

'Werner Plan discussed in Brussels' from the Süddeutsche Zeitung (14 December 1970)

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Werner Plan discussed in Brussels

[...]

Preparations for the ministerial talks on the Werner Plan took place, according to the diplomats involved, under ‘inhuman time pressure’. Over the past week, fundamental differences between France and its partners were confirmed in the course of four sessions lasting day and night, the physical pressures of which proved beyond some of the participants’ endurance. France wants to embark on the first three-year stage of harmonisation of economic and monetary policy on 1 January 1971, without, however, committing to clearly outlined political options establishing above all the final goals — the Treaty amendments required to proceed from the first to the second stage and the transfer of hitherto national powers to Community institutions. The French Government regards this as precipitate, a position that is clearly influenced by domestic political considerations. It would like to restrict matters to the practical decisions required to move into the first stage, arguing that things will progress unaided once the ball is rolling.

France’s partners, on the other hand, are unanimously of the view that they cannot set off until they know where they are going, that is to say until decisions on the various stages have been taken and are firmly embedded in the broader process of economic and monetary union, with all its political consequences. They fear that otherwise the train could come to a standstill after the first or second stage and that those in greatest need might be able to enjoy the newly available economic advantages without anything having been done to further political union.

The problem is further complicated by Italian demands to establish a clear regional policy link to the three-stage plan and to set up a fund in order to avoid the risk of uneven development within the economic union. Thus the Council of Ministers is faced with difficult political decisions, which, even if a further meeting before Christmas is not agreed, will at all events necessitate a follow-up session. In any case it is certain that the friendly ‘European climate’ that has prevailed since the summit in The Hague will be affected.