

'The rude awakening' from L'Europe en formation (1988)

Caption: In its summer 1988 editorial, the federalist magazine L'Europe en formation criticises the European policy being pursued by the British Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, and calls on the founding countries not to relax their efforts to create a united Europe, with particular regard to political and monetary union.

Source: L'Europe en formation. Eté 1988, n° 282. Nice. "La douche froide", p. 3-6.

Copyright: (c) Translation CVCE.EU by UNI.LU

All rights of reproduction, of public communication, of adaptation, of distribution or of dissemination via Internet, internal network or any other means are strictly reserved in all countries.

Consult the legal notice and the terms and conditions of use regarding this site.

URL:

http://www.cvce.eu/obj/the_rude_awakening_from_l_europe_en_formation_1988-en-e6465e44-1341-4da7-9da3-7cc2e3a94417.html



Last updated: 05/07/2016

The rude awakening

Editorial

FOR the Community, the month of August ended on a high note. Having re-appointed Jacques Delors as President of the Commission, the European Council meeting in Hanover tasked him with completing the internal market in accordance with the 'plan' that bears his name, and to chair a committee to come up with proposals for finally establishing the economic and monetary union that, according to earlier promises, should have been completed by the end of the 1970s!

Decisions in principle on 'Europe-wide diplomas' and 'Europe-wide investments' had just been taken, thanks to the dynamic German Presidency. Also, the Community had just been officially recognised by the Comecon countries. On top of all this, European opinion polls were indicating that all was well.

In a word, everything was going fine in the Eurosphere when a spanner was thrown into the works. Margaret Thatcher decided to pour cold water over the most ardent fans of Europe who, here and there, were, according to *her* view of things, beginning to mistake their wishes for reality. There is not the slightest ambiguity in what she said on 27 July to the BBC. It was a warning shot aimed at Jacques Delors, who had gone so far as to say and to write that the European Parliament could share the task of law-making with national parliaments. He had also called on the Twelve to consider whether it was time to take 'the first steps towards a European government'. Heresy! Already annoyed by the excitement in continental minds over the possibility of a European central bank, the Iron Lady simply let rip.

No question of transferring Westminster's powers to this papier-maché Assembly sitting in Strasbourg. No question of accepting those 'far-fetched and absurd ideas' held by the austere but also extremely realistic Commission President. No question of moving towards a United States of Europe or even a European union (which is a neutered version of it or an ambiguous title open to dubious interpretation).

For good measure, Maggie also decided not to extend the appointments of the very conservative Lord Cockfield and Labour's Clinton Davis in the European Commission. Since everyone knew that she bore a grudge against Lord Cockfield for the independence that he maintained concerning the harmonisation of VAT rates and the European central bank, the recalling of this Lord who had 'gone native' in Brussels was a surprise to no one.

Even more revealing was the Prime Minister's decision to replace the current Vice-President of the Community's executive body with Lord Brittan, a controversial figure at home in Britain, having been forced to resign as minister in 1986 over the circumstances surrounding his choice of a non-European solution during the attempts to salvage the Westland helicopter company. It is even being rumoured that Lord Brittan cannot say no to Margaret Thatcher and has become her 'lapdog'. Also, the new Labour-leaning Commissioner, Bruce Millan, voted against Britain joining the Community in 1972 and in 1975.

In any case, the honeymoon period is over in Brussels. After all, it did last from February 1987 to the following July, or from the February European Council, which accepted practically all of the Commission's ideas, up to the Hanover Council. We are now entering a turbulent and uncertain period under the Greek Presidency. That does not mean we must give up. On the contrary, we must have the courage to react quickly. If the United Kingdom, which never agreed to join the exchange mechanism of the European Monetary System, is against setting up a European central bank, is that sufficient reason for dropping the monetary initiative that is essential for achieving the single market? And if the United Kingdom does not yet want to give serious consideration to joining a genuine European political community, why should we delay in launching the process that will allow us to achieve that ultimate goal?

Jean Monnet, who greatly admired the British people's democratic virtues and who lobbied tirelessly for UK membership of the Community, used to say, 'Make it a reality and Britain will turn up.' The Six have made it a reality, despite the efforts of Her Majesty's Government at the time to support the large free-trade area. Great Britain was quick to realise that it had taken the wrong turning and joined the Community as soon as

the opportunity arose. If her partners now have the will to move towards monetary and political union, despite all opposition, the United Kingdom will not remain plunged in melancholy isolation for long. It is first and foremost Paris, Bonn, Rome and the Benelux countries, the founding countries, that have to take up the challenge; and why not also that young democracy, Spain, which is opening up to Europe.

In the 1950s and 1960s, the fledgling European Economic Community had to live with a difficult individual, General de Gaulle. The Community model was based more upon federalist ideas and Jean Monnet's approach, rather than on the ideas and methods of the man of 18 June 1940. It took considerable effort for French governments over the years to finally accept the idea of majority voting, European popular sovereignty and 'own resources' to fund the Community budget. It will probably take many more years to make the British brake an accelerator on the road to European unity. But once again we have no choice. We must go forward and allow no doubt as to our determination.

While advocating this attitude we are not forgetting that many British people have recently shown themselves to be as convinced as we are about the need to 'build Europe' in a federal way. Taking names at random, it is the case with Edward Heath, Shirley Williams, David Owen, George Thomson, Roy Jenkins and many others, particularly Lord Cockfield at the Commission in Brussels and Lord Catherwood in the European Parliament. The approach of the current British President of the European Union of Federalists, John Pinder, does not differ from our own. We are also thinking of Jean Monnet's many British friends, of activists in the Federal Trust, of some groups in Conservative and Labour circles, and also of the Liberals, the Social Democrats and the City.

It is precisely by working closely with pro-Europeans in Britain that we should now take the initiative. If we don't, we will only disappoint and discourage them. We need no 'green light' from Margaret Thatcher, but since, true to herself, she only believes in realities, then let's create those realities, with or without her!

L'Europe en formation