

'Giscard–Schmidt: A European revival' from La Croix (3 September 1974)

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Giscard-Schmidt: A European revival

In the present economic upheaval, the Giscard-Schmidt dinner held at the Élysée Palace on Monday evening constitutes an event in itself. But the most important aspect for the future is certainly that it should be possible to adopt such initiatives in this way and at this speed.

This is the third time in less than four months that the two men have held face-to-face meetings to compare their views on the difficulties that Europe faces. And it is the second time that they have done it on an informal basis, outside the pattern of the two-yearly Franco-German summits inherited from de Gaulle; enough for us to be able to see, in the Franco-German duo, the driving force behind a Community of Nine which is seeking to 'rediscover itself'.

The current situation determined what was on the dinner menu for the French President and the German Chancellor. The German side said that it was interested by the plans for a political Europe which Mr Giscard d'Estaing outlined in his televised speech last Tuesday. It was in Bonn that the remarks made by the Head of State, who believes that Europe must rely only on itself in shaping its future, received the most favourable hearing.

On the French side, the expectation was that Mr Schmidt would set out his ideas for a European policy to combat inflation; not long ago, the German Chancellor had given an interview to the New York Times alluding to Europe's fears regarding an American economic policy that is too self-sufficient. These fears are shared by Mr Giscard d'Estaing; in an interview with well-known leader writer James Reston, the President of the Republic said that '**General de Gaulle was right in thinking that the world simply could not tolerate American deficits of more than 100 billion dollars**'.

A floating international monetary system is also beneficial, technically speaking, but 'it is very worrying psychologically and politically,' Mr Giscard d'Estaing is reported to have said.

The two statesmen do, of course, have immediate concerns: Italy, for which, after the loan that Mr Schmidt has just granted to Mr Rumor, something will now have to be done to organise genuinely Community-wide mutual support; and the Cyprus crisis, a situation where the Nine are having great difficulty in making their views heard but which France wants to take advantage of in order to attach Greece to Europe as quickly as possible (the Greek Foreign Minister is coming to Paris this week, after a stopover in Brussels).

But they must also give some thought straight away to the medium, or indeed the long, term. The medium term means the European Summit which Mr Giscard d'Estaing wants to convene before the end of the French Presidency, in other words before the end of the year.

It would be going too far to say that the omens for the scheme are as good as they could be. Britain is staying on the touchline, at least until after the general election expected to be held in October. Most of the Member States make it a condition that a Summit should deliver some tangible results; this could only be in the area of economic and monetary union, but, to date, the every-man-for-himself policy has made much more headway than Community-based reactions.

The Summit should also be capable of giving some indication of how European unity, as scheduled for 1980 since the Paris Summit, will look. If we are to believe the confidential remarks made thus far by Mr Giscard d'Estaing, France remains attached to the prospects of a confederation which Mr Jobert borrowed from Mr Pompidou after the latter's death.

But what Europe needs just as much as prospects is a climate of trust and a more dynamic style. Here, the solidity of Franco-German cooperation is a good omen. Present conditions are propitious, the new rulers of the Western world, be they Ford, Schmidt or Giscard, are in favour of more flexible, more 'realistic' and more direct cooperation. We still need to be able to exploit it as rapidly as possible.

We cannot, however, fail to see that this Franco-German cooperation also disguises fierce competition for

the leadership of Europe: Giscard and Schmidt are very obviously two men who mean to leave their mark on their era. But for the moment the thankless task of getting Europe out of the rut is the order of the day.

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