

'The Parliament and the Delors Plan' from Europe (10 March 1987)

Caption: On 10 March 1987, Emanuele Gazzo, Director of Agence Europe, emphasises the importance of the European Parliament debate on the Delors I Package on the reform of the Community budget.

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The Parliament and the Delors Plan

Wednesday's debate in the Parliament on the Delors plan will be of extreme importance and will probably help to sort out what is in fact a very worrying situation.

As we have already announced, the Commission's document is now in the hands of COREPER, which received it from the Foreign Ministers on 22 February, following a brief general discussion during which procedure was the main topic, although there was a taste of the difficult debates to come. As indicated in last Saturday's Bulletin, the Permanent Representatives decided to devote one afternoon per week to this document (which had already been explained to them by the Commission). Since it is planned that an initial report be submitted to Ministers for the Council session of 27 April, we can suppose that they will be holding five or six meetings on the Delors plan.

Since COREPER, because of its nature, needs to go into details, and given that some of these, especially those regarding Community financing, budgetary discipline and management regulations, means and functioning of the Structural Funds, etc., delicate and complex problems will arise, it would be easy to imagine that the Permanent Representatives will not reach unanimous positions and will not be able to propose final options to governments.

In other words, we have now entered an extremely dangerous phase, in which it is very easy to totally lose sight of the finalities of a project which is global in nature, and consequently to break up the debate into a huge number of separate issues, with the risk of solving neither the big nor the small problems.

How can we escape this deadlock? It is not easy, and circumstances are bound to increase the difficulties. Two negative factors in particular have arisen:

The first was the demand, expressed by the British Presidency just when the Commission was ready to draw up its final proposal, for a poll to be taken in the capitals. This took place given the German electoral demands and consequently only ended on 13 February in Bonn. After this, the Community immediately adopted its document on 15 February. A whole month wasted.

The second negative factor was the incident concerning the ratification process of the Single Act by Ireland and this despite the positive vote from the Dail, which came just in time. Today, we know that, in the best case, the coming into force of the Single Act can only happen on 1 April.

As compared with the forecasts made in December, three months have been wasted. Three months which have seriously affected the Belgian Presidency's strategy, according to which, by starting the debates in January on the Commission's proposals, it would not have been impossible to rapidly pass on to the political level, trying to overcome the main obstacles during an informal summit in the middle of March and thus obtain, at the June European Council, the necessary political agreement for taking some formal decision, especially with regard to financing, in time for the 1988 budget. It should not be forgotten that several Commission proposals must have their legal basis in the Single Act, as set out in the Act. This also applies to the establishment of the procedure known as cooperation with the European Parliament. Can the Commission introduce some procedures basing itself on Art. 253 EEC (as it did for the powers of execution)? This is an expedient which would not be of much use. The risk is that everything may topple and that — as some people are already proposing — a decision be taken as a conservatory measure, to raise the VAT ceiling to 1.6 for 1988. Then, nothing else will happen, except perhaps a few majority votes in order to complete the White Paper. The cards are down and the transformation of the market into an economic area will have ended.

Emanuele Gazzo