

"The three "Wise Men" and the European Parliament' from Europe

Caption: In his editorial of 24 October 1979, Emanuele Gazzo, Editor-in-chief of Agence Europe, comments on the proposals included in the report by the Committee of the Three Wise Men, with regard to the development of the Community institutional system and, in particular, the strengthening of the powers of the European Parliament.

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The three "Wise Men" and the European Parliament

The running of Europe's institutional system could be improved by 1 January 1981. On this date, the Community will undergo a "transformation" since it will comprise ten countries. It will have to start even then its preparations to take in another two countries in the following two years. This means that the system of running the institutional and administrative structures need to be adapted to the new circumstances, the new size and the problems that will inevitably arise (and are arising already) now, if it wants to avoid ultimate confusion and paralysis.

On the same date, a new Commission will take office and within a few months, the Heads of Government will probably start thinking about the new members and more particularly who will be the new President, in line - and perhaps with a few slight alterations - with the procedure followed in 1976 when Roy Jenkins was appointed. This procedure has its advantages but a few disadvantages too. In view of the manifold aspects involved, it would be pointless here to mention the range of possibilities that are open in this not very wide choice. The choice made by the Heads of Government will in itself be a significant hint as to the role they expect the European Commission to play.

The Parliament can indirectly start to exert a considerable amount of influence on this choice, by showing clearly and whenever the opportunity arises what role it expects the Commission to play. This was one of the major points in a question raised by Mr Ruffolo and allies for discussion yesterday evening. Of course, the Parliament may also, as it has in the past, demand "observer status" for the appointment of the Commission President. The fact that the Parliament has been directly elected puts it in an even stronger position.

Having said this, it is clear that the preparatory measures, which sometimes turn out to be "major manoeuvres", for this institutional change must not be delayed. The first was publication of the Spierenburg Report, a section of which deals exclusively with administrative (but important) questions, but which also looks into problems that arise from the role and structure of the institution. For example, it discusses the number of Commission members. Will there be a Commission of 10 members on 1 January 1981? It's possible. Is it likely to have just one Vice President as suggested in the Spierenburg Report? This is not so easy as the so-called "merger" treaty would need to be amended.

But by far the most important aspect of this preparatory phase is undoubtedly the report submitted to the Heads of Government by the three "Wise Men". The Foreign Ministers, who have only had a brief summary of it so far (at Ashford Castle) will examine this report of a hundred pages or so.

If the information we have received is correct, this paper starts with an analysis of the Community's institutional situation as laid down in the Treaties and as it has developed, in the way it is run, until recent years, going through all the successive changes and adaptations. Then, it goes on to describe what changes are likely to come in the near future. The proposals contained in the Report cover changes that would be needed between 1981 and 1985. It is not intended to be a paper outlining an "ideal" structure or theoretical aims leaning to any one doctrine. The measures the Wise Men suggest in it are intended to improve the running of the institutions, eliminate bottle necks in the decision-making process and anomalies in the institutional balance. EUROPE has already reported (Political Day of 20 October) on some of the major aspects of these proposals.

Apart from confirmation of the independent role of the Commission and the need for the Commission to work in line with the Treaty, and the proposal that COREPER be given a central role (with the possibility of taking decisions and efforts to coordinate the activities of the various Councils horizontally and vertically), the Report confers on an "institutionalised" European Council a much better defined role, which slots into the institutional pattern and the Community's legislative process.

The Report leaves no room for doubt that the nucleus of activities (or manoeuvres) that will take place between now and mid-1980 will involve the European Council's role and more especially the relations that will be established between all the institutions. Over and above any debate on doctrine, everyone must try

and see as clearly as possible what should stay and what must go. We have drawn attention - in our recent editorials - to certain problems, especially how long the Council's term of office should be. This question was raised during the work done by the three "Wise Men".

The most directly affected institution is without a doubt the European Parliament. The fact that it has been elected gives it unprecedented authority. The Parliament should make its demands known and get itself into - before positions become too rigid - the process that is about to be started, so that it can make sure its part in drafting EEC legislation is not pushed aside by procedural ruses. The debate on the Ruffolo motion shows quite clearly that the Parliament is aware how big a problem this is.

Em. G.