

'Political cooperation: a "certain idea of Europe"?' from Le Monde (21 June 1983)

Caption: On 21 June 1983, following the Stuttgart European Council, the French daily newspaper Le Monde comments on the issues surrounding the implementation of common European political cooperation.

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After the Stuttgart Summit

Political cooperation:

a ‘certain idea of Europe’?

From our special correspondent

Stuttgart. — After devoting so much time and energy to the budget controversy, the Ten did not want to leave the capital of Baden-Württemberg without solemnly reaffirming their commitment to the European Union and, hence, to political cooperation among themselves. Perhaps this was a belated expression of the concern to ensure that the general public in their respective countries did not go on regarding Europe only as a question of big money. Probably. But, equally, there is no doubt that this affirmation of the presence of politics at the very heart of economics reflects an intention that lies at the very heart of European integration.

The ‘*Solemn Declaration on European Union*’ may be read in at least two ways. The first would underline that, however long the text, it does not include any really new institutional provision and that it may seem odd to be so emphatic or to fix such vague future dates when it is quite simply a question of restoring a little dynamism to age-old mechanisms and institutions.

But it may also be interpreted — as did Mr Mauroy at his final press conference — as ‘*a symbolic gesture*’, even though the French Foreign Minister also pointed out that this Declaration was merely ‘*one of the elements of the revival of Europe*’, elements which his government ‘*can only welcome*’. Mr Mitterrand, before returning to Paris, had actually insisted that this text must include a social chapter and, in particular, must refer to the fight against unemployment.

The Declaration by the Ten, which derives from the ‘Genscher-Colombo Act’ that some (in particular the French) regarded as a serious threat to the ‘Luxembourg Compromise’, does not, in fact, call into question that agreement, which enabled France to put an end to its ‘empty chair’ policy in 1966.

The adoption of the simple majority rule for Community decisions would certainly have marked a more striking turning point than the list of good intentions solemnly signed in Stuttgart; but it had no chance of being adopted unanimously ...

As for the role of the European Parliament (also known as the ‘*Assembly of the European Communities*’ in the Declaration, less, no doubt, to avoid repetitions than to satisfy the ‘sensibilities’ of all concerned), it has been strengthened now that the Strasbourg Assembly has been accorded the right to have a say on political cooperation among the Ten.

Other provisions of the various texts adopted in Stuttgart are, however, more ambiguous. It is unlikely that the Community will be able to dispense for much longer with an in-depth consideration of the allocation of powers among its various bodies, with particular reference to political cooperation; although everyone insists that they want to extend its scope, the Assembly would prefer to have a broader right of scrutiny.

Poland, Lebanon, Israel ...

As the Declaration on European Union points out, extending the scope of this form of cooperation means that the Council will increasingly endeavour to speak with a single voice on various topical issues covered by the Community’s foreign policy. Stuttgart was certainly among them.

On the question of Poland, it thus noted that ‘*at a time when everything shows the depth of the Polish people’s aspirations [...] only national reconciliation that takes full account of these aspirations*’ can enable this country to ‘*emerge from the serious crisis*’ which it is currently experiencing.

The Council also ‘*considered the progress made at the Madrid CSCE Conference*’, with particular reference

to the compromise proposal put forward by Mr Felipe González on 17 June this year (*Le Monde*, 19–20 June edition). On the Middle East, it hoped that ‘*Lebanon would return to full sovereignty and lasting peace*’, which required ‘*the complete and rapid withdrawal of foreign troops from its territory, except those whose presence was requested by the Lebanese Government*’.

Furthermore, the financial facilities for Israel, suspended last year because of Israel’s intervention in Lebanon, have been unfrozen. Greece, which had hitherto opposed such a gesture, confined itself to abstaining. The sum involved is ECU 40 million, which the Community will now lend to the State of Israel.

Lastly, on Central America, the Heads of State or Government called for ‘*a political and not a military solution*’ to the problems arising there, for inviolable borders, respect for human rights and the ‘*establishment of democratic conditions*’.

‘*This European Council was an important rendezvous for the Community, in an atmosphere that was not short of risks,*’ according to Mr Mauroy. ‘*By pulling together, with everyone playing their part, it decided collectively to make a new start.*’ Yet it seems that this was a hard-won success.

Chancellor Kohl, in particular, had to make great personal efforts, going constantly from one delegation to another, preaching a pragmatic Community approach here and comprehension towards British difficulties there, to ensure that ‘*his*’ Summit did not collapse.

To a large extent, he succeeded: ‘*He practically grabbed us by the coat-tails just as a number of us were about to leave the negotiating table,*’ according to Mr Cheysson. The German Chancellor was, indeed, aware that his compatriots needed to make ‘*political*’ progress if they were to accept certain budgetary concessions of which the German public hardly took a favourable view.

Aside from these tactical considerations, however, most of the other participants also appeared to realise that this was not just a budgetary issue. However modest it may be in terms of substance — especially when compared to its declamatory form — the Stuttgart Declaration is an endeavour to express a ‘*certain idea of Europe*’.

Bernard Brigouleix