

'Through a qualitative transformation to European Union', from Luxemburger Wort (8 January 1976)


Caption: On 8 January 1976, the Luxembourg daily newspaper Luxemburger Wort comments on the main elements of the Tindemans Report on European Union, which recommends, in particular, the strengthening of the Community institutions.

Source: Luxemburger Wort. Für Wahrheit und Recht. 08.01.1976, n° 6; 129e année. Luxembourg: Imprimerie Saint-Paul. "Durch qualitative Wandlung zur Europäischen Union", auteur:Fons Theis , p. 1.

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Last updated: 06/07/2016



Through a qualitative transformation to European Union

Pragmatic procedure in individual areas — strengthening of Community institutions

— Cable report from Fons Theis of our editorial staff (Brussels) —

The Belgian Prime Minister, Leo Tindemans, was asked by the Heads of Government of the nine Member States of the European Community at the Paris Summit in December 1974 to draw up a report on the future shaping of the European Union. The report was handed over to the national governments on schedule just before the end of the year and presented to the public yesterday in Brussels. Tindemans' thinking is characterised by realism and pragmatism, and a qualitative transformation on the basis of the existing situation became the key idea.

The report deliberately avoids defining a final status, as Tindemans emphasised at yesterday's press conference. Those expecting a legal proposal on the establishment of an ultimate federal structure will therefore be disappointed. In a realistic appraisal of the situation, Tindemans restricted himself to pointing out what is politically feasible, firstly, in the very near future, saving what has already been achieved from the threats it faces and, secondly, initiating an essential new phase in the continuous process of unification through a progressive qualitative transformation. Presenting an increasingly common front to non-member states, targeted Community actions in the areas of economic, monetary, social and regional policy, the growing involvement of citizens and the strengthening of the institutions in specific areas constitute the decisive means to be used in attaining the established goals .

Obligation to pursue a common foreign policy

In Tindemans' view, the countries in the European Community should commit themselves to a common European foreign policy, which would also encompass defence policy and be binding on all the Member States. The Member States should also accept 'that the minority must rally to the views of the majority at the conclusion of a debate.'

According to Tindemans, the European Union must be concerned with all aspects of foreign relations. The distinction to date between ministerial meetings which deal with political cooperation and those which deal with subjects covered by the Treaties should therefore be abandoned. This does not necessarily mean blurring the boundaries between the two subject areas, but it does entail the different aspects of the problems being dealt with together by the same people and in the same place. The political obligation of the Member States in the context of political cooperation should, at all events, be transformed into a legal one.

Tindemans sees four topics on which a common foreign policy should initially concentrate: the new world economic order, relations between Europe and the United States, security, and the crises in the immediate geographical surroundings of Europe. In the multilateral negotiations on a new world economic order, the Community should present a united front and designate the delegates responsible for pursuing such policies on behalf of the Community. The instrument of Europe's common action should be strengthened by a gradual transfer of national appropriations intended for development cooperation. The European Council should delegate one of its members to hold talks with a view to initiating a common reflection of the character and scope of relations between the United States, 'our allies, our partners and occasionally our competitors', and the Community.

Regular exchanges of views on specific defence and security problems, cooperation in the manufacture of armaments and the establishment of a European armaments agency, as well the preparation of a common policy in the event of crises in Europe and the Mediterranean area, should complete the foreign-policy picture.

New approach to economic and monetary union

Despite the various decisions that have been taken, there has not been any genuine political and technical agreement for years on the attainment of a common economic and monetary policy. How can we escape from this blind alley? Tindemans does not want a 'Europe à la carte' — the agreements on the final goal to be jointly reached must bind everyone. He believes that a 'credible' programme of action can no longer be submitted if all the stages have to be reached by the all Member States at the same time in every case. Those Member States which consider themselves to be in a position to make progress should do so. Those states which have reasons commonly acknowledged as valid for not advancing any further, says Tindemans, should let this be for the time being. They should receive aid and assistance from the other Member States that can be given to them to enable them to catch the others up. They should also, however, take part in the assessment of the results achieved in the area concerned within the Community institutions.

The Community snake should continue to be consolidated as the centrepiece of monetary stability, which includes key aspects of economic and monetary policy, namely control of money supply, the extent and financing of budget deficits, control of the economy and the control of inflation, and should have a stronger Community identity than previously.

As far as the sectoral areas are concerned, Tindemans puts the main emphasis in his 74-page report on energy supply and research. The creation of a joint mechanism in the event of supply difficulties, the setting of targets for production and consumption and a programme for alternative energy sources, the exploitation of additional production capacity and the creation of a common instrument to guide the energy market should form the basis of energy policy.

In a chapter entitled 'A citizen's Europe', the author of the report emphasises that the need for and advantages of the European Union must be recognised and felt by everyone 'so that effort and sacrifices are freely accepted.' Initiatives are encouraged for the protection of fundamental rights, consumer and environmental protection and for the extension of freedom of movement in education, for example, through the mutual recognition of educational qualifications.

No new institutions but changing the way in which they operate

Tindemans has drawn the conclusion from his consultations in the various capitals that the European Union can and must be built on the institutional foundations that already exist. This is conditional, however, on their performance, authority, legitimacy and coherence being improved.

In order to broaden the powers of the European Parliament, the European Council, in Tindemans' view, has to allocate to this institution the right to propose legislation. The Council has to undertake to discuss the resolutions submitted to it by Parliament, so that the Assembly is able 'to make an effective contribution towards defining common policies.' Parliament should organise two major policy debates every year under its own auspices in order to influence the thrust of European Union activity.

The role of the European Council in the composition of the Heads of Government for the general coherent shaping of integration policy is confirmed in the report. In order effectively to fulfil its task, when taking decisions on Community matters, it should act in accordance with the forms and procedures prescribed by the Treaties (according to Tindemans, this also includes majority decisions), indicate the institutions or bodies entrusted with executing its decision and indicate the timescale for the execution of the decision.

Tindemans considers that wider scope for action should also be entrusted to the Commission. Greater use should be made of the possibility of powers being conferred on the Commission under the Treaty. The appointment procedure should be amended in the future so as to provide the Commission with increased authority and cohesion. According to the arrangement envisaged by Tindemans, the President of the Commission should be appointed by the European Council.

The President appointed in this way would have to appear before the European Parliament to make a statement and have his appointment confirmed by vote. The President of the Commission would then

appoint his colleagues, in consultation with the Council and bearing in mind the number of Commissioners allocated to each country. Since a Treaty amendment would be required for this procedure, until such an amendment is adopted, the new Commission President should be appointed at the Council's second meeting in 1976, appear before the European Parliament and then help the Member States make the requisite preparations for the Council meeting which would appoint the other members of the Commission.