

Interview with Egon Bahr: Willy Brandt and the European integration process (Metz, 10 June 2006)

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[François Klein] What was Willy Brandt's general view with regard to the importance of the European integration process?

[Egon Bahr] That it was taking too long! European integration was not moving at a fast enough pace for him. His proposals ... In The Hague, and subsequently, he took up Pompidou's proposal. I've already talked about Davignon ...

I forgot to mention that it was a time when ... When I was in Moscow negotiating, Gromyko asked me 'When can we expect to hear Europe speaking with one voice?' And I said 'Ask me again in 20 years!' When he asked 'Do you really mean that?' I said 'Yes!' And when I related this to Brandt, he told me 'You're a defeatist!' Just like that. He couldn't imagine that it could take so long. And now 36 years have passed and we're still talking about the same thing. Which, on the one hand, means that the Americans cannot help but laugh at us Europeans — although, as a polite people, they do so only behind closed doors — and, on the other, means that they cannot afford to wait until Europe has reached the stage of being able to speak with one voice — if it ever does. Europe's weakness causes us problems, as we have already mentioned.

You cannot say that he lost hope in Europe, but it was only with difficulty that he was able to accept that the slowest ship determines the speed of the convoy, and that the results achieved had a firm foundation, because everyone had had to agree. And results like that last.