

Pascal Fontaine, Jean Monnet's role in the birth of the European Council (September 1979)

Caption: In an article published in September 1979 in the Revue du Marché commun, Pascal Fontaine, lecturer at the Paris Institute of Political Studies, gives an account of the events which led Jean Monnet, at that time Chairman of the Action Committee for the United States of Europe, to propose, from 1973, to the Heads of State and Government of the Community Member States that they should meet regularly in the form of a 'provisional European government' in order to give new impetus to European unification.

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Jean Monnet's role in the birth of the European Council

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The European Council, which was formally established in December 1974, held its 15th meeting in Strasbourg on 21 and 22 June 1979. That supreme body, where the Heads of State or Government meet three times a year, is now part of the institutional fabric of the Community. It is too early to make a final assessment of the impact of that intergovernmental body on the functioning of the institutions set up by the Treaty of Rome. Like the elected Parliament, the European Council has democratic legitimacy, because its members are drawn from parliamentary majorities or, in the case of the French President, elected by universal suffrage. Moreover, it embodies the legitimacy of states and is, in a sense, related to diplomatic conferences that are essentially confederal.

Some regard the European Council as a disruptive factor in the Community's institutional system and believe that it could distort it by depriving it of its pre-federal potential. Others, however, believe that the European Council was instrumental in freeing Europe from the paralysis that had beset it once the major steps set out in the EEC Treaty had been taken. Only a body in which supreme power was concentrated could restore to Europe the political will that it lacked. Was it not thanks to the European Council that the decision was taken to have the European Parliament elected by universal suffrage and to set up the European Monetary System?

On the death on 16 March this year of Jean Monnet, hailed throughout the world as the inspiration for and most tireless promoter of European integration, some commentators reminded us that one of his final proposals specifically concerned the European Council. It was he, they said, who first put the idea to President Giscard d'Estaing.

In order to avoid any simplification of what is historical truth, it is worth recalling the conditions that led Jean Monnet to suggest, as early as 1973, to the Community Heads of Government that they should meet on a regular basis in order to give fresh impetus to European unification.

This document constitutes a kind of documentary of the events that were to lead the Chairman of the Action Committee for the United States of Europe to submit, first to Georges Pompidou, Edward Heath and Willy Brandt, then to Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, Helmut Schmidt and Harold Wilson, a proposal for a 'provisional European government'. With the necessary hindsight, we can understand why today's European Council is not exactly as Jean Monnet had imagined it.

The 'provisional European government' that was to lay the foundations of the European Union, the broad lines of which had first been marked out at the 1972 Summit, had as its main task to hold the Heads of Government personally accountable for their solemn commitment; in fact, it was more a question of defining a method of action for a transitional period than of a permanent institution of an intergovernmental type.

This study was written when its author had the privilege of assisting the Chairman of the Action Committee for the United States of Europe. It is based on the documents and notes written by Jean Monnet following his conversations with his main partners.

In his *Memoirs*, published in 1976, the founding father of Europe had already revealed essentially what he wanted to achieve. We are confining ourselves to casting further light on this by taking the reader to the very heart of a process that developed in the space of less than 18 months.

The Paris–Bonn–London triangle

The Action Committee met in Brussels on 3 May 1973. That 18th meeting did not arouse much public interest. True, some influential figures such as Herbert Wehner, Helmut Schmidt, Giovanni Malagodi, Gaston Defferre and

Pierre Werner were present and, like the other participants, approved the four resolutions. Yet neither the governments nor the Community institutions took on board the proposals on economic and monetary union, or the proposal to appoint two prominent figures to be responsible for listing the various monetary and commercial issues dividing the United States and Europe, or the idea of a European Community loan to contribute to the revival of backward regions.

In the view of the Chairman of the Committee, the context in which the issue of European integration arose in 1973 looked as follows:

— there was no systematic blocking, fuelled by ideological considerations, by one or other member of the Community;

— for more than three years, three men had headed the three major countries of the enlarged Community. Georges Pompidou, elected in June 1969, Willy Brandt, Chancellor since October 1969, and Edward Heath, Prime Minister since June 1970, had many points in common. They were of the same generation, had strong personalities and were pragmatic. Each of them was in favour of European integration. In particular, each of them was aware that the domestic difficulties that they had to tackle, both monetary and social, could be resolved only at European level, with the development of forms of organised solidarity.

— Those three men held the executive power in their own country. For some years, and for reasons that are, in fact, generally confirmed by the provisions of their constitutions, that executive power had continued to grow. External policy affected increasingly wide sectors that had a determining influence on their country's internal affairs. Conversely, the parliamentary forces complained of being marginalised, of having no power to intervene until the decision-making process had been concluded, in short of having less and less power.

Although Jean Monnet was a democrat and had a profound belief in the virtues of the parliamentary system, he found that the forces on which he was depending in order to act, the political parties and the trade unions, no longer constituted a strategic lever. He must, therefore, concentrate on influencing the heads of the executive of the three large Community countries.

At the Paris Summit, in October 1972, those countries and the other six set out the broad lines of a stage-by-stage plan that was to lead, in 1980, to a 'European Union'. In May 1973, the Committee said: 'The execution of this programme under the authority of the Heads of State or Government is the responsibility of the Community institutions.' However, Jean Monnet wondered how much decision-making capacity the European institutions actually had. The Committee had always supported the Commission, in particular when it was headed, between 1958 and 1967, by Walter Hallstein and then by Jean Rey (from 1967 to 1970). Jean Monnet tirelessly promoted the Community method, which he was largely responsible for inventing. He found, however, that the Brussels machinery had become less effective and feared that it had become too bureaucratic. He knew that, since the Luxembourg agreements (January 1966) and the quarrels between the Commission and the French Government, the *modus vivendi* had no longer been satisfactory. The Council of Ministers had the final say, and Ministers had become accustomed to upholding the interests of only the country that they represented. Since the Paris Summit, cynical or exasperated observers were counting the deadlines that had passed without decisions producing any results.

Jean Monnet gradually became convinced that the Heads of State or Government must be held directly accountable for meeting their commitments. That transfer of accountability was to be to the detriment of the 'technical Ministers' who had, hitherto, been responsible for implementing the decisions taken at summits. In fact, not only were technical Ministers tempted to act solely in the interests of their own country but, sometimes, they also upheld the interests only of their own Ministry. That led to a variety of blockages, a lack of coordination, a gradual distancing from the global approach that had formerly marked the decision-making of the Heads of State. The latter had to be convinced that it was up to them to ensure that their authority was respected: together, they must establish a genuine 'European authority'.

The proposal for a provisional European government

On the basis of those considerations, during August 1973, Jean Monnet drafted a note entitled ‘Constitution and action of a provisional European government’. It is divided into three parts. The first is an explanatory statement. It recalls the urgent need and importance for Europe to be united. The text was drafted as a joint declaration that would be signed by the nine Heads of State or Government of the Member States of the EEC who would decide to form themselves into a European provisional government.

The second part defines that government’s mandate: to ensure that the programme adopted in Paris on 19–21 October 1972 was carried out. To that end, it would do three things:

- ‘— whenever necessary, and after hearing the Presidents of the Council and the Commission of the European Communities, it shall issue instructions to the Ministers representing the Member States within the Council of the European Communities. It shall act in absolute accordance with the Treaties in force;
- within six months, it shall set up a committee to organise the European Union. It shall give it the necessary directives;
- it shall adopt the proposal for a European Union that will be submitted to the Member States for ratification.’

The outline of that European meeting had already been laid down at the 1972 Summit. Jean Monnet’s proposal offered the Heads of Government a method that would allow them to take practical action to follow up their statement of intent. In particular, it reminded them that it was essential to ensure personally that Ministers, as well as the organising committee responsible for drawing up a proposal for European union, were given precise instructions. In short, they had to ensure that their personal efforts resulted in a European Union.

The third part provides that ‘the provisional European government shall meet at least once every three months. Its deliberations shall be restricted to its members, who shall keep them secret’.

That meant institutionalising regular summits that were not purely formal. Those summits could resemble a Council of Ministers, at which secret deliberations allow for frank exchanges of view and a collegiate spirit.

That was a realistic project. It was not very different from the first Fouchet Plan (November 1961), which was abandoned because of General de Gaulle’s intransigence. Meanwhile, the French Government had changed. The time of the wars of religion had passed, and the pressures of necessity had changed people’s attitudes.

Getting the project off the ground

In late August, Jean Monnet had to decide to which of the three governments he should put his proposal. The wisest course would be, no doubt, to sound out the French Government, and in particular Michel Jobert, Minister for Foreign Affairs, who was totally devoted to President Pompidou. Although not a member of the Action Committee, Michel Jobert had been coming to Avenue Foch quite often to talk to Jean Monnet since the days when he had held the post of Secretary-General to the Presidency of the Republic.

Before meeting the French Minister, however, Jean Monnet contacted Edward Heath and Willy Brandt and, without specifying the purpose, arranged a meeting with each of them. He had known both men for a long time and was on terms of friendship and trust with both of them.

On 13 August, Robert Armstrong, the British Prime Minister’s personal adviser, sent him a letter. Following their recent telephone conversation, he referred to an invitation issued by Edward Heath. On 24 August, Jean Monnet replied that he would come to Chequers during September. A date was set: 16 September. Jean Monnet then wrote

to Willy Brandt. He told him of his fears: 'I believe that, as a body, the European institutions speak but do not act and that we may well be giving in to the easy option of not deciding anything. The decisions taken by the Community, to the extent that there are any, are usually determined by the administrations. The supreme political authority of the governments is not involved in the search for common solutions.' He asked to meet the Chancellor, and it was decided that he would go to Bonn on 19 September.

Jean Monnet knew, therefore, that he would be able to talk to Edward Heath and Willy Brandt about his proposal on 16 and 19 September. First, however, he had to be sure of the French reaction.

On 4 September, Michel Jobert invited Jean Monnet to lunch at the Quai d'Orsay. There, Jean Monnet would meet Robert Armstrong, a long-standing friend of the French Minister. The conversation revolved mainly round preparations for the meeting, in the context of political cooperation, of the Foreign Ministers of the Nine scheduled for 13 September in Copenhagen. The United Kingdom, supported by France, was going to propose that the Community should speak to the United States with a single voice, which would be that of the President of the Council of Ministers, even in the field of foreign policy. Michel Jobert confided to Jean Monnet that he considered that proposal extremely important; to ensure that he could uphold it in Copenhagen, he had decided not to accompany President Pompidou on his presidential visit to China but to join him a little later in Beijing.

Jean Monnet proposed another meeting to Michel Jobert. Four days later, therefore, they had another private meeting at the Quai d'Orsay. The Chairman of the Action Committee immediately addressed the subject of the Community's political authority. He handed to Michel Jobert the document entitled 'Constitution and action of a provisional European government'.

After the French Minister had taken note of the memorandum, Jean Monnet drew his attention to the fact 'that it does not propose any transfer of sovereignty. The envisaged system restores responsibility for the discussions to the Heads of Government, who have the final say.' Until then, the Heads of Government, when they met, would each give their competent national minister their instructions, which remained national instructions. The highest political authority of the Community should be made responsible for the general implementation of the obligations into which the Heads of Government had entered together.

Michel Jobert stated that, as far as he was concerned, the proposal was entirely in line with his thinking and that he would forward it to Mr Pompidou as soon as possible. Jean Monnet pointed out to him that, apart from Willy Brandt and Katharina Focke for Germany, and Edward Heath and Robert Armstrong for the UK, nobody else knew of the proposal. It could be put forward without the Action Committee or its Chairman being mentioned and, if he thought it a good idea, the initiative could be credited to Mr Pompidou.

The secret was indeed well kept, with one exception. The President of the Commission was due to have lunch at Avenue Foch on Friday, 14 September, two days after the Copenhagen meeting, and it was important to know his reactions to a project that would have such an impact on the way the European institutions functioned. After much thought, François-Xavier Ortoli said that he agreed with the objective, but he was worried about the absence of the Commission from the provisional European government's discussions. The Commission attached great importance to taking part in the discussions of the Council of Ministers, as it had done since the time of the Copenhagen meeting and, a fortiori, in the discussions of the provisional government.

Jean Monnet replied that the Commission would acquire greater authority as a result of the implementation of the project because its institutional counterpart would then no longer be only the Council of Ministers, which had limited authority, but the Supreme Council, which would have the power to take the final decisions.

Touring the capitals

When he flew to London, Jean Monnet knew that the coming week would be decisive to the success or failure of his project. He still had no idea how his three counterparts would react, and a favourable view by their advisers,

however influential they might be, could be no guarantee of the way in which the Heads of State would decide.

The British Prime Minister was expecting him at Chequers. Robert Armstrong was the only witness to their conversation. In a few words, Jean Monnet said that it was essential to create a European authority and to give to the general public the sense that European affairs were ‘decided’ because, at present, there was a growing impression that they were merely ‘discussed’.

Edward Heath said that he was convinced that something had to be done, and done immediately, but what?

After reading the proposal that Jean Monnet had put before him, he went on: fine, that is the right direction. But why make a public statement about what we are about to do? Let’s just do it, that is enough and will be better.

— Jean Monnet replied: ‘it is essential for the Community’s political objective to be explained in clear terms and for the method of working together to be made known; the general public will not be deeply concerned unless it knows that a European authority exists and that there are not just technocrats running the show, as is the case today.’

He added:

— ‘I had maintained in the past that an authority would emerge from the European institutions. We must recognise that this is not the case. For whatever reasons, the public is tired of the administrative form of the resolutions, the slowness and technical complexities of the discussions. The institutions have been indispensable, and they still are, but, today, they do not meet the need to move quickly and to decide.’

Edward Heath was quite easily persuaded but had reservations about the expression ‘provisional government’, preferring the term ‘Supreme Council of the European Community’. He even suggested that a supreme council of that kind should meet not every three months, as set out in the proposal, but on a monthly basis. Jean Monnet pointed out to him that it would not be useful to meet so often, because the purpose of the meetings was not to resolve technical problems but, basically, to reach agreement on political and general questions.

Before leaving the Prime Minister, Jean Monnet got him to confirm that the proposal was heading in the right direction and that he could tell the French President and the German Chancellor that it had been favourably received.

The latter was awaiting Jean Monnet in Bonn on Wednesday, 19 September.

First, the Chairman of the Committee had a long conversation with Katharina Focke, erstwhile Junior Minister in the Chancellery responsible for European affairs and then Minister for Youth, the Family and Health. She had a great deal of influence with Willy Brandt, based on a strong sense of trust, much the same as Michel Jobert with Georges Pompidou and Robert Armstrong with Edward Heath.

Katharina Focke carefully perused the proposal for a provisional European government and the notes drafted by Jean Monnet describing his recent conversations with Michel Jobert, Edward Heath and Robert Armstrong.

Her reaction was favourable:

— ‘I am pleased that you have reached the conclusion that we should now use the authority of the Heads of Government, because I myself have reached the same conclusion. That is the only way to breathe life into the Community, which is getting bogged down. At present, matters are handled by the competent Ministers, who reach national conclusions. There is no real attempt to seek a European position on the question concerned. The burden of responsibility lies mainly with national technical authorities, such as the Minister for Agriculture, or for Finance and, in the case of more general questions, the Foreign Minister. The authority of the Heads of

Government must become manifest and, to that end, the Heads of Government must get together; their meetings will then form the real European authority.’

She then added:

— ‘The Chancellor is very keen to see you. Like you, he feels that we are losing our way. I believe that your proposal will respond to his concerns.’

Indeed, Willy Brandt, who received Jean Monnet a few hours later, agreed to the proposal and underlined the need to act quickly. If Georges Pompidou wanted to take the initiative of making a public statement in line with that proposal, the Chancellor was prepared, like Edward Heath, to give him his immediate support.

That same evening, Jean Monnet sent the following message from Bonn to the French Foreign Minister: ‘I have had long talks with the people that I met in London and Bonn. I am very eager to see you. I would be grateful if you could receive me, at your convenience, for ten minutes tomorrow afternoon, on 20 September, or on Friday, 21 September. Kind regards’.

When he was received on 21 September, at 3.15 p.m., Jean Monnet recounted the favourable reactions he had received in London and in Bonn. He drew the Minister’s attention to the fact that very few people were aware of his initiative: Mr Pompidou, Mr Heath, Mr Armstrong, Mr Brandt and Mr Schilling (the Chancellor’s confidant), Mrs Focke, Mr Ortoli and he himself.

Michel Jobert spoke in his turn:

— ‘I am going to tell you exactly what happened. I cannot give you a definitive reply because I do not have one. I have informed Mr Pompidou of the proposal that you are making, and I handed him the text as we were flying over Tibet on our way back from China. I told him: “This is a project. I had no part in drafting it, but I believe that it is a very important proposal. I kept it for a quiet moment. I think that that moment has come, and I hereby submit it to you.” Mr Pompidou read the text. He said nothing. But, an hour or two later, he asked me to come and see him in his cabin in the plane. He was clearly very interested in the proposal. My impression was that it went down well. But I am unable to tell you whether, in that sense, Mr Pompidou reached or did not reach a conclusion. What I can tell you is that I have the impression that he is extremely interested.’

Michel Jobert then made a few observations on the details of the proposals, particularly with regard to the frequency of meetings and the role of the organising committee of the European Union as set out in point 2.

In any case, he regarded this proposal as ‘unstoppable’. When Jean Monnet told him that he intended to relate the conversation to Willy Brandt and Edward Heath, the Minister hesitated for a moment and suggested that perhaps it would be better to wait.

The reply was:

— ‘You know that a climate of confidence has been created among us on this matter; it is, therefore, necessary that we should all be informed, that we have the impression that nobody is keeping anything to themselves so far as they know.’

Mr Jobert accepted that argument and said that he would be presenting a memorandum to Mr Pompidou recording that conversation and those mentioned by Jean Monnet.

The French kick-off

Now that Germany and the UK had given their consent, set out in so many words through the intermediary of Jean

Monnet, the initiative reverted to France. President Pompidou was quick to seize it. A few days later, during his press conference of 27 September, he described in careful terms the broad lines of the proposal for regular meetings of Heads of State:

— ‘There will not be genuine European union until the day when we have a European policy; believe me, contrary to what people think, France is not against that, quite the opposite. And if, for example, it is believed that political cooperation must, if it is to develop more rapidly, be in the hands of the highest authorities, and of them alone, meeting from time to time at intervals that are not too frequent but are nevertheless regular, then I for one am in favour, and I am prepared not to take the initiative in this respect but to discuss it with our partners. If we now manage to establish a European policy vis-à-vis everybody else, all third parties, that is the moment when the way will be clear.’

The diplomatic calendar gave the leader of one of the Community countries that had not been involved in that ‘triangular plot’, Italy, the opportunity to be the first to talk to the French President about his suggestion. Received in Paris on 2 and 3 October, Giovanni Leone, President of the Italian Republic, accompanied by Aldo Moro, his Foreign Minister, carefully noted the prospect of regular European summits of ‘the highest authorities’ being held. Mr Pompidou informed them on that occasion that the French Government did not want to be alone in taking the initiative on the matter.

In a letter addressed in identical terms to Edward Heath and Willy Brandt, dated 3 October, Jean Monnet informed them that ‘the French Government does not wish to be alone in taking this initiative, and it is the first time that Mr Pompidou specifies that the initiative should be collective.’

He concluded thus:

— ‘I am sure that this may be of use to you in your talks with the Chancellor’ and ‘with the Prime Minister.’

The Heads of the British and German Governments did indeed meet, in London on 8 October. Although they publicly agreed to the creation of a European Regional Fund, the question did not arise, officially at least, of an exchange of views being held on Jean Monnet’s proposal. In any case, the two men were agreed on that point; no doubt the Chancellor wanted to leave it up to the Prime Minister to be the first to respond to the French suggestion.

In fact, the Conservative Party Conference was due to begin in Blackpool five days later, on 13 October.

This is a short extract from a 25-page speech given by the Prime Minister, which appeared in the international press the following day:

‘I believe that already some of my colleagues as Heads of Government feel the need for us to get together regularly without a large staff so that we can jointly guide the Community along the path we have already set. I would like to see the Heads of Government of the member countries of the Community getting together, perhaps twice a year, as I have said, alone and without large staffs, with the President of the Commission being present, as he was at the summit, on matters which concern the Commission. I would hope that my partners would respond to an initiative of this kind.’

Success seemed round the corner

When Jean Monnet met Michel Jobert again, on 22 October, matters seemed to have made considerable progress. The Minister told him that Willy Brandt had written to President Pompidou, giving his agreement, and that the Italians also seemed to have agreed. All that remained was to secure the agreement of the Benelux countries and to overcome the fears of some that they would be dominated by a kind of board of directors made up of the three big European powers. The final question that arose was deciding which Head of Government should take the

initiative of inviting his partners, and on what date. Regarding the date, Michel Jobert proposed:

— ‘The meeting could be held in March, because December is busy and, moreover, President Nixon is intending to come to Europe soon. No date has been set as yet, and maybe he will not come, but currently we think that he is likely to come in early 1974.’

Jean Monnet interrupted him:

— ‘I did not know that President Nixon was to come so soon, but if you tell me that his visit is almost certain, then it would be most important for the first meeting of Heads of State or Government of the Nine, which would confirm their European solidarity, to take place before President Nixon’s arrival. That would change the tone and atmosphere, it would change the presentation. Europe would present itself as united and strong, whereas otherwise it would present itself as still divided.’

Michel Jobert could not commit himself on behalf of the French President. But it was highly likely that a decision would be taken during November, at the time of Mr Pompidou’s short stay at Chequers and Willy Brandt’s visit to Paris.

In fact, the French President decided to retain the initiative and immediately repeated his proposal in more formal terms.

European solidarity and the oil crisis

It is true that the general public was anxious about the turn of events in the Middle East conflict that had suddenly broken out on 6 October and was to affect the West as a whole when the Arab world decided to use oil as a weapon.

Mr Pompidou released his statement to the Council of Ministers meeting of 31 October. He began by regretting the absence of a European voice in the discussions that were beginning with a view to the resolution of the Middle East conflict.

— ‘I believe that it is essential to demonstrate and test the solidity of European integration as well as its capacity to contribute to the resolution of world problems. The French Government therefore intends to propose to its partners, in the political field, to approve the principle, in accordance with precise rules, of regular meetings being held solely between the Heads of State or Government with the aim of comparing and harmonising their approach under political cooperation. The first of those meetings should take place before the end of 1973.’

The Danish Prime Minister who, like his other Community colleagues, had received a letter from the French President setting out that proposal, proposed in his capacity of President of the Council of Ministers of the Community that the Heads of State or Government should meet in Copenhagen. The dates set aside were 13 and 14 December 1973.

Meanwhile, there were a growing number of diplomatic discussions, fuelled by the rising anxiety and, above all, by the increasingly strong differences dividing some Community countries as to the approach to take towards the oil embargo. The idea of regular summits, of a European government, dropped a few rungs in the hierarchy of the priorities that the governments set themselves.

Nevertheless, Chancellor Brandt in his turn stated his position, in public, on the French initiative. Addressing the European Parliament in Strasbourg, on 13 November, he said:

— ‘What is decisive, along the road towards union, is the ability to assess things correctly. The proposal from the French Head of State to the effect that the Heads of Government of the Community must meet regularly in order

to discuss intensively and without being hampered by any “assistance” the problems facing the emerging union internally and externally certainly takes account of that need for a correct assessment. For the rest, that proposal is, happily, very much in line with my government’s intentions and the British Prime Minister’s suggestions. This is how I personally interpret the initiative: that body, a kind of regular conference of presidents, may become a well-established concept and, consequently, constitute a vital step along the road to political union.’

The failure of Copenhagen

In terms of the project for a provisional government proposed by Jean Monnet, the Copenhagen Summit was a failure. Circumstances made it impossible for that meeting to take on the character of an intimate exchange of views, without an agenda, without formality and without a communiqué, as Mr Pompidou and his partners had originally wanted. Instead of talks between the Nine, entirely by themselves, along the lines of a cabinet meeting, the meeting turned into a conference in due form dealing with specific issues dictated by the burning issues of the hour. It was hampered by the presence of all the traditional administrative machinery, with each delegation comprising several dozen diplomats and experts. The communiqué was the outcome of a lengthy, line-by-line discussion of a document submitted by the French President. It was, no doubt, the presence in Copenhagen of four Arab Ministers waiting in the wings and exerting a pressure that was unexpected and unwanted, except perhaps by France, on the running of the meeting that most effectively ensured its failure.

Point 3 of the communiqué shows how much Jean Monnet’s project, accepted by the three Heads of Government, had been watered down.

‘They [the Nine] decided to meet more frequently. Those meetings will be held whenever justified by circumstances and when it appears necessary to provide a stimulus or to lay down further guidelines for European integration. It will be for the country holding the Presidency to convene these meetings and to make detailed proposals concerning their preparation and organisation ... They also agreed to meet whenever the international situation so requires.’

There was no longer any question even of meeting every six months, as had been agreed on the first day of discussion.

The vague terms of the communiqué reflected disagreements that became increasingly apparent over the months following the Copenhagen Summit, especially between France and its partners. These disagreements mainly concerned the approach that the oil-consuming countries should take vis-à-vis the oil producers and became tangible when France refused to participate in the Washington Conference called by the US Administration.

The new points of the triangle

The first quarter of 1974 will be remembered as an escalation into polemics punctuated by a series of verbal confrontations between Henry Kissinger and Michel Jobert about relations between Europe and the United States and the question of oil.

By spring, however, new actors were to emerge on the forefront of the international scene. The three points of the triangle on which Jean Monnet had focused his action disappeared in the space of three months. Harold Wilson replaced Edward Heath on 5 March, Helmut Schmidt replaced Willy Brandt on 14 May and Valéry Giscard d’Estaing was elected President of the Republic of France on 19 May.

The Chairman of the Committee had to restore the vital bonds of trust between the leaders who represented European authority. Once again, he had to persuade them to act without delay in order jointly to take the measures that were necessary to safeguard the European countries which were being hit, one after another, by the most serious economic crisis in the post-war period.

When he was received by Harold Wilson at 10 Downing Street on 28 March, Jean Monnet knew that he could not ask the Labour Prime Minister to take part in the bold project of a European provisional government that his Conservative predecessor had supported. Above all, he had to persuade the new government to resist the noisy calls within the Labour Party not just for renegotiation but for the United Kingdom to withdraw from the European Community. This meant that a new and highly delicate ‘British problem’ was added to all the problems of concern to the Europeans, and the Chairman of the Committee realised that he had to look to Paris and Bonn to find people to promote the revival of his project.

In Jean Monnet’s view, the new French President embodied the spirit of analysis, while the new Chancellor was a man of decision. The two men, who knew each other well, also seemed to like one another. He hoped that the conjunction of two complementary temperaments would produce a Franco-German decision-making capacity that could, if the two agreed on the principal European options, lead to the agreement of its partners.

Jean Monnet was in contact with the Chancellery through Per Fischer, who was to Helmut Schmidt what Katharina Focke had previously been to Willy Brandt. He was in frequent contact with the new French team, paying several visits to Jean Sauvagnargues and to Claude Pierre-Brossolette. When France held the Presidency of the Community in the second half of 1974, Valéry Giscard d’Estaing had stated that he would support initiatives aimed at bringing about real progress towards European union.

During a lengthy visit to the Élysée on 19 September, Jean Monnet had an opportunity to talk to his host about the various aspects of the French plan for revival. During their conversation, they discussed in detail the prospect of a European political authority that would emerge from the regular and frequent meetings of the Heads of Government of the Community. As early as March 1969, the President of the Independent Republicans had given his support to the Action Committee for the United States of Europe. During the presidential election campaign, he had made a number of commitments to European integration. It seemed that the moment had come to turn these declarations of intent into action. On leaving the Élysée, Jean Monnet told the press that he felt quite hopeful:

‘I am convinced that Mr Giscard d’Estaing believes in Europe and wants to build it.’ He added that, in his view, France’s European policy was the right one.

The success of Paris

The French Government’s intentions became known in more detail when the capital city of each of our partners received a memorandum in which the broad lines of its European policy were defined. It was known that France would be proposing that a meeting of the Heads of Government be held before the end of the year. Reactions abroad were lukewarm. To some, the proposals in the institutional field, such as restricting the application of the unanimity vote for Council decisions, setting a date by which the European Parliament would be elected by universal suffrage and the creation of a European Council of Heads of Government seemed out of the question. First of all, ‘substantive issues’ linked to the economic crisis must be resolved, such as fighting inflation and unemployment and defining an energy policy.

Jean Monnet believed those issues could not be adequately resolved unless the Community countries set up a supreme authority which, alone, could effectively take the lead in joint action.

He said as much to Chancellor Schmidt who received him in Bonn on 22 October 1974 and assured him of his wish to pursue a common Franco-German policy wherever possible.

A few days later, when he visited Leo Tindemans, the Belgian Prime Minister, the Chairman of the Committee sought to relieve any anxiety that might be caused by the prospect of a European Council within which the votes of the ‘small countries’ would be overshadowed by those of the ‘big’ ones.

The nine Heads of Government met in Paris on 9 and 10 December 1974 in a climate of scepticism. They knew that one major issue, the differences between France and its partners relating to the dialogue between the oil-producing and oil-consuming countries, could not be resolved during that meeting. They knew that the UK would voice 'reservations' about any strengthening of the Community's decision-making instruments and would call for a review of the rules governing its contribution to the common market budget.

Yet, when he read the few lines of point 3 of the communiqué adopted on the evening of 10 December, Jean Monnet found that some of his efforts had been successful:

'The Heads of Government have therefore decided to meet, accompanied by the Ministers for Foreign Affairs, three times a year and whenever necessary, in the Council of the Communities and in the context of political cooperation.'

The election, as from 1978, of the European Parliament by universal suffrage and the restriction of unanimous voting completed the institutional package. In a statement to the AFP, Jean Monnet expressed his satisfaction:

'I see the results of the Paris meeting, chaired by Mr Giscard d'Estaing, as proof of the continued resolve of the Nine to unite. The Heads of Government have confirmed the establishment of a European organisation following a quarter of a century of efforts, on the basis of Community rules and institutions.

'At the same time, they have decided to meet regularly several times a year so that they themselves, with all the authority of their office, may direct the development of the European Community.

'That is a considerable innovation. Added to the agreement on the anti-inflation and anti-recession policies, I believe that this will ensure the democratic future of Europe and enable us to overcome the difficulties that surround us.'