

'A day for the history books' from the Luxemburger Wort (1 November 1993)

Source: Luxemburger Wort. Für Wahrheit und Recht. 03.11.1993, n° 251; 146e année. Luxembourg: Imprimerie Saint-Paul. "Ein Tag für die Geschichtsbücher", auteur:Werle, Gerd , p. 3.

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Last updated: 06/07/2016

A day for the history books

All Souls' Day 1993 will go down in history. This was the day when 12 Western European states took the leap into the European Union (EU), thereby pulling Europe closer together. 41 years after the Coal and Steel Community got down to work in Luxembourg and 35 years after the Rome Treaties came into force, the good ship Europe has set sail for new shores. The process of ratifying the Maastricht Treaty was anything but easy. The shared vessel nearly came to grief on the rocks of Denmark and Great Britain but did not in the end sink. And if its religious significance was itself enough to ensure that 1 November was not a day for celebration, Europolitical considerations have added to the contemplative mood. What does the EU signify for the continuing coexistence of Europeans?

Measured against the length of a human life, the process of European unification may well seem a rather slow process. In historical terms, however, integration is moving ahead in giant leaps and bounds. Peoples and countries which have waged war on each other for centuries now make common cause. Ancient nations such as France (founded in 843) and Spain (1492) are joining forces with such relatively young countries as Luxembourg (1815) and Ireland (1937) and transferring parts of their sovereignty to a higher, Union level, simply because there are many problems with which the nation-state has become too small to deal.

The European Union is not yet the federal state of which Winston Churchill once dreamed. But it already represents more than a mere customs union or federation of nations, along the lines of the 'Europe of the Motherlands' imagined by Charles de Gaulle und Margaret Thatcher. The Federal Constitutional Court has described the EU, in terms worthy of Solomon, as a 'college of states' [Staatenverbund]. In other words as a federation of states [Staatenbund] plus internal market plus common policies such as the Common Agricultural Policy plus (since 1 November) a common foreign and security policy plus cooperation in the area of internal security together with the creation of an economic and monetary union.

Just as the EC could do no more than provide the legal framework for the common internal market, so the authors of the Maastricht Treaty simply drew the outline of what a common foreign and security policy might look like. How that outline is filled in depends solely on the political will of the Member States. It was above all through the conflict on its doorstep, in the former Yugoslavia, that Western Europe came to understand that economic power alone is not enough to provide for political order. This is why the Twelve, probably reinforced as from 1995 by four new members, must at long last make up their minds to speak with a single voice on the foreign policy front.

Despite the turmoil in the currency markets over the last 12 months, the Community wishes to keep to the timetable for the introduction of a common currency. That objective was reaffirmed at last Friday's special summit meeting in Brussels. This brings with it major tasks for the soon-to-be-established European Monetary Institute, forerunner to the future European Central Bank, and for the EC Finance Ministers, with regard in particular to the coordination of currency policies and the convergence of individual national economies. The success in keeping to the deadline for completion of the single market has shown that the Europeans are able to get it together when they really want to meet a target date.

The establishment of Europol is another huge task. The Schengen Agreement allowed considerable preparatory work to be done in the area of internal security. It is now essential, however, to make faster progress on police cooperation. The requisite legal framework has been available since the day before yesterday. In their fight against the drug barons and organised crime the Twelve must now shift into higher gear if they are to communicate a feeling of security to union citizens once the internal frontiers have been opened.

For Europeans the issue of deepest concern is, however, unemployment, which despite the predicted modest economic upswing is set to rise further and should soon pass the 20 million mark. Luxembourg alone has been spared to date but, with the high degree of economic interpenetration, such a situation should not leave is indifferent. And in any case the European Union is meant to be a community based on solidarity.

The European Commission White Paper on Growth and Employment, due to be issued in December, is

awaited with suspense. It will not however, unlike the White Paper on the internal market, contain a specific road map and detailed legislative proposals. The subject matter is too complex to do so on this occasion. The experts agree that there is little chance of devising a recipe that would work for all countries. There is broad agreement that unemployment in the 1990s is no longer primarily determined by short-term economic circumstances but is now structurally defined. It follows that the existing structures must be reviewed. How can the available work be divided up among people more justly and more effectively? This issue is already the subject of heated debate.

Within the wider Europe Luxembourg is something of a flourishing oasis. The country holds a series of records — full employment, highest per capita income, continuing growth, vanishingly small levels of long-term state debt and new state borrowing; and the population is, according to a survey, well satisfied with its lot. Unfortunately, it is always the case in a community that those who fare less well are prey to feelings of envy. And while this is natural enough, it does little to generate feelings of friendship towards the Grand Duchy abroad. The Luxembourg Government has now found this out to its cost in Brussels, where it has seen other contenders nose ahead in the dispute over the location of the Central Bank and the Patent Office.

The store of goodwill among the larger Member States toward the smallest seems to have run out. The message in Brussels was quite unmistakably that Luxembourg will have to learn to suffer like all the others. This kind of attitude does not necessarily have to lead here to a defiant response of the ‘Euromorose’ variety. Luxembourg will continue in the European Union to make its voice heard and have its say in the further development of Europe.

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