

'European Political Union: Deadlock ... or a fresh departure?' from the Courrier Socialiste Européen (May 1962)

Caption: In May 1962, following the failure of the Paris Conference of ECSC Foreign Ministers, Fernand Dehousse comments, in an article published in the monthly Courrier socialiste européen, on the serious disagreements persisting between the Six with regard to the creation of a political Europe.

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European Political Union:

Deadlock ... or a fresh departure?

by Fernand Dehousse

The Conference held in Paris on 17 April and attended by the Foreign Ministers of the Six did not end in success ...

No formal agreement was reached on any issue, even those which previous discussions seemed to have settled. Examples include maintaining the status of the existing Communities and a commitment to considering NATO as the sole framework within which to organise the defence of the Six, two policy lines which, it had been thought, were no longer the subject of controversy.

And while the possibility of a mandatory review at the end of three or four years was indeed evoked, not all the implications seem to have been clarified nor all the reservations cleared.

There is, thus, no early prospect of a draft treaty and, for the first time in many a moon, the Six broke up without even agreeing on a firm date for their next meeting.

This has created a worrying situation, a European political vacuum, on the edges of which sharply opposing views are vying for favour. Something will have to be done to bridge that chasm if the process of European integration is not to stall for a substantial period, as happened in the aftermath of the rejection of the EDC.

The position adopted by Belgium and the Netherlands was the major event at the Paris Conference and also the main stumbling block.

This has been interpreted in a number of ways. The most common interpretation is that the two countries are driven by a fear of being duped on two counts: firstly, of agreeing to a treaty confined simply to European cooperation; and, secondly, of doing so without any guarantee that the United Kingdom will indeed join the Common Market and, subsequently, become part of the projected political union.

Some have gone even further, however, relying on a statement attributed to Paul-Henri Spaak, according to which he, too, would be unwilling to sign a genuine treaty of integration in the absence of British involvement.

These two approaches are, of course, entirely theoretical in so far as the position adopted by the Foreign Office and recently reaffirmed by Edward Heath is significantly closer to European cooperation than European integration.

Perhaps Mr Spaak has, on this occasion, reacted as a Belgian Minister rather than adhering to the sort of European line of conduct to which he has accustomed us. There is still some way to go before the Rue de la Loi adjusts fully to the Franco-German tandem. And, while it is no longer fearful of violent shocks, the risk of hegemony remains a matter of concern. It is only natural then that it should turn to the United Kingdom as an arbiter and protector. The Netherlands are doing likewise, for much the same reasons.

All the same, it is far from possible to speak of a Paris–Bonn axis within the six Member States! One need only to look at the conflicts concerning agricultural policy which, in January, came close to derailing the transition from the first to the second phase of the Common Market.

At all events, a negative attitude, for whatever reason, itself constitutes a risk. Any such attitude will or may reinforce the East's conviction that Europe's contradictions will never really be overcome and that the great political rapprochement which is supposed to crown the entire process is nowhere near happening. This

could, sooner or later, give rise to further crises.

This is the weakness in the stance taken by Belgium and the Netherlands and in the manifesto recently published by a number of eminent Germans, including Heinrich von Brentano and our friend Karl Mommer.

That particular document is more dogmatic than the line taken by Mr Spaak and Joseph Luns, and it bears no trace of the concerns which exercise the smaller countries. In limiting the choice before the Six to one between a treaty of cooperation and a treaty of integration, it poses the problem in terms such that a formal statement of disagreement is, once again, a real prospect, given that several of the six Member States will not, and rightly so, wish to settle for cooperation alone while, on the French side, integration is a non-starter.

This two-way monologue could go on for a long time. The fact is that it will come to an end only when each party decides to concede some ground.

The time has come for French diplomacy to recognise that its doctrine of a 'Europe of the Motherlands' has no chance of winning the argument.

That doctrine is swimming against the tide of history, against the broad thrust of developments in Europe. It is, moreover, powerless to achieve its own aims, amounting, as it does, to a form of pure intergovernmental cooperation accompanied by the unanimity rule, a technique whose shortcomings, or, at the very least, whose cumbersome nature, are known from long experience.

The solution would seem, therefore, to lie not in an attempt to find a 'middle way', which, in this context, would be synonymous with vagueness and verbiage, but in a process which is on the way to proving its worth, namely the establishment of the Common Market.

Rather than envisaging a review that would take place at the end, a review whose precise purpose and consequences are not at all clear, why not take over the scheme adopted in the Treaty of Rome, with its phases, milestones and gradually expanding powers?

The beginnings could be modest enough, and the first milestone quite a way into the future. What really matters is for Europe to decide to get started as a political entity, to make a fresh start. The rest will then fall into place, as results are achieved.

As for the United Kingdom, whose accession is desired by all good Europeans, it would discover in this empirical approach to the problem concepts and methods with which it is familiar and which would facilitate its participation in political union.

A procedure proposed in the Plevin report and adopted unanimously by the European Parliament in December would be well worth considering here. That procedure, designed to eliminate manoeuvring, consisted in restricting entry to the political union to the Members of the Community and, at the same time, making such entry a right that is secured automatically, without a vote, as soon as it is claimed.

In this way, the discussions could be resumed without delay, and there would be no need to postpone the first steps towards political union until a fairly long way into the future (some three years, if one counts the time that will elapse before the United Kingdom joins the Common Market and the duration of new seven-country negotiations).

The point cannot be made often enough that the real threat to European integration lies in labyrinthine complexities which the general public is hard pressed to understand and in postponements which indicate an inability to act.

It is to be hoped that the politicians dealing with these issues will all grasp this point, even if, for a limited

period, political doctrines have to concede some ground.