

'Moscow pays lip-service to Europe' from Süddeutsche Zeitung (25 May 1973)

Caption: In May 1973, the German daily newspaper Süddeutsche Zeitung examines the attitude of the United States and the Soviet Union towards the European Economic Community (EEC).

Source: Süddeutsche Zeitung. Münchner Neueste Nachrichten aus Politik, Kultur, Wirtschaft und Sport. Hrsg. Dürrmeier, Hans ; Herausgeber Heigert, H. 25.05.1973, Nr. 120. München: Süddeutscher Verlag GmbH. "Moskaus Lippenbekenntnis zu Europa", auteur:Schröder, Dieter , p. 4.

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Moscow pays lip-service to Europe

by Dieter Schröder

Western Europe's misery results from the fact that its economic Community structure lacks a political superstructure and that its existing institutions are weak. In addition, not only France but also Great Britain and, to an increasing degree, even the Federal Republic of Germany subscribe, in essence, to General de Gaulle's ideal — if it can be described as an ideal — of priority being given to the interests of the nation state. As long as this state of affairs continues, Europe cannot become 'European', an independent entity, and as long as the European Community is built on the lowest common denominator — on the political advantages of agriculture and trade — this Europe will be threatened with being torn apart by the centrifugal forces created by those very matters of special concern to the nation state.

This sad fact could hardly be better illustrated than through the witty statement ascribed to President Pompidou: 'I have an excellent relationship with Mr Heath, but we have differing opinions on all matters.' Willi Brandt could more or less say the same about his forthcoming meeting with Pompidou and Heath. Each of the three is a 'spokesman for Europe', a role which Brandt claimed when talking to Nixon and Brezhnev. However, there is no 'European spokesman'. To make a proper evaluation of the 'reality' of Europe, the starting point must be this ongoing weakness of the association. The low esteem in which the Americans currently hold this reality has been demonstrated by the way in which they took Europe by surprise with their proposal for a 'new Atlantic Charter', which reveals the deep divisions between the Europeans and how ill-prepared they are for the world role which they claim. How little the Soviets think of the reality of Europe is indicated by the fact that their recognition of the Community, like Brezhnev's vis-à-vis Brandt, are currently nothing more than lip-service.

Both Nixon and Brezhnev have chosen 1973 as the Year of Europe. What they understand by the phrase is, however, by no means flattering to Europe, especially as the danger exists that the ideas of the superpowers will draw closer together. Originally, Washington hoped for a strong Europe that would largely assume the burden of defending the Old Continent. That was partly wishful thinking, for Europe would never have been capable of so doing. Now they are seeing a Europe that is strong enough to disrupt their trade but which passes itself off as too weak to do more for its own defence. If nothing changes on this, they could — and, in the end, they learned a lot from de Gaulle — be tempted to prefer a weak Europe to which they could lay down their own conditions even as far as creating a differential between the levels of nuclear protection for Europe and for the USA, which already seemed reminiscent of Nixon's foreign policy statement.

Whatever Brezhnev's television comment on Europe as a 'continent of peace, trust and mutually advantageous cooperation' was intended to mean, we may be sure that Brezhnev definitely wanted a weak Europe. The time is surely past when the Soviets hoped that they could torpedo the EEC. As guarantor of the stability and status quo in Europe, they may, initially, be rather glad, especially if it is kept in check in conjunction with the USA. However, they are not in favour of a strengthening of the EEC. They still refuse to conclude trade negotiations with the EEC. In view of this, the EEC's common external trade policy with regard to the countries of the Eastern bloc, where governments have a monopoly on external trade, had been suspended until 1 January 1973. Now it is being undermined. Instead of renouncing an agreement, the Member States are concluding with the Soviets bilateral treaties on economic cooperation which does not fall within the competence of the EEC. However, they are trade treaties in all but name.

Here, however, the 'reality' of Europe must take more of the blame than the Soviets, especially since, in the preliminary talks in Helsinki, the EEC prevented them from having the coveted most-favoured-nation status as the basic principle of their international trade and expressly relegated them to industrial cooperation on the basis of 'mutual advantage'.

Because it is politically weak and divided, the Community is handing to the Soviets on a plate the means of splitting them apart should they wish to do so. This impression would be further strengthened if approaches from Romania, which is seeking a treaty with the EEC, are treated coolly out of fear of Moscow.

What is valid for Moscow also applies to negotiations with the USA, as well as to the forthcoming series of international conferences on questions of trade and currency, security and troop reductions. Western Europe is everywhere at a disadvantage vis-à-vis the superpowers because of its lack of coherence and its failure to adopt a common policy. Events are starting to overtake plans for a European Union. For that very reason, the Italian Member of the Commission, Altiero Spinelli, has proposed the appointment of a 'European negotiator'. But what use is a negotiator without a common policy and the will to carry it through?