

'The European Parliament remains unstable' from the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (10 June 1977)


Caption: On 10 June 1977, the German daily newspaper Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung comments on a study by three researchers at the CDU Institute, who found that it is difficult for political parties to achieve a parliamentary majority through an electoral system based on direct universal suffrage.

Source: Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung. Zeitung für Deutschland. Hrsg. Eick, Jürgen; Welter, Erich; Fack, Fritz Ullrich; Deschamps, Bruno; Fest, Joachim; Reißmüller, Johann Georg. 10.06.1977, Nr. 132. Frankfurt/Main: FAZ Verlag GmbH. "Das Europa-Parlament bleibt instabil", auteur:Hermann, Rudolph , p. 11.

Copyright: (c) Translation CVCE.EU by UNI.LU
All rights of reproduction, of public communication, of adaptation, of distribution or of dissemination via Internet, internal network or any other means are strictly reserved in all countries.
Consult the legal notice and the terms and conditions of use regarding this site.

URL:
http://www.cvce.eu/obj/the_european_parliament_remains_unstable_from_the_frankfurter_allgemeine_zeitung_10_june_1977-en-f13180fc-8e51-4cod-8730-8c29ee72106e.html

Last updated: 06/07/2016



The European Parliament remains unstable

In the forthcoming direct elections no group has any chance of securing a majority

by Hermann Rudolph

Bonn, June

A directly elected Europe is on the way, but what kind of Europe will it be? Decisions on how direct elections should be organised and on electoral pacts and party-political configurations are still too much in the air for any detailed answer to be given to that question. However, using the methods of social science, the distribution of political influence in the future parliament can be determined with some degree of certainty. It is possible to make one prediction: that Europe with a directly elected parliament will, in political terms, be a pretty shaky affair; it will be difficult to establish political alliances capable of forming a majority and carrying on business. This is what emerges from a study conducted by three political scientists, Hans Rattinger (Freiburg), Michael Zängle and Reinhard Zintls (Regensburg), on the estimated distribution of seats in the European Parliament following direct elections.

The study was commissioned by the Social Science Research Institute of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation, which has close associations with the CDU. The researchers tried to work out the distribution of seats on the basis of the existing parties and their relative strengths in the countries of the Community, taking account of the differing electoral procedures and factoring in any political trends. The anticipated character of the future parliament was determined on the assumption that essentially it would be elected according to current national electoral laws and that political developments in the various countries right up to election day would correspond to what could be expected in the light of the current situation in those countries. In addition, the study simulates the effect on the election results of various possible electoral systems — general proportional representation, proportional representation with medium-sized constituencies, first-past-the-post — and calculates the consequences of various smaller or larger shifts (anything up to 7 %) in the distribution of seats in the individual countries. The authors conclude that ‘no sustainable, coherent majority coalitions emerge from any of the voting systems we have simulated’. The only European coalition to emerge, from all the variations, is that between the parties of the present-day Socialist and Christian Democrat groups; it could have a working majority over the Liberals, the European Conservatives comprising primarily the British Conservatives, the Progressive Democrats dominated by the Gaullists, as well as the Communists and the Independents. All other alliances would be incapable of offering a sufficiently stabilising counterweight to the political fragmentation that would be generated, in the European Parliament, by the traditional diversity of political cultures in the individual countries.

That also holds good for any pact between Christian Democrats, Liberals, European Conservatives and Progressive Democrats. True, such a pact would enjoy a majority if Europeans were to vote as they did in their last national parliamentary elections. It would then take 220 of the 410 seats against 124 for the Socialists, still the strongest group, 47 for the Communists and 19 for the Independents. However, if today’s relativities are projected along the lines suggested by political developments in the individual countries — a modest strengthening of the Communists in Italy, gains for the French Socialists, Conservative inroads in Britain — this majority melts away to no more than a single vote.

If proportional representation were to win the day in Europe — except in Great Britain — or if Liberal voters were to move towards the centre-left, even this alliance could no longer command an arithmetical majority.

The chances of a Popular Front coalition would be even slimmer than the alternative model offered by such a ‘bourgeois’ bloc. Quite apart from the fact that a coalition of this kind could never materialise because of the oft-repeated determination of the German Social Democrats not to enter into any alliance with the Communists, it would also be unworkable arithmetically. Assuming the present national electoral systems are retained, even the inclusion of the Liberals — incidentally a highly unlikely occurrence considering the profile of the German Liberals and even more so that of Liberals in other countries — would still not

provide it with a majority. At best, with a first-past-the-post system and Liberals in the Federal Republic and Great Britain voting for the left, then, admittedly, a Popular Front could expect to win a majority, and a substantial one at that. However, that means that a Popular Front could bring stability to the European party framework, stability by its lights, only through changes in the European political landscape so fundamental as to belong to the world of science fiction.

The study confirms with a sufficient degree of certainty that the likely instability of parliamentary Europe cannot be remedied by electoral arrangements, whatever form they might take. The remedy could only come from the formation of new political configurations that break away from national political traditions or from a sea change in the thinking of voters.

But this would mean nothing less than the Europeans, in direct elections, making a breach in the political ramparts that might, indeed would, plunge their familiar political worlds into turmoil; or perhaps things would remain what they have been up to now — an expensive charade.