

'It would be better to have a crisis...' from Crocodile

Caption: In April 1994, the Federalist journal Crocodile wonders whether the Twelve have made sufficient efforts to prepare the European Union for its forthcoming enlargement.

Source: Crocodile. Letter to the Parliaments of Europe. March-April 1994. Brussels.

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‘It would be better to have a crisis...’

The Twelve negotiated the Maastricht Treaty for a Community of...Twelve. It was to be finalised by the revision process in 1996 and completed by the advent of the single currency by 1999 at the latest.

Since increasing number of European countries were knocking at the doors of the Community, the Twelve decided to offer the European Economic Area to the wealthy countries of the EFTA and to offer Association Agreements to the poor countries of Visegrad.

These offers were accompanied by asking them to wait until the start of the next millennium to enter the Community. In this respect the minutes of the meetings of the Intergovernmental Conference which led to the adoption of the Maastricht Treaty are instructive. If the Crocodile Newsletter can have the necessary means, it will remove these texts from its files and make a present of them to its subscribers.

Developments after signature of the Maastricht Treaty, and in particular the Danish ‘No’ in the referendum of 2 June 1992, and the skilful manoeuvres of the British Foreign Office have wrecked this timetable. Thus the European Council in June 1992 decided in Lisbon to open negotiations with Austria, Finland, Norway and Sweden with a view to their accession before the 1996 revision.

Since Lisbon, confident and authoritative voices have been raised to emphasise the risks of widening without deepening and to request due reflection of the Twelve on the indispensable institutional changes for an enlarged Union.

Our readers will recall the declarations of Jacques Delors, Felipe Gonzalez, Ruud Lubbers, Beniamino Andreatta, Willy Claes, Alain Lamassoure...the benefit of which European citizens have enjoyed thanks to the transparency which marks the activities of the Union today.

Despite these declarations, the Lisbon timetable has been kept to up till now. This makes us think that these declarations were not restated in the appropriate places, i.e. in the meetings of the European Council or of the Council of Ministers, but rather that they were made as it were in the spirit of a Working Man's Pub.

Having advanced their cause by means of the Lisbon calendar the English sought also to put their stamp on the 1996 revision. Enlargement was to comprise a strengthening of the national sovereignty of each country and thus a weakening of the decision-making of the Union. Beyond the false squabble on the blocking minority this was the basic purpose of the action led by John Major and Douglas Hurd in respect of the balance of votes within the Council.

They have won twice thanks to the Greek compromise at Ioannina (text published at page 8) which allows decision-making paralysis again, reminiscent of the Luxembourg Compromise, and this despite the last-minute braying of Jean Luc Dehaene, Theodoros Pangalos and Alain Lamassoure at the Convention of the International European Movement in Brussels, the 25 March 1994.

The thimbles are now on the table of the European Parliament in which a great majority has repeatedly proclaimed its opposition to widening without deepening. It will certainly be difficult for the European Parliament to swallow the Ioannina Compromise and to place its hopes in the hands of a ‘Comité de Sages’ whose task and influence will be more in line with the Dooge Committee of 1984 than with the Spaak Committee of 1955 or the Delors Committee of 1988.

‘It would be better to have a crisis than a bad compromise’ declared Jacques Delors to the seven hundred delegates at the International European Movement Convention. This is a message which the European Parliament will have to take very seriously or which at least a minority of MEPs, capable of blocking the assent on the accession treaties and so placing the thimbles on the table of the next European Parliament, will have to heed.