

‘The Tindemans Report: all right for some governments (and the "powerful forces"?), from Europe (19-20 January 1976)

Caption: In his editorial of 19–20 January 1976, Emanuele Gazzo, Editor-in-Chief of Agence Europe, condemns the lack of ambition, particularly of a federalist nature, in the Tindemans Report on European Union.

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The Tindemans Report: all right for some governments (and the "powerful forces"?)

The debate on the Tindemans Report has only just begun. The presentation of the document by the author brought a variety of reactions. It has been discussed in the European Parliament, and in recent days at the socialist conference in Elsinore, It will doubtless be developed at the congress organized by the European Movement in Brussels at the beginning of February, and, very probably, by the "Val Duchesse Group" (the Monnet Committee's successor) whose authority and experience will undoubtedly be profitable. And then, of course, there will be the debate within the European Council, in March,

For our part - after the remarks on the aspects of the Report which struck us most (see Editorials of 8 and 9 January) - we are going to contribute to this debate with an analysis of the general guidelines and proposals contained in the Report, of which there are well over fifty, leaving aside the "sub-proposals" or simple suggestions. This incidentally explains why at the moment reactions and comments are of a rather general nature.

Let us first of all remember the actual aim of the report which Mr Tindemans was requested to produce. This report was to define what was to be understood by the concept of "European Union". This concept had not been formulated in a theoretical context, "European Union" should be, according to the 1972 Summit deliberations, a development of the Community, hence something going "beyond" the Community's objectives.

In short, the report was to show what Mr Leo Tindemans, in his own capacity, and on the basis of the reports already produced by the Institutions and on the opinions gathered from all circles concerned, thought European Union should be. Let us say straight away that the impression gained from carefully reading the 80 pages of the Report (including the letter to the Heads of Government) is that it expresses what, according to Mr Tindemans, most of his colleagues, or the most influential among them, think European Union should be. That is quite another matter. Confirmation of this is to be found in the accompanying letter, in which Mr Tindemans writes that that any reproach other than the one he adopted "would lose all credibility with the parties in power". The author was thus anxious to be credible to the parties in power. It is in this sense that the Tindemans Report is a "political" report and that it reflects, as he said, a "feasible" Europe, that is to say a Europe which does not go beyond what (according to Mr Tindemans) the governments can be asked to do. And yet Mr Tindemans had assured us that he had questioned the "powerful forces" at length. What did he do with the will, or at least the wishes of these "powerful forces"?

A reading of the various proposals shows that most of them, and the most significant among them, have been carefully selected from among those which are known to be "acceptable" for one or the other country, and more especially for Germany. This confirms the "political" and "realistic" nature of the Report (it is normal that Mr Tindemans should want to see his arguments succeed and that he should seek the support of the most powerful country), but does not serve the Community cause. There is already too much said to the effect that the Community is dominated by Germany, and anything backing up this unjustified allegation should be avoided.

All the more so as one would say that Mr Tindemans, in sketching out a Europe which is known beforehand to be to the liking of all the governments, is going against his own convictions. Does he not write in his accompanying letter that "Europe will only fulfil its destiny if it espouses federalism"? Why then did he not say so in his report? That in no way ruled out concrete proposals concerning a stage of the way to be taken. It is by knowing where one is going that progress is most assured.

In declining to propose a broader horizon, Mr Tindemans exposed himself to accusations of excessive caution. After explaining very clearly what the powerful forces would like from Europe, he withdrew into what the chancelleries are prepared to concede. And even his most courageous proposals are obscured by the disappointment following the confident expectations.

Em. G.