

The Tindemans Report

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The Tindemans Report

The Paris Summit of 9 and 10 December 1974 instructed Leo Tindemans, the Belgian Prime Minister, to draw up a report on how the term 'European Union' might be interpreted. The Nine thus renewed their support for reviving European integration that had been halted by the economic crisis and the threatened disintegration of the Community. As a Federalist of long standing, Tindemans consulted not only European institutions, who all submitted reports to him, but also hundreds of eminent persons from the worlds of politics, the economy, trade unions, local interest groups and intellectuals in the nine countries of the Community. The Report on the European Union was published on 29 December 1975. On 2 April 1976, it was presented to the European Council in Luxembourg who held a preliminary exchange of views thereon.

Without going so far as to propose that a new treaty be drawn up, the Tindemans Report advocated consolidation of the existing institutions and the development of common policies. It wanted to extend the powers and authority of the Commission and, to this end, proposed that the President should be appointed by the Council and approved by the European Parliament. Tindemans also wanted to strengthen the powers of the European Parliament, the Members of which he wanted to see elected by universal suffrage before the end of 1978, by conferring on it the right to propose legislation, a right hitherto the sole prerogative of the Commission. The Report also advocated the extension of majority voting in the Council and changing the period when each Member State held the Council Presidency from the current six months to one year.

The Tindemans Report also recommended extending the authority of the European Community to include monetary issues, energy and social and regional policies. In foreign policy matters, the Report provided for a legal obligation on the Member States to agree on a common position, by a majority vote, where necessary. Against a background of international détente, the aim of the Belgian Prime Minister was for the Europe of the Nine to speak with one voice vis-à-vis the rest of the world. He also advocated the creation of a European Armaments Agency. Aware of the need to bring Europe closer to the man in the street, Tindemans recommended the introduction of a European education policy, enhanced protection for the environment and the rights of consumers. As for the economy, he developed a series of proposals aimed at consolidating and giving the Community control over the mechanisms of the 'European currency snake' with a view to ensuring greater international monetary stability.

In spite of its deliberately moderate and pragmatic tone, the Tindemans Report failed to arouse much enthusiasm in the Member States' governments. Against a background of severe economic recession – there were at that time nearly six million unemployed in the EEC – the Report disappointed the Federalists who found it too reticent. On the other hand, the national political leaders thought they were already doing all they could, and they were not prepared to envisage any further loss of national sovereignty. Finally, the plan drawn up by the Christian Democrat Tindemans irritated the left wing who were wary of allowing the right wing to take the initiative in the process of European integration. No immediate action was taken on the Tindemans Report, which was considered at the European Council meeting in The Hague on 30 September 1976, apart from the request made to the Council of Foreign Ministers and the European Commission to draw up an annual report on the progress of the European Union.