

# Letter from Leo Tindemans to the European Council (29 December 1975)


**Caption:** On 29 December 1975, Belgian Prime Minister, Leo Tindermans publishes his report on European Union and accompanies it with an official letter in which he describes to his European colleagues the philosophy behind his political project, and expresses his faith in the future of European integration.

**Source:** Bulletin of the European Communities. Dir. of publ. Commision of the European Communities. 1976, n° Supplement 1. Bruxelles: European Communities. "Text of Mr Leo Tindemans' letter", p. 5-7.

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At the Conference of Heads of Government of Member States of the European Communities, which was held in Paris on 10 and 11 December 1974, you asked me to define what was meant by the term 'European Union'.

When attempting to do this I obviously took into account the reports drawn up by the European Parliament, the Commission of the European Communities and the Court of Justice and also the opinions voiced during the past year by members of your governments and other powerful forces in the various States.

Throughout these contacts I was struck by a contradiction.

On the one hand, some people believed that it was particularly inappropriate to draw up a report on European Union at a time when the European concept was passing through a crisis and the incompleting European structure was swaying. Furthermore, there was the feeling that the economic recession has made itself felt in our Member States throughout 1975 without any large-scale joint action having been planned to counter the effects of economic depression and unemployment.

And yet — and this is most significant — almost all the people to whom I spoke stated that they could not imagine a better future for their country than that offered by the building of Europe. They could not conceive of doing this other than by strengthening the Community.

In this respect, there is a distinct divergence of views between public opinion and those who fulfil a political role in their respective countries.

Public opinion is extremely sceptical on the will to establish a genuine European Union and solve the real problems of the day at European level. It wants results and questions the lack of political will on the part of its leaders.

For me, the conclusion is obvious: if we wish to safeguard the achievements of the Treaties and conquer new ground the Member States must agree on new aims.

At this stage, the stakes are political, that is quite irrefutable.

This is the reason why I deliberately refused to draw up a report claiming to be, at least in part, the Constitution for the future European Union. Nor did I wish to describe what Europe ideally should be, while remaining personally convinced that Europe will only fulfil its destiny if it espouses federalism.

The crisis in Europe is so serious that we must, in the immediate future, save what has already been achieved and, working on this basis, take drastic measures to make a significant leap forward.

I had to make a difficult choice. My proposals do not directly concern the final phase of European development. They state the objectives and the methods whereby Europe can be invested with a new vitality and current obstacles can be overcome.

My choice is based on the belief that at the present time any other approach would either be unworthy of our faith in Europe, or else, because of its utopian nature in the present circumstances, would lose all credibility with the parties in power. Consequently, it represents a realistic yet feasible approach.

For me, European Union is a new phase in the history of the unification of Europe which can only be achieved by a continuous process. Consequently, it is difficult to lay down, at this stage, the date of completion of the European Union. It will only achieve its objectives by means of institutions which have been adapted to its new requirements. It is in fact by means of institutions which have been strengthened and improved that the Union will be able to give increasing expression to its own dynamism. In this respect, the role of a directly-elected European Parliament will be decisive in the development of the Union. Finally, I

am convinced of the need, in 1980, to assess what we have already achieved so as to open up new prospects and make further progress.

That, after much reflection, is my conclusion.

Seen in this light, the proposals put forward in my report should help us to overcome the present crisis, improve the functioning of the institutions, give shape to yesterday's and today's political options and work out new ones. As I see it, this is the main task at the present time.

If we succeed in this, the European concept will be preserved once and for all and because of this the future of our peoples assured.

I remain firmly convinced — as do the great majority of our fellow-citizens — that we can only really develop if we have common policies in most sectors.

Efforts to reach an agreement on vital questions of international policy and concertation on security are the basis of our policy which aims at safeguarding our identity. They are indispensable to Europe if a better world is to be built.

The aim of European Union should be to overcome the age-old conflicts which are often artificially maintained between nation States, to build a more humane society in which, along with mutual respect for our national and cultural characteristics, the accent will be placed more on the factors uniting us than on those dividing us.

Such a Europe could awaken new hope in everyone and could be the focal point in an ideal and significant resurgence.

Any discussion which the European Council may wish to hold on my report should lead to a commitment to achieve by appropriate decisions the qualitative change characteristic of European Union.

I am convinced that after a detailed study of this report you will feel able to endorse its objectives and ensure that they are carried out.

Leo Tindemans