

'Preparations for the Summit' from 30 Jours d'Europe (June 1972)

Caption: In an article published in June 1972 in the monthly journal 30 Jours d'Europe, Emanuele Gazzo, Director of Agence Europe, comments on the preparations for the European Summit Conference planned for October. For the first time, the Commission takes part in the preparations for the Summit, at all stages and on all subjects, at the same level as the governments.

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Preparations for the Summit

The European Commission states its position on the strengthening of the Community institutions

On 26 and 27 May, Sicco Mansholt attended the meeting of the ten Ministers for Foreign Affairs of the enlarged Community held in Luxembourg. The President of the European Commission was there to assist in the preparations for the October Summit and, more specifically, to set out the ideas that the Commission suggested should be taken into consideration on a topic of fundamental importance: *the strengthening of the European institutions and, in parallel to this, the progress to be made on political union.*

This is the first meeting of Heads of State or Government in respect of which the European Commission has been allowed to participate in the preparations, at every stage and on every topic, on the same footing as the governments. It has even been able to give its views on the progress to be made in political cooperation. That is an important sign of the changes in the European political climate.

Why the institutions need to be strengthened

The strengthening of the Community institutions is, first and foremost, a *practical necessity*, which has become particularly crucial because of the scale of the *new objectives* that the Community has to achieve and of the wider responsibilities assigned to it. It is important not to forget the other two areas on which decisions will be taken at the Summit, the establishment of economic and monetary union and implementation of the policy of the enlarged Community vis-à-vis the rest of the world.

But such strengthening also meets a *political need*. Its effect must be not to disrupt the institutional balance established by the Treaties of Rome but to restore it where it has been altered (mainly to the detriment of the European Commission and the Council of Ministers, as the Vedel Report has shown in an exemplary analysis). (1) It must also strengthen the *democratic legitimacy* of the Community as such. Since the actions of the Community are having a growing impact on the citizens of Europe in all areas of the economy and society and are increasingly outside national democratic control, it is essential for the institutions to be strengthened.

It might be added that the 'Ten' have agreed on the principle of strengthening *political cooperation*. That will necessarily involve interaction between any instruments that might be created for that purpose and the Community institutions. The *cohesiveness and compatibility* of those two developments has to be ensured at all costs. Political cooperation must not encroach on the development of the Community, which will be brought about through *integration*, and the strengthening of the economic Community must facilitate the political strengthening which, *at the moment*, is being brought about through *cooperation*.

It is clear that *the basic justifications* for the institutional questions that will most probably dominate the October Summit relate to two imperatives: the *efficiency* and the *democratic nature* of the institutions. Those are the foundations of any cohesive political structure, whether it is called a confederation, or a federation, or a *Community*, the term that we prefer.

At the time of writing, the European Commission has not yet taken its final decisions on all the institutional questions, but it can still give a fairly accurate and detailed outline of its views and of the ideas that it is putting forward to the governments. Every member of the Commission has been involved in formulating those ideas, but some members have made a particular contribution: Sicco Mansholt himself, of course, but also Altiero Spinelli, Albert Borschette and Albert Coppé. A 'task force' led by Émile Noël has drawn up and gradually fine-tuned the texts.

It must be borne in mind that the Commission is not required to submit actual 'proposals', especially at this stage of the debate. Its main role is to provide *logical responses* to the various questions. The meeting on 26 and 27 May should provide an overall view which will serve as a general basis for reflection. The Commission will also be holding wide-ranging discussions with the European Parliament next May. No

doubt it will, on that occasion, specify the steps that it considers appropriate (for example, what Mr Vedel calls a 'symbiosis' between the European Parliament and the national parliaments). Parliament itself is to adopt a position that it will forward directly to the Summit.

European Parliament scrutiny 'upstream' of decisions

Now let us look at the policies that the European Commission would like to see adopted. They fall into three categories, which are logically and organically connected but not in any order of priority.

A. — *The first part of this process seeks very quickly (and without excessively complicated procedures) to make initial improvements to the efficiency and democratic nature of the Community institutions.*

It centres on the idea that the Commission should present to the European Parliament a genuine *general programme of action* covering several years (preferably four years, which is the term of office of the Commission). This will set out *the political priorities* for action by the Commission. The imperative of efficiency requires that, after being debated and approved by Parliament, the programme should form the basis for the *Commission-Council* dialogue and the political commitments of the Council. Those commitments are combined with a *timetable* and the instruments to be used for its implementation. That ensures that the European Parliament may scrutinise *upstream* decisions that have *budgetary consequences*, which is much more efficient than the normal *downstream* scrutiny.

That fundamental suggestion is coupled with several other proposals relating mainly to the practical working of the institutions, as follows:

(a) the term of office of the President of *the European Commission* should be increased to four years like those of the Commissioners. Similarly, the President (or even the Vice-Presidents) should be invested by Parliament and have a say in the appointment of the Commissioners;

(b) *the European Parliament* would, for the moment, be given if not a full codecision right as proposed in the Vedel Report then at least a *double reading* right, something which would have a real influence on the final decisions of the Council of Ministers;

(c) the Commission considers that there is a need to change *the current Council of Ministers practice* of not holding a vote. More frequent use of *abstentions* by members who do not fully support the views of their colleagues might make the procedures that are being perpetuated more flexible. Others would like to go further and ask the governments to draw up a *restrictive list* (this could be shortened and not extended) of areas in which they consider that a *vital interest* is at stake. In practice, this would probably mean adding a few subjects requiring a unanimous vote to those already laid down in the Treaties. Where necessary, *the working methods* of the Council should be altered by the introduction of *deadlines* requiring the Council to debate Commission proposals and not to let them sink without trace, as regularly happens at the moment.

Extending the limits of the Treaty

B. — The second requirement for efficiency and maintenance of the institutional balance is *to increase the powers* of the Community in the various areas relating to its consolidation, which are, so to speak, *at the limits of the Treaties*. As Émile Noël said in a recent speech, the main reason for the Community imbalance is *the increasingly important role of intergovernmental cooperation in the work of the institutions*. Those limits must therefore be removed, and all the areas that cannot, in practice, be separated from the powers that the Treaties already confer on the Community must be brought within the scope of the Community method.

Accordingly, the Summit should:

(a) confirm the commitment that has already been made for all aspects of economic and monetary union to be dealt with in the Community framework (the Council is to take a decision on the transition to the second

stage before the end of 1973);

(b) affirm *the political commitment* needed in order for the common policies necessary for the development of the Community *to be formulated and implemented through the machinery of the Treaties* and not outside that machinery. (2)

Cooperation on political integration

C. — Let us turn to the third main topic, the steps to be taken for *substantial strengthening* of the institutions and the connection between the institutions and *political cooperation*.

The first point to consider is that the aim that Europeans should be pursuing is for political cooperation to be turned into *integration* as soon as possible (as outlined in the recent European Movement proposals). But the need to take account of the interest groups involved requires this to be done *step by step*. Certain steps therefore have to be *planned*, and commitments secured from the Summit, based on a working hypothesis that has the advantage of being logical: the establishment of economic and monetary union at the end of this decade will require institutions capable of fulfilling the *political* responsibilities inherent in such a union. Hence, there will be a *convergence* enabling a series of measures to be taken and planned straight away. Those measures may be outlined as follows:

— with regard to *the powers of Parliament*, the European Commission has, as we have seen, made a specific commitment. However, if the aim is for certain *legislative* powers to be conferred on Parliament in 1975 (codecision, as referred to in the Vedel Report), *the Summit* must decide on the principles at this stage;

— with regard to *the election of Parliament by universal suffrage* (which will undoubtedly make it easier to increase its powers), the Summit should *draw up a timetable* for successive actions;

— the *link to the development of political cooperation* might operate in various ways, but it should always follow the guiding principle that the two processes are inseparable and that neither takes precedence over the other. The European Commission suggests that the Council of the Community should hold meetings at the level of the Ministers for Foreign Affairs (four a year, for example) in order to coordinate foreign policies and draw up the Treaty on Political Union (target date 1980). The meetings might be planned in the Political Committee, whose *Political Secretariat* would be the infrastructure, on the understanding that the Secretariat *would form part of the Council Secretariat*. Altiero Spinelli — whose views on the subject are well known — would like to go further; he wants to see this whole *constituent* process assigned to the (elected) *European Parliament*, obviously in cooperation with the diplomatic and government bodies.

We are now entering a period of discussion and formulation. It is essential that, in the meantime, political, economic and trade union interest groups step up the pressure on the top bodies to go as far as possible with the commitments into which they formally enter at the October Summit.

Emanuele Gazzo

1. See '30 Jours d'Europe', May 1972 issue.

2. That means that the restrictions on the application of Article 235 or possibly Article 236 of the Treaty will be removed and that they may be applied where necessary without any problem.