

‘Living with 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, Ferdinando Riccardi, reporter at Agence Europe, argues in favour of the opportunities offered by European Summit Conferences despite the reservations of others. In his opinion, only ‘summits’, convening as non-Community bodies and benefiting from the lack of defined limits, can extend the powers, the responsibilities and the field of activity of the Community and, in this way, define the future guidelines for European integration.

Source: 30 jours d'Europe. dir. de publ. Fontaine, François ; RRéd. Chef Chastenet, Antoine. Juin 1972, n° 167. Paris: Service d'information des Communautés européennes. "Vivre avec le Sommet", auteur:Riccardi, Ferdinando , p. 7-9.

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Last updated: 05/07/2016



Living with the summit

‘The Community must learn to live with the summit’, said Sicco Mansholt in his first press conference as President of the European Commission. In this way he responded indirectly to some people with a *purist* concept of Europe, who had taken offence at what they regarded as the risk of seeing certain aspects of integration defined by an interstate body not explicitly provided for in the Treaties of Rome. Mr Mansholt added that the separation between the ‘summit’ meeting and the official meetings of the Community institutions could even be regarded as a positive element, since in this way the deliberations of Heads of State or Government were not restricted by the limits of the powers formally attributed to the Communities.

He noted that no state in the Community would be able to rule out any subject whatever from the discussions, arguing that it was outside the Community’s competence. We have only to appreciate the extent to which developments within society, in the world situation and in Europe itself have brought to the fore a number of ‘emergencies’ that could not have been foreseen by the authors of the Treaties of Rome to understand the impact and significance of this lack of boundaries enjoyed by the ‘summit’.

Moreover, only the ‘summit’ can extend the Communities’ powers, responsibilities and field of activity, in order rightly to ensure that the sense of European integration is not distorted by situating outside Community procedures too substantial an element of what are perhaps today the essentials.

Therefore the citizens of Europe must learn to live with the ‘summit’. From a psychological viewpoint it is not untimely, even for public opinion, for the highest authorities of the countries of Europe — Heads of State or Government, depending on their respective constitutions — to involve themselves personally and directly, from time to time, in the integration of Europe. Obviously care will have to be taken to ensure that the ‘summit’ does not take the place of the institutions in the decisions that are their responsibility, and that it does not distort the spirit of the Treaties by entrusting to other bodies the new responsibilities ensuing from developments in the world and in society. But why mistrust it on principle? It is on results that new initiatives are judged. And if we consider the conditions under which the 1969 ‘Summit’ virtually took in its arms a failing Community, uncertain of its future, not yet convinced of its need for enlargement and its ability to embark on the unknown pathway of economic and monetary union, and if we look at the extent to which the programme of The Hague has been carried through ... But precisely how far has it been carried through? Have we ever stopped to evaluate the effectiveness of the 1969 ‘Summit’ in the light of the achievements that followed it?

The achievements of the last ‘Summit’

From one summit to the next — between the two, 22 months in the life of Europe. The communiqué from The Hague on 2 December 1969 contains 16 points, the first of which reaffirm the goals of integration and the unanimous political will to realise it, while the remainder indicate a number of specific objectives:

— *Enlargement of the Community.* Do you need to be reminded that ratification procedures are under way, and that, on 1 January 1973, the United Kingdom, Ireland, Norway and Denmark will be part of the Common Market? And that, moreover, they will take part in the next ‘summit’?

— *Financial autonomy for the Community.* Own-resource mechanisms have been put in place, and the timetable has been specified for gradual full autonomy (with transfer of resources from the states to the Community); at the same time, the European Parliament’s budgetary powers have undergone an initial extension.

— *A plan in stages [...] with a view to the creation of an economic and monetary union.* Approved in February 1971, this plan withstood last year’s monetary turmoil, and since 24 April this year, the Community has had its own system of exchange and money-market intervention. At the same time, coordination procedures for economic policy have been strengthened.

— *European University.* It is true that the University Institute in Florence does not precisely correspond to

the initial plans, but at least it exists, since the Convention setting up this Institute was recently signed by the Six.

— *Reform of the European Social Fund*. The reformed Social Fund came into operation last month.

Those are five objectives that have thus been achieved, even though at the time some of them appeared almost utopian.

Where the communiqué from The Hague mentioned objectives in less specific terms, the results are less meaningful. Election of the European Parliament by universal suffrage? The communiqué simply says *The problem of the method of direct elections is still being studied by the Council of Ministers*. And indeed, it is still being studied ... Scientific and technological cooperation? The Heads of State or Government had *reaffirmed their wish to follow more closely the activity of the Community with a view to coordinating and encouraging industrial research and development*. To date this ‘following more closely’ has been expressed above all in an increase in the number of working groups ...

It is an established fact that none of the Community Member States have shirked the commitments that clearly and explicitly ensued from the The Hague communiqué, even though at the time more than one observer regarded some of the objectives cited as somewhat fanciful. How can we not conclude from this that the ‘summits’ are invaluable, inasmuch as they lead to firm commitments, expressed simply and unequivocally?

The tasks of the October Summit

However, it is important not to oversimplify. The optimum recipe for a successful summit seems to consist of a skilful cocktail of general guidance and more limited, but specific, decisions.

Since the themes of the October Summit are the Community’s place in the world, the development of its institutions, realisation of an economic and monetary union, and social progress, we cannot expect detailed decisions on all these points. That would be impossible, and it is not the task of a meeting of this kind.

The ten Heads of State or Government should draw up common or converging guidelines on the direction and content of European integration and actions in the areas cited: autonomy for Europe and partnership with the United States; responsibilities with regard to the Third World; the wish to meet the deadline of 1980 for a European currency, and what this involves; strengthening of the institutions, to bring their powers into line with the expanded content of Community responsibilities; democratisation of the Community, i.e. the establishment of democratic European control of the activities that are gradually eluding national parliamentary control. It will not always be easy to specify common guidelines on all these points, since it’s no secret — nor is it a scandal — that the doctrines and the starting positions of the Ten do not always coincide. ‘Building Europe together’ also means knowing when to give way a little ...

Specific measures

The main guidelines will need to be accompanied by some specific, detailed measures, spectacular if possible and at all events meaningful. Mr Mansholt mentioned some of these recently, aimed essentially at making European citizens aware that they are part of a unique whole — removal of all border controls on individuals at intra-Community borders, free access to all existing training and study opportunities within Europe, the granting of voting rights at local-authority level to all Community citizens in their place of residence.

The other main immediate objectives could be as follows:

- creation of the European Monetary Cooperation Fund;
- setting of an absolute deadline for European elections;

— establishment of permanent institutional relationships between the Community and the United States.

But everybody is entitled to add others, as they wish and as they feel inspired to do; there are still four months to go before the meeting in Paris, and it is comforting to dream and to battle to have these dreams come true.

Ferdinando Riccardi