

'The Tindemans Report: triumph for "moderation"', from Europe (8 January 1976)

Caption: In his editorial of 8 January 1976, Emanuele Gazzo, Editor-in-Chief of Agence Europe, gives lukewarm support to the proposals set out in the Tindemans Report on European Union.

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Tindemans Report: triumph for "moderation"

The Prime Minister of Belgium, Mr Tindemans explained to the press this afternoon, in addition to the content of his Report (summarized in today's Bulletin), the purpose of his mission and the ideas which guided him. Mr Tindemans is a "European of long standing" and his federalist faith is indisputable. He was entrusted with a mission which enabled him to acquire, as he acknowledged himself, an exceptionally broad knowledge of the state of public opinion in Europe. Admittedly he met in many circles with great scepticism and with widespread incredulity. This shocked him deeply, and enabled him to gauge the risk of a total collapse of the European idea, and thus of the construction based on that idea.

However, this scepticism, if we understand him correctly, in no way concerns the need to forge ahead swiftly in the direction of European unification, but the fact that the Governments really want to commit themselves politically and by concrete measures to this goal. There is thus a "crisis of credibility" which has moreover existed for a long time: it does not concern Europe but those who are to build it.

What ought to have been the appropriate reaction in these circumstances? That is to say, what was the aim of a Report on European Union? Logically, to provide evidence of the contrary, to demonstrate the European will of the governments, to put forward proposals which, if they were accepted by the governments would prove the existence of this will, and consequently would make it possible to mobilize public opinion. On the other hand, if they were rejected, it would then be possible to apportion the responsibilities clearly and definitely. In addition, they would make their author the real spokesman of that Europe which is always waiting and which will one day be established by the nations, if the governments continue to behave as they are doing (but then it will be very different from what they imagine).

Mr Tindemans in short had to make a choice - let us state clearly that it was a difficult choice - between Utopia and moderation. He chose the moderate line. He did this doubtless with the conviction - and herein lies the justification - that what he proposes is the best way to safeguard what has been achieved but also to preserve and prepare the future. He must be given credit for this. We would note however that from several points of view his report is a step behind that of the European Commission (which, it is true, was of a different nature).

Undoubtedly moderation makes it possible to find concrete solutions to concrete problems: we must keep our feet on the ground! Nonetheless, when one speaks of qualitative change, of a new society, etc. one is entering the realms of revolutionary language. And the building of Europe, or rather of a certain Europe is a revolutionary act. We know of no revolution which did not have the aim of Utopia at its origins. That does not mean that there should be a desire to do "everything at once". Revolutions in no way rule out patience...

These first general, but fundamental, remarks must not lead to the conclusion that the Tindemans Report does not have a very dense and at times courageous content. Mr Tindemans very aptly identified a whole series of points on which he proposed concrete courses of action.

But that is precisely what must prompt thorough consideration of each of the proposals: some point to real and positive results. Over others there are question-marks. Much remains to be said. After a first reading of the text the feeling is that many of the proposals merely take up ideas expressed at a very high level: they may consequently become alibis for those who launched them. Let us mention at this stage the rather surprising idea, of dividing the Community convoy in two, taking it for granted that one group of Member States will always be behind the others. How can the whole convey be brought into port, we asked Mr Tindemans. We are awaiting his reply. Similarly, in the institutional field, some proposals have an "appearance" which may hide a dangerous "substance": We shall return to all these problems. As Mr Tindemans said: the debate is now open.

Em. G.