

'Milan: a difficult start for a renewed Europe' from Le Figaro (1 July 1985)

Caption: On 1 July 1985, following the Milan European Council, the French newspaper Le Figaro gives a mixed account of the meeting held by the Ten and describes the difficult debate surrounding the issue of institutional reform.

Source: Le Figaro. 01.07.1985, n° 12 699. Paris: Le Figaro. "Milan: démarrage difficile pour une Europe rénovée", auteur:Kergorlay, Henri de; Suzannet, Robert de , p. 3.

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Milan: a difficult start for a renewed Europe

Institutional reform has provoked intense debate. The United Kingdom, Greece and Denmark have shown their opposition to a new Community treaty that would confer powers and responsibilities in the area of foreign policy and security.

Milan:

From our special correspondents

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Despite its lack of grandiose results, the Milan European Council will have opened the door to the Europe of the future and, at the same time, isolated the Member States who are opposed not only to any further extension of the Treaty of Rome but also to a possible return to its original provisions. In a way, the Heads of State or Government of the Ten have failed in the main task that had been assigned to them, namely the improvement of the decision-making process within the Council of Ministers, which would entail changes to some treaty articles.

Nevertheless, they have handed over part of this task to their Foreign Ministers, who will meet in Luxembourg on 18 July. It will be up to them to agree on certain changes which will prevent Community mechanisms from coming to a standstill: greater use of majority voting where it is provided for by the treaty, use of the right of abstention to avoid the obstruction of decisions requiring unanimity. Finally, any Member State invoking its 'right of veto' will be obliged to justify itself to the Council of Ministers and/or to the European Council. It will be a matter of devising a code of good conduct, to which any Member State so disposed will be able to sign up. Accordingly, these decisions may be taken by a majority vote rather than by unanimity.

On the other hand, for the first time since the treaty entered into force, the Council Presidency — currently held by Italy — with the support of seven Member States, invoked the procedure for revision laid down in Article 236 of the Treaty of Rome. The aim is to extend the remit of a Community which, to date, saw itself as a purely economic Community, to turn itself into a political union whose remit would extend to cover foreign policy and security and, additionally, to culture, education, public health, etc.

Certainly, the Ten have already tried to define joint positions on a number of these issues. However, as far as foreign policy is concerned, discussions have taken place outside the Community framework, while security issues are simply taboo.

Three dissidents

In accordance with Article 236, the decision has been taken to convene an intergovernmental conference. The European Parliament must be consulted. From next week, it will be so consulted, and the intergovernmental conference will have to present its findings in good time for them to be submitted to the European Council, which will meet in Luxembourg next December.

Three Member States — the United Kingdom, Greece and Denmark — were hostile to the idea of such a conference being convened. However, it is interesting to note that Ireland came down firmly on the side of the Community's six founding Member States. The attitude of the three opponents surprised nobody, but the Council was a revelation, and, at all events, the process of reviewing the Treaty of Rome is now under way. It remains to be seen if, when the work begun today is completed, Europe will become fragmented or if, on the contrary, it will be able to maintain its cohesion. The Luxembourg European Council will, no doubt, constitute the moment of truth for some Member States.

As far as Denmark is concerned, it has already had considerable difficulty in accepting the idea even of belonging to a Community with all that that entails. Even more so, it would find any extension to the Treaty of Rome quite unacceptable.

As for Greece, it is not clear that Andreas Papandreu completely understood, on Saturday, all the implications of the current debate. At all events, it is unpredictable.

The internal market

The United Kingdom's position is, once again, ambiguous. It believes that the Treaty of Rome has still to be properly implemented and that this should, therefore, be the starting point. At the same time, the United Kingdom attaches a great deal of importance to political cooperation that it does not wish to see within the Community's remit. It believes that political cooperation should operate in parallel.

However, among the other tasks which were established at the Milan European Council, the most important concerned the completion of a genuine common market with a population of 320 million in a Community enlarged to encompass 12 countries. The Council welcomed the white paper presented recently by the Commission on this subject which provides for establishment of this single market in 1992. The following issues were considered to be priorities: abolition of physical obstacles to the free movement of goods, the creation of a free market in the financial services and transport sectors, complete freedom of establishment for the liberal professions and the liberalisation of capital movements. A further priority: abolition of technical obstacles to the free movement of goods, which would entail the adoption, in the case of the new technologies being developed, of common norms with a view to the opening up of public procurement contracts. Unfortunately, the harmonisation of indirect taxes (VAT and excise duty) may well find itself put on the backburner. A conventional and reliable method has been found to achieve this: the dossier has been handed over to the Ministers of Finance.

Finally, the Council's conclusions confirm support for the French Eureka project, as well as for the Commission's proposals in the field of technology.

H. K. and R. S.