

'So what is America doing?' from the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (20 April 1977)


Caption: In its coverage of the visit to Washington by Roy Jenkins, President of the European Commission, German daily newspaper Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung considers the development of economic and trade relations between the European Economic Community (EEC) and the United States.

Source: Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung. Zeitung für Deutschland. Hrsg. Eick, Jürgen; Welter, Erich; Fack, Fritz Ullrich; Deschamps, Bruno; Fest, Joachim; Reißmüller, Johann Georg. 20.04.1977, Nr. 91. Frankfurt/Main: FAZ Verlag GmbH. "Was tut denn Amerika?", auteur:Stadlmann, Heinz , p. 3.

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So what is America doing?

The Europeans are forearming themselves for the dialogue with Washington

By Heinz Stadlmann

This week, there is a great bustle of activity developing within the institutions of Europe. After the bitter disappointments of recent times, the President of the Commission, Roy Jenkins, can now show his face again in the glamorous setting of world politics in Washington. President Carter will be receiving the man from Brussels at the White House, Vice-President Mondale, who first of all made a courtesy call on the Commission in Brussels on his first foreign trip immediately after taking office, is once again a partner in negotiations, and other members of the government in the new American administration are displaying interest in the European Community. It may be coincidence or simply bad planning, but, at the very moment when Roy Jenkins is making his appearance in the United States, a government delegation from Washington is travelling to Brussels for consultations about further cooperation.

Things are also happening in other areas: the Community Foreign Ministers met in London on Monday in order to coordinate their views under the banner of European Political Cooperation (EPC). The position of the Nine towards southern Africa was on the agenda, as was the preparation of a common position for the Helsinki follow-up talks to take place in Belgrade. The regular meetings of the Foreign Ministers, who sometimes meet as the Council of Ministers, in the best cases to take decisions, but also sometimes under the umbrella of EPC for what are more like informal exchanges of opinion, are popular with all those taking part, in spite of the demands associated with them. The generally held opinion is that cooperation is strengthened by continuous dialogue.

At the same time as the Foreign Ministers were meeting in London, the Finance Ministers of the Community were meeting in Luxembourg. Here, too, the main concern was the attempt to find common positions for international conferences so as to be able to speak there with the greater authority of a single voice. In Luxembourg, there was partial unanimity of the Nine for the imminent discussions at the International Monetary Fund, which is looking for new sources of finance for the poor developing countries now highly indebted as a result of the oil crisis. The Finance Ministers discussed questions that will be under consideration at the major economic conference in London in May. Here, too, efforts will be directed at finding a common position for all the Member States of the Community. Above all, it is the dialogue with America that will play a major part, and this dialogue is characterised by differences over nuclear energy policies, the right way to give a boost to the economy and the increasing pressure on the President to take protectionist measures against imports from Europe and Japan.

Until early last week, it was regarded as agreed in Brussels that the consultations with the Americans, which begin at the headquarters of the Brussels Commission this Wednesday morning, would be devoted predominantly to the new nuclear and energy policies of President Carter. The subject will still stir up feelings, but it is likely that the confrontation originally expected to emerge in these discussions will not now materialise, according to clear signals coming from Washington. Commissioner Brunner, who is responsible for energy policy in the Community and therefore also for the supply of uranium, gave a hint as early as last Sunday that there was hope for the resumption of uranium deliveries by both the United States and by Canada.

The rigorous plans put forward by President Carter had shocked Brussels. It was true that the Community had been involved in disputes with the Americans for years about its agricultural policy, which Washington regards as protectionist, not entirely without justification. However, the large surplus of the United States in trade in goods had the effect of dampening this down. What was then, on occasions, being talked up into the 'Chicken or Cognac War' was mostly a somewhat artificial uproar that did not seriously strain the relationship. After Carter has taken office, the eulogies of the new President for the Community were received like a windfall, for a number of Heads of Government in the Community of the Nine had again recently demonstrated a considerable degree of contempt for the 'Brussels bureaucrats' when the Commission was constituted.

In practical terms, a halt to the deliveries of enriched uranium to the Community ordered by Washington was only insufficiently camouflaged as an administrative difficulty. This situation rapidly transformed the honeymoon with the new President into a furiously bitter disappointment. In talks, senior officials from Brussels made no attempt to disguise their complete lack of comprehension for the sledgehammer approach being used by Carter to force through his concept of the non-proliferation policy. The Europeans, who of course also form a Community in Euratom, saw all their hopes for the nuclear energy programme dashed.

At the same time, however, it was noted with some astonishment in Brussels that in the question of uranium deliveries, Bonn was behaving just as if it was a question of its own exclusive interests and not a matter for the Community. In this regard, Paris managed to operate more skilfully. Under the cloak of the Community, the French held continuous discussions with the Commission in Brussels as to the most appropriate steps to be taken towards the Americans. In this period, the negotiating skills acquired by Commissioner Brunner during his period in the diplomatic service proved to be an advantage. In talks in Washington, he explained to senior government officials what it was that they were about to inflict upon the Europeans. After these discussions, Schlesinger promised an early return visit to Brussels and must also have realised what an impossible position the new President had placed himself in by adopting an 'all or nothing approach'.

The hope of a rapid resumption of enriched uranium deliveries and signals from Canada that there, too, the intention was to send raw uranium on its way to Europe again suppressed the bitter sentiments in Brussels. The talks will not disintegrate into angry accusations. Negotiations on the justifiable security requirements to prevent the further proliferation of materials for the manufacture of nuclear bombs is now the watchword.

At the talks in Brussels, which are led for the Europeans by the Commissioner with special responsibility for external relations, Wilhelm Haferkamp, other subjects are now again attaining greater significance. The comprehensive agenda covers the state of the world economy, trends in economic activity and North-South relations. In the evening, a 'restricted working dinner' will be held, where the more delicate questions such as nuclear policies, the enlargement of the Community and measures for Portugal will be broached.

The Europeans are attempting to forearm themselves against new American advances towards stronger boosts to the world economy. Although Carter has also adopted a change of course even in his own country, the view in Brussels is that the subject should not yet be allowed to be closed. At any event, as a precaution, the Finance Ministers have had an investigation carried out into what exactly the Americans have done so far in the cause of strengthening of the weak forces of economic buoyancy. What they found was that the bulk of increased American imports, which are often described as a means of bringing economic revival to the exports of other countries, actually consist of huge imports of petroleum. The possible question from the Americans: what are you doing for the global economy? will be answered coolly by the Europeans: so what is America doing? The language of European negotiations is gaining in self-confidence.