

'Did you say "European Political Cooperation"?' from Europe (7 October 1987)

Caption: On 7 October 1987, Emanuele Gazzo, Director of Agence Europe, condemns the inadequacy of the structures in place for the implementation of European Political Cooperation (EPC) and calls for EPC to be made a key component of the European Community.

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Did you say “European political cooperation”?

We are often visited by colleagues from far away who want to discover Europe, by young people who want to understand it, or by students preparing theses on “European” subjects. Recently we were able to see what a young student thought of European political cooperation. Titles on this subject are fewer in number than those on the economic and legal aspects of European construction, but the excellent book by Philippe de Schoutheete, the second edition of which has a preface by Etienne Davignon, is full of basic references. However, in general, political cooperation is seen as a sort of supplement to, if not a “surplus” of the concrete substance of the Community, which is “economic.” It is a little difficult to make it understood that a desire for political cooperation is a necessary pre-condition for economic union. In other words, the aim of the unification of Europe is to create a distinct political entity, of which a pillar is obviously economic and monetary union. This is not an abstraction, since in the Schuman statement of 9 May 1950, as in the introductions to the European treaties, this goal has been clearly stated.

Political cooperation such as it is today, is an ensemble of behavioural norms, which are not constricting, in the area of national foreign policies, stemming from a lightweight structure, with, recently, a general Secretariat (with headquarters in Brussels) and a sophisticated network of inter-Ministerial communications. The public texts on which it is based start with the first “Davignon Report” in 1970, up to the one included in the European Single Act under Chapter III, which makes it, from the institutional point of view, an integral part of the Treaty of Rome. Paragraph 5 of art. 30 of the Single Act points to the link which exists between the process of economic integration and cooperation in matters of foreign policy. It says there that “the external policies of the European Community and the policies agreed upon within the EPC should be coherent.” One may wonder as to the degree of coherence attainable between on the one hand, the constricting dispositions contained in complex institutional procedures, and on the other all the results obtained in the search for a consensus.

The truth is that if Political Cooperation does not exceed its present level and is not transformed into a key element for the union of Europeans in order to express Europe’s political personality, it will be condemned to vegetate without this having any practical effect on Europe’s weight as such on the world stage. Without under-estimating the usefulness of information exchanges and consultations which at times take place, a structure such as the existing one could well be included in and function within the framework of the Strasbourg Council of Europe, thus being extended to countries which either do not or cannot become Members of the Community, but which share in common a very great vision of tomorrow’s Europe, based on an inter-governmental cooperation which would leave the States free reign.

Unfortunately, EPC can only be judged on concrete results, and not on speeches or appeals which remain hollow. One only has to look at the desperate spectacle of the Twelve faced with the Gulf crisis: some countries sent ships but each were careful to point out that this was a purely national operation. This also holds true for the first step taken on the path to nuclear disarmament.

This seems to have caused a “European leap”. Only seems to: we should look carefully. Was this not a series of “national leads” which, it is true, caused some reactions, but from which no real “European voice” stemmed? Another disappointing spectacle: the UN votes. Having recorded an improvement in cohesion, statistics show that national interests are more important than European interests. A final example: the election of the Director-General of UNESCO. It would have been normal that a “European choice” had been made. But far from it. As a headline in a newspaper says, everything ends up with “Byzantine intrigues between Paris, Bonn and Washington.” Farewell Europe!

Emanuele Gazzo