press. Mr Paul Delouvrier, questioned by us about the chances of seeing these proposals translated into acts, replied: "This is the first time that a report on the functioning of the Commission and its services has been made public, and this comes just at the moment when the elected Parliament is meeting. Therefore... go ahead, children!" That means: the future of the reform proposals lies largely in the hands of public opinion and of European political forces.

These two factors are important in evaluating the real scope of this report which contains proposals of a technical nature, but with an obvious general political aim, for it is a question of redefining the nature, structure and functioning of one of the key institutions of the Community, by practical methods which to a certain extent represent a "return to the sources", but inspired by experience and the changes which have taken place in the intervening period.

This is therefore a political document, which results explicitly in the general observations where one can read: The Commission plays a vital and unique role in the institutions of the European Community. It must express the interests of that Community as a whole. It is in order to do this that it has been made responsible by the Treaty to submit proposals to the Council of Ministers without which the latter cannot deliberate. And further on: For all these reasons, the Commission must be able to act as a veritable college, strong, inventive and efficient, to be in a position to fully play its role of interlocutor of the Council and the European Parliament.

This results again from the statements made during presentation to the press. Mr Spierenburg himself told us: The Commission must continue to play its role, an important role; it must be independent and strong. When the Commission is weak, the problems are not resolved. And, developing his fundamental proposal, to reduce the number of Commissioners to one per country, he emphasised that the excessively large number produced a lack of cohesion and inadequate coordination. One must therefore create this cohesion once more, which will strengthen the Commission's authority and credibility.

For his part, Mr Paul Delouvrier evoked the period when he took part in elaboration of the treaties of Rome and criticisms levelled at the Commission in France. He said: No longer wishing to have a High Authority,

the Six had found the quadrature of the circle by giving the European Commission the prerogative of making proposals without which the Council cannot decide. Now the establishment of the European Council and the Parliament's direct election lead to a strengthening of certain institutions to the detriment precisely of the Commission, from which stems the need to strengthen the latter if one wishes to restore the very equilibrium of the institutions. What is important is that the Spierenburg group did not venture into more or less innovatory proposals exceeding its mandate. Very concretely it felt that course to strengthening the Commission calls for greater "concentration", greater collegiality, a better distribution of internal powers, strengthening of the authority of the President, flanked by a single vice-president with important horizontal coordination functions. That being the starting-point, we shall return to the other points.

Em. G.