

"The three "Wise Men's" report: no justification for secrecy' from Europe

Caption: In his editorial of 29-30 October 1979, Emanuele Gazzo, Editor-in-Chief of Agence Europe, criticises the secrecy which, to the detriment of the European Parliament, surrounds the disclosure of the report by the Committee of the Three Wise Men on the operation of the Community institutional system.

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URL: [http://www.cvce.eu/obj/the_three_"wise_men_s"_report_no_justification_for_secrecy_from_europe-en-5fa8f543-3aa1-4fa1-aa51-25cd1088d749.html](http://www.cvce.eu/obj/the_three_)

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The three "wise men's" report: no justification for secrecy

According to the "working theory" valid until a few days ago, it was today, or tomorrow at the latest, that the "three wise men's" report on the running of the European institutional system was to have been published, at the explicit request of its authors. Furthermore, the Foreign Ministers meeting in Council today and tomorrow, should have been able to take the preliminary procedural decisions and perhaps start the detailed debate, ready for the decisions that are to be taken at the next European Council session in Dublin in a month's time, or at a later session.

This programme has now undergone some changes, which could have some important consequences. That is to say, for the time being, the report, which has been translated into the EEC languages under close guard, is to remain secret, or if you like, will not be made known to the public. It will be published at the earliest at the ministerial session in Brussels on 20 and 21 November.

It is difficult to understand what there is that needs to be kept "secret" in this paper, which contains a series of discussions and theories on the way Community institutions should be run in future. The fact of these theories' being made public would certainly not put anybody's or anything's security at risk, nor would it endanger the security of anybody involved, especially as the paper does not contain any commitments or decisions. Decisions and commitments could in any case be very far removed from the contents of the report.

The explanation for this procedure lies elsewhere. It is the reason behind our mentioning important consequences. In effect, by preventing publication of the report and stopping its authors from having the chance to discuss the contents (after being sure of course that the persons for whom it is intended have received the report and have had a chance to read it before anyone else does) it will be impossible for the European Parliament to debate it, as it wanted to do, at its next session in Strasbourg from 12 to 16 November. The Parliament is meeting just before publication of the report and the European Council, which means that the Council does not want the matter to be discussed, at least in public, until it has had time to discuss it.

So, the decision to keep the report secret seems to be mainly directed against the European Parliament.

It seems that a very high-ranking official has described as "indecent" the idea of allowing the Parliament to hold a debate before the European Council has met. This attitude is not very easy to understand. On the contrary, it would be perfectly normal and even of some use to the Heads of Government to know what the public thinks of the suggestions and proposals before a debate is started on it. And it is precisely through the elected Parliament that the public can make its voice heard. Several MPs have made statements along these lines as we reported in our editorial of 24 October (which also contained several details on the major features of this hundred-page long document).

The reticence of the governments has led to certain "indiscretions", open or otherwise, and prompted rumours - which we think have no foundation whatsoever - that publication is being stalled in order to make some last minute changes to the text of the report.

Such rumours are not true. It is already known that attempts have been made to get some changes made to one chapter but this was a while ago. It would seem that these attempts failed as two of the three "wise men" considered it impossible to go back on texts that were virtually adopted.

It should also be borne in mind that the "wise men" have undoubtedly given their personal assessments of what problems there are and how they could be resolved, but they have had the opportunity to hear not only the views of very varied circles, including the European institutions, but also those of the nine governments, set forth in black and white following their meetings and talks.

In view of this situation, the risk of an indiscretion, truthful or otherwise, can only be greater and this will not serve to facilitate the debate. Furthermore, as soon as there is no objective justification for "secrecy",

violation of secrecy becomes plausible to a certain extent.

The Parliament might see this attitude as a breach of its rights to be kept informed and the role that is rightly its, since it is directly effected by the reforms laid down in the Report and indisputably has competence in institutional matters. It would therefore be a good idea to make sure that the steps that have been taken be made somewhat more flexible.

Em.G.