

Statement by Leo Tindemans (7 January 1976)

Caption: On 7 January 1976, in Brussels, Belgian Prime Minister Leo Tindemans publishes his Report on European Union.

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Nearly everyone I spoke to felt that there was no better future for their country than through the establishment of a united Europe; but at the same time public opinion is confused and sceptical because so little has been actually achieved and because of the lack of real political will.

As a man of politics, I am well aware that you cannot overcome misgivings and scepticism by the creation of legal structures or by declarations of intention. The only right way to go about this is to put in hand work on properly *interrelated measures having a specific objective*. This is the fundamental consideration I had in mind when I drafted the report.

I describe European Union not as the definitive arrangement terminating the road towards the unification of Europe, but as a further, essential stage during which a *qualitative change* will take place in the relations between the Nine. This will entail:

(i) for the *Community*, consolidation and a deepening of roots;

(ii) for the *Member States*, further commitments concerning the objectives to be attained, practical progress to be made in the immediate future, and the strengthening of the Institutions which are our security for ongoing progress towards the jointly agreed objective.

This set of interrelated commitments constitutes the change which is the main feature of the European Union, and distinguishes it from the present stage of European unification.

I therefore suggest that the European Council should take as a first objective the *definition of the goals to be reached* during the European Union, relating these goals to the key underlying wishes of our peoples. The public must be properly informed as to what the policy-goal of European Union entails and as to what considerations it is based upon; the endorsement of public opinion is indispensable.

I then dealt with *external relations* because I noticed during my visits how keenly aware we all are of the loss of influence of our countries in world affairs and of the growing vulnerability of our way of life. I make proposals designed to enable Europe to work out policies based on greater solidarity in the various fields of external relations, including security, with a view to obtaining a better hearing for Europe in international relations. The aim is also to go beyond coordination, with the Nine undertaking to reach common positions.

There can be no genuine external policy if the European Union is not based on common policy with regard to internal matters. Consequently I could not neglect economic and monetary questions in my report. Clearly the European Union must eventually entail a common economic and monetary policy. And yet, of all the topics discussed during my talks, this was undoubtedly the most delicate and intractable. Here I am proposing to the European Council a new Community approach which is obviously not perfect but which at least has the merit of attempting to overcome the current obstacles which of late have forced us actually to yield ground in this area. Failure to act in a matter as fundamental as this could well endanger the very fabric of the European structure: the 'acquis communautaire'—the gains made over the years—could easily be lost if these problems are neglected.

But the European Union will be incomplete if it does not offer, in the economic and social field, a concept of the post-industrial society which respects the basic values of our society while reconciling individuals' rights with those of the various social groups. I have therefore also made suggestions in this field.

European Union is not a matter only for the States or the Governments: it concerns the European citizen as well. Accordingly I have made suggestions designed to ensure that the citizens of Europe will benefit directly from the changes to be made in the relations between the States.

The European Union will, then, be achieved through an ongoing process, but if progress is to be made along the lines advocated, stronger and more effective common institutions are needed. The implications of two

key decisions taken recently—direct elections to the Parliament and the establishment of the European Council—must be fully realized. The report also contains proposals designed to ensure more effective working of the Council of Ministers, to enable the Commission to make a fuller contribution to our joint enterprise, and lastly to allow of delegation of implementing powers, a measure which is indispensable.

Under my terms of reference, I could have submitted a very different report; I could have emphasized the legal structures, described the constitutional framework which I believed to be the right one for Europe in the future, or again simply summarized the proposals submitted to me. I have not done this, because I am convinced that Europe cannot move towards a federal pattern, in which I believe, unless we accept practical commitments in key areas to bring about that qualitative change in our relations which is essential if we are to make irreversible progress towards the Union.

My mission was a political one. My political report has a twofold objective:

- (i) that of defining an overall approach providing a framework for relevant action in the member countries in coming years;
- (ii) that of pointing out at the same time a number of practical measures which must be adopted simultaneously in the various directions entailed by the overall approach.

Concluding, I should like to draw attention to a key factor: the credibility of our undertaking. I have already indicated that this factor had led me to prepare a political report advocating practical and major progress along interrelated lines rather than to propose any new legal framework or to list possible alternatives. It is because I believe that Europe must gain in credibility both within its frontiers and outside that I argue that it must always express a single viewpoint on key world problems, that it will neglect major economic and monetary problems at its peril, that it must be in a position to propose a model for society, that it must be close to the citizen and that it must strengthen its power to act, in other words its institutions. But credibility does not depend only upon the Governments: it is also dependent upon public opinion. If this report were to prompt a general debate in Europe on the various aspects of the case for a united Europe and on the implications of the political choice made by certain States twenty years ago and by others more recently, I should feel, for my part, for this reason alone, that my work had not been entirely in vain, since it would have made a contribution to preparatory work on the choice which must be made if it is desired that 'Europe' as a single entity should have a future.