

'It must not fail' from Der Spiegel (23 March 1984)

Caption: On 23 March 1984, in an interview granted to the German magazine Der Spiegel, Hans-Dietrich Genscher, Foreign Minister of the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG), sets out the priorities for Germany's European policy after the failure of the European Summit held in Brussels on 19 and 20 March 1984. He also considers the thorny question of the British contribution to the Community budget.

Source: Der Spiegel. Das Deutsche Nachrichten-Magazin. Hrsg. AUGSTEI, Rudolf ; Herausgeber BÖHME, Erich; ENGEL, Johannes K. 23.03.1984, n° 13; 38. Jg. Hamburg: Spiegel Verlag Rudolf Augstein GmbH. "Es darf nicht scheitern", p. 146-150.

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Publication date: 13/09/2013

‘It must not fail’**Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher on Bonn’s European policy after the failure in Brussels**

Spiegel: Minister, the British Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, led her new male colleagues a merry dance in Brussels. Would it not be better to kick the British out of the EC?

Genscher: It was not my impression that anyone was leading anybody else a merry dance. In fact, this European Council was very serious and very pragmatic. It would be a cardinal error to drive England out of Europe now.

Europe needs England. But London will realise that England also needs Europe. There are more advantages from membership for England, too. That is why there are now no serious calls from London for England to leave the Community.

Spiegel: Why are you so keen for Great Britain to remain a member of the Community?

Genscher: We were in favour of England joining at a time when de Gaulle had serious reservations about its membership. We believed that a country as important as England would improve both the political and, in the end, the economic balance in the European Community. We cannot be indifferent to the path that England pursues — whether it chooses a path between Europe and the United States or whether it works closely together with us as a part of Europe. In addition, England is important to us Germans as one of the guarantor powers for West Berlin.

Let me also remind you that, in view of the enlargement of the European Community, we have to think of the other countries at the moment: Greece has joined.

Spiegel: Spain and Portugal will be joining, too.

Genscher: This already means a shift of emphasis towards the south, which is important for agricultural policy, for instance. In that regard, England is also important to the Community’s internal balance.

Spiegel: In plain words, England is an important partner in helping the Germans to economise.

Genscher: Here, we are at one with the English.

Spiegel: Would it not serve the Federal Republic’s interests better if it built on a strong continental Europe together with France and the founding members of the EC?

Genscher: We should not marginalise anybody. The course of history since the Second World War has shown that we can create Europe only if Bonn and Paris work closely together. Without Franco-German reconciliation, there can be no European integration. After centuries of being seen as archenemies, and regardless of the government in power, we bear a special responsibility for the process of European unification.

Spiegel: But some countries are holding back political integration.

Genscher: Sadly, that is what I discovered when I and my Italian colleague, Mr Colombo, submitted the draft Treaty establishing the European Union ...

Spiegel: ... which was given a first-class burial at the Stuttgart Summit.

Genscher: That is a far too negative assessment, but we had hoped for closer foreign and security policy cooperation. Unfortunately, we found that some countries were not prepared to accept this.

Spiegel: For instance, Denmark, Greece and Great Britain. All you can chalk up here is failures. Where are the successes?

Genscher: We have come a long way in the space of a year, between Stuttgart and Brussels. It was always our aim to reform European agricultural policy. Big steps have been taken in that direction. The fact that surplus production is being cut back for the first time is something of a revolution. It was always our aim to impose greater discipline on expenditure in the European Community. There, again, we have made good progress.

We have always been in favour of the accession of Spain and Portugal, in the interest of this European democracy. Here, too, we have secured agreement.

In our view, Europe must cooperate more closely in technology, because there is no reason why we should not achieve just as much as the Americans and Japanese. We have made progress here.

Spiegel: But, after all, those are not major decisions but, at most, good intentions; it will all be up in the air until you reach agreement with Mrs Thatcher.

Genscher: Certainly not; this is what everyone wants. Now it has to be set out in so many words. For heaven's sake, we must not forfeit what we have achieved. This must not fail simply because we have not yet managed to reach agreement on what is certainly a rather important issue, namely the British contribution.

Spiegel: A quarrel that is, after all, nearly tearing the EC apart.

Genscher: You are exaggerating. I do not think that, on balance, we have achieved so little. It is something on which we can build.

Spiegel: Surely the Europeans are making fools of themselves: they want to be taken seriously as security partners of the USA but, in fact, this is a lost cause.

Genscher: I agree that the Europeans cannot expect to enhance their influence in the Alliance if they themselves are not able to define their security interests. During the second half of the year, we shall be asking our partners to decide whether any of them are prepared to cooperate more closely with us in foreign and security policy in the Community.

Spiegel: That will only widen the rift: some will join in, others will not.

Genscher: I am confident that Europe will realise what is needed.

Spiegel: What a hope!

Genscher: I am not one to resign myself for what you might call prophylactic reasons. On the contrary, I shall do my utmost to ensure that we make progress now in foreign and security policy, just as we have done on financial, agricultural and technological issues.

Spiegel: Chancellor Kohl is enthusing about Europe as a counterpart to America's position as a leading power. How can Europeans live up to this claim while they quarrel among themselves?

Genscher: We should like to see the European pillar acquire the strength that it merits in the Western Alliance. The European Community has more citizens than the United States has inhabitants. However, can we say today that Western Europe, the Member States of the European Community, have the same political and economic clout as the United States?

Spiegel: Definitely not.

Genscher: Certainly not. And why not? Because we have not reached that stage of political and economic integration. Yet I would not play down what has been achieved to date in terms of European unification.

If you think how Europeans kept going to war with one another, and not just with one another but with other parts of the world, too, you will realise that what has happened in Europe over the last few decades really is a miracle. Now it is a question of not losing the momentum of the founding fathers of the European Community.

Spiegel: Splendid words. But surely the next disgrace is imminent.

Genscher: Which one?

Spiegel: The world economic summit in early June. How do you expect to speak with a single European voice there?

Genscher: It is not a European event, although Europeans will be taking part in it. The Europeans are entirely at one in calling on the United States to cut back its budgetary deficits and to pursue an economic and financial policy aimed at lower interest rates, so that we do not have to bear a share of this burden. Here, there are no differences between London, Paris, Rome ...

Spiegel: ... we do not dispute that. For the Americans, however, the Europeans' market value has declined.

Genscher: I fear that is the case. I agree with you that Europe must decide its own market value, both within the Alliance and also vis-à-vis Eastern Europe.

But let me say one thing to you: I am not impressed by those who complain that not enough account is taken of European interests but who cannot find the inner strength to ensure that Europe can take common action. This is an appeal to all those concerned.

Spiegel: I hope that it will be heard. After all, the Japanese are already beginning to overtake the Europeans in Washington.

Genscher: The United States is becoming increasingly interested in the Pacific region because of Japan's growing economic performance and, above all, because of its technological development.

That is why I think that it is not just an economic but also a political task for Europe to make up for any technological arrears that it may have. That will determine our international influence.

Spiegel: According to the German Chancellor, the Germans have no alternative to Europe.

Genscher: It cannot be repeated often enough.

Spiegel: The man in the street here sees it quite differently: there is no alternative to the constant financial sacrifices for Europe.

Genscher: The SPD is responsible for this theory of sacrifice. It is an attitude that I have never understood because it reflects a mistaken view of the importance of the European Community.

Spiegel: You mean the reference to 'Europe's paymaster'?

Genscher: Yes.

Spiegel: Your CDU colleague, Mr Blüm, issued similar warnings at the most recent cabinet meeting.

Genscher: He asked some questions. But he did not accept the paymaster approach. If I may, however, I should like to finish what I was saying.

Spiegel: Certainly.

Genscher: After all, we Germans have to ask ourselves: what are the pros and cons of Europe for us? For us, a market of 271 million people is better than one of 60 million people, because our country depends on exports. Many of our jobs would not exist, others would be insecure, others again could not even be created if we were not a member of this Europe. We are benefiting from the larger European market.

Spiegel: ... but paying a lot for it.

Genscher: When the European Community was founded, people said: the Germans benefit from the industrial market, the French from agriculture. Events have shown that the Germans have benefited at least as much from agriculture as the French. Then there is the foreign policy component of European cooperation. For a divided country, it makes a difference whether it has to go it alone or whether it can act jointly within the European Community.

Spiegel: But surely there should be a reasonable cost-benefit ratio?

Genscher: You have to look at the overall situation.

Spiegel: Your coalition is demanding billions from the workers, the weaker members of society and pensioners in order to reduce the public debt. Now billions are also going to Brussels. Are we, in fact, only saving for Europe?

Genscher: The question would be justified if we were not also saving in Europe. Hence the great importance of the reform of agricultural policy, which will help us to avoid future surplus production, and the decision on budgetary discipline.

Spiegel: You did not say that, over the next decade, Europe will cost the Germans further billions.

Genscher: We shall be increasing the contributions for the European Community in 1986, with the accession of Spain and Portugal.

Spiegel: That will cost four billion a year.

Genscher: No, not in the first year. After all, in the first year, we shall not be drawing the entire proposed rise in the proportion of VAT to 1.4 %. In return, we shall benefit from an enlarged European market — thanks to Spain and Portugal ...

Spiegel: ... which also swallows up money. Please spell out what Europe will cost the Germans in the way of further sacrifices by the end of the decade.

Genscher: I would justify the contributions that we make — I do not use the word sacrifices, because sacrifices are something made with no return — with the advantages that we gain, in terms of foreign policy, the economy and agriculture. And they are many.

Spiegel: And does that make up for the up to DM 10 billion more that Bonn will have to shell out every year until the end of the decade?

Genscher: Whether this will mean another 10 billion by 1990 is anyone's guess at present, because nobody knows how much of the increased contributions will be used. Above all, however, thanks to a stronger European technology policy, we may also expect higher returns from the European Community.

Spiegel: We can easily work it out for you. The Minister for Finance has to support the farmers with DM 2 billion from Federal coffers. The Brussels bureaucrats want 2 billion to plug the holes in the EC coffers up to 1986. And the VAT rate is now to be raised to 1.4 %.

Genscher: The VAT increase will not be used in full. This is a process of gradual rise. Initially, the amount will be substantially lower.

Spiegel: So why do you want to raise the VAT rate to 1.6 % from 1988?

Genscher: We are merely considering it. Nothing has been decided.

Spiegel: So what is going on now in Brussels?

Genscher: We are in very close contact with Paris and the Commission. We shall have to consolidate as much as possible of the outcome of the European Council in the Agriculture Ministers' Council on Monday and the Foreign Ministers' Council on Tuesday.

Spiegel: What, for instance?

Genscher: Budgetary discipline, for instance. There is no reason why we should not establish and adopt the principles established for budgetary discipline at this point, even if the British issue has not been resolved. For, in the meantime, all the Ten have realised that we have to economise.

Spiegel: You can establish them, but you cannot implement them until the issue of the British contribution has been resolved.

Genscher: We can certainly implement the principles of budgetary discipline. Surely we are all keen to get the rocketing expenditure under control.

Spiegel: Does that mean that you now want to unravel the package of reduced agricultural expenditure and VAT rises agreed at the Stuttgart Summit and to separate it from the dispute about the British EC contributions?

Genscher: That would be a fundamental mistake. It would mean going back on what we have already agreed in Stuttgart. No, under no circumstances.

Spiegel: Time is pressing for you, though. The new EC agricultural year begins on 1 April. Agricultural expenditure will run wild unless you contain prices now.

Genscher: I agree with you one hundred per cent. That is why it is surely in everyone's interest to reach agreement quickly.

Spiegel: So you will be making further financial concessions to the British?

Genscher: We shall have to see what other advantages England may be able to perceive. Perhaps they would not even cost money, but save money.

Spiegel: What does that mean?

Genscher: I was interested to learn that the British Government is not happy about certain economy measures because it felt they did not go far enough.

Spiegel: Which economy measures?

Genscher: I do not know which ones. But perhaps we can help the British Government here by agreeing an

even more stringent economy drive in certain areas. That would also meet with German interests. All I can say is: come on, let us try.

Spiegel: Mr Genscher, thank you for the interview.