

'The shortcomings of the EEC have an effect all the way to Washington' from the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (21 March 1974)

Caption: On 21 March 1974, German daily newspaper Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung considers the tensions between the United States and the European Economic Community (EEC).

Source: Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung. Zeitung für Deutschland. Hrsg. Benckiser, Nikolas; Eick, Jürgen; Welter, Erich; Deschamps, Bruno; Fest, Joachim; Fack, Fritz Ullrich. 21.03.1974, Nr. 68. Frankfurt/Main: FAZ Verlag GmbH. "Die Unzulänglichkeiten der EWG wirken bis nach Washington", auteur:Weseloh, Hans Achim , p. 3.

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The shortcomings of the EEC have an effect all the way to Washington

The reasons behind the conflict between Europe and America

By Hans Achim Weseloh

Both the declarations made on Wednesday by President Nixon in Houston and the views expressed on Tuesday evening by Finance Minister Schmidt following his talks with Secretary of State Kissinger clearly demonstrated that the two sides in the conflict between the Americans and the Europeans are both of the opinion that a cooling-off period is now necessary, because any continuation of the public argument could only result in further damage. The Year of Europe, which, according to remarks made half seriously and half ironically by Kissinger while he was still on his last visit to Bonn, did not come to an end until 23 April and might still achieve its actual significance, has finally been officially written off with the cancellation of the planned visit by the President to Europe.

One factor that contributed above all to this was a draft produced by the Europeans of a declaration in which the future relationship between the European Community and the United States is to be defined. To date, it has not been possible for the Europeans to come to any agreement with the Americans about this declaration. For Washington does not intend to reconcile itself to the fact that there is no reference in this joint declaration to interdependence, nor to partnership, nor to consultation on an institutionalised basis.

The three words interdependence, partnership and consultation, which the American side would have liked to see as the focal points of an American-European declaration, are the key to the tensions that have actually existed for a long time, and certainly not only since the conflict in the Middle East. A commitment to interdependence would be the recognition of the mutual dependence of the Atlantic partners, the undeniable, reciprocal reliance of each on the other existing between the members of the Alliance on both sides of the Atlantic. In the field of military security, in which the Americans can have no less interest in the defence of Europe than the Europeans themselves, interdependence is most obvious and least controversial. It may be axiomatic for the Americans that this interdependence also exists in economic policy, in monetary and trade policy, in energy policy and in other spheres of international life, but in many European states, as is shown by the Washington Energy Conference and the Brussels plans for the Middle East, this idea far less uncontested. Cracks could appear here in the façade of Atlantic cooperation, especially since most Europeans are reluctant to countenance setting American security obligations against European trade concessions.

It is true that the word 'partnership' has been used for years to define the relationship between the American and the European members of the Alliance, but the equal rights which that concept implies have never existed. In this regard, the Europeans — and not only the French — see the attitude of the American superpower towards the junior European partners as being too domineering, which results in the need to seek a separate and clearly defined identity. According to the American assessment, however, Europe is not a partner with equal value and equal rights, because it has still not become a unitary organisation with substantial political and military potential in addition to its economic potential and because it is allowing its moves towards integration by means of institution-building to stagnate, instead of developing them into a strong federation. If Europe were to make progress in this significant area, there would be no need to develop the position of a front against the United States, and Europe could be a strong pillar of the Atlantic Alliance with equal rights, instead of remaining the 'Europe of the fatherlands' and staggering from one crisis to another.

The third keyword, 'consultations', is at the centre of the present friction between the Americans and the Europeans, although discussions on the type, extent and timing of the consultation negotiations have, for many years, been part of the daily bread of Atlantic Council sessions. As a rule, however, it has been the Europeans who have accused their American partners, often quite rightly, of not entering into prior consultations about important decisions that also affect Europe but of simply notifying Europe of decisions already taken. Most recent examples of this are, for example, the agreement between Brezhnev and Nixon, and the incident when all American forces were placed on alert during a delicate phase of the Middle East

conflict.

Opinion on the American side, not without reason, is that, sometimes, consultations are problematical for reasons of time pressure and also that consultations create additional difficulties, because it is not a question of dealing simply with one single European discussion partner but with a number of governments of nation states. From the European point of view, too, it is unmistakable that the consultation procedure is inadequate for the American partner, especially since the Community has not opted for the high-level consultations once demanded by Federal Chancellor Brandt, which would have placed permanent dialogue on an institutional basis.

Given the present form of the decision-making mechanisms on which European political cooperation is based, it is, in fact, very difficult to take legitimate American interests into account. Ahead of important discussions, the only information that the Community can give the Americans is that there is not yet a joint position in Europe on which there could be any consultation.

In order to achieve really meaningful consultations, a procedure would therefore have to be found that, first of all, does not turn talks among the Nine in the European Community into a conference of the Ten that includes the Americans, one that, secondly, also ensures that justified American objections may be considered and taken into account during the early stages of the decision-making process. The European initiative for a dialogue with the Arabs was a typical example of poor consultation, because the effects of this step had already been made public before the Americans, who see their Middle Eastern and energy policies as being disrupted here, had been clearly informed about its implications.

The pause for reflection that has now been imposed upon the dialogue between the Americans and the Europeans by the cancellation of the Nixon trip and by the uncertainties as to the role of Great Britain in Europe should be a good reason to reduce tensions and to prepare for new discussions about the actual issues. Henry Kissinger's initiative for a new Atlantic Charter proved to be impracticable for many reasons. However, if the relationship between Europe and the great power that affords it military protection is not to suffer irreparable damage, then it is important that we do not lose sight of its fundamental concept, which is to find a new formula for the Atlantic relationship with a view to the future.