

'Be sure to cast your vote!' from the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (7 June 1979)

Caption: On 7 June 1979, the German newspaper Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung comments on the first direct elections to the European Parliament whilst reminding its readers of the importance of their vote and highlighting the implications of the election.

Source: Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung. Zeitung für Deutschland. Hrsg. EICK, Jürgen; FACK, Fritz Ullrich; DESCHAMPS, Bruno; FEST, Joachim; REIßMÜLLER, Johann Georg; WELTER, Erich. 07.06.1979, n° 130. Frankfurt/Main: FAZ Verlag GmbH. "Unbedingt zur Wahl gehen", auteur: Gillessen, Günther, p. 1.

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Last updated: 06/07/2016



Be sure to cast your vote!

By Günther Gillessen

Much can be said against the European Parliament. It has no authority, it cannot pass any laws, it is unable to appoint a Member of the Commission of the European Community, it can barely take decisions on the Community's expenditure and budget. Is going to the polling station for such a Parliament worth the effort?

This portrayal, true as it may be, leads to wrong conclusions. The political parties involved in the election campaign did not help voters to understand that it is for their own benefit and essential for the future of Europe that a strong European Parliament be established.

People who make derogatory remarks about the European Parliament and about this first opportunity to elect its Members directly have no idea about either the dangers that will threaten Europe or the means that it can acquire through confederation in order to preserve both itself and its way of life. Europe's most important characteristics are the traditions, rules and institutions on the basis of which its nations may freely govern themselves. These rules of political civilisation were invented in Europe.

If we are to ensure the survival of this European way of life and political attitude, we now need new institutions. The main reason for this is that no European nation now rules over an empire. Ever since antiquity, there has always been at least one European power, often several at the same time, that pursued a world policy for its own benefit and indirectly for that of other European nations. By creating empires, Europe also created a favourable environment for itself in the context of world politics. This is manifestly no longer possible.

Europe's need for protection is at its most obvious in the areas of external security, energy supply and the maintenance of trade relations with other continents in which the European nations have to earn their livelihoods. Europe needs a new structure that is capable of asserting itself in world politics. In addition to uniting more and more European States in an Economic Community, it must also produce political guidance. If the hegemony of one European State over all others is no longer acceptable, the only solution remains a confederation on a cooperative basis.

Every federal Constitution must create a balance between the protection of individual parts and the protection of the whole. Ever since Charles de Gaulle, in a major test of strength, succeeded in convincing the Council of Ministers in Brussels to renounce the exercise of its enshrined right to take majority decisions, every single Member State has a right to veto not provided for in the Community Constitution. This has further strengthened the clout of national interests in the Community. The Commission, in particular, has been badly affected by this loss of balance. The Community's once leading organ has been relegated to a position of less importance. This has also had a negative effect on the decision-making process in the Council of Ministers. The fact that the Heads of State or Government felt obliged to place themselves above the Community's Council of Ministers was a clear admission of the latter's weakened power of integration.

For many years now, the centrifugal forces in the Community have been over-represented while its centripetal forces have been under-represented. Such a situation is not without consequences. Can we presume that an assembly of national governments will want to develop into a joint defence capability under a joint supreme command? The sad ending of the European Defence Community (EDC) already gave the answer to that question. Can we presume that the governments of Europe's wealthier countries will want to become 'paymasters' of a regional policy which directs large sums of money to Europe's weaker regions? Although not a single state objects to imposing higher national taxes on its wealthier citizens in order to help the poorer, is that kind of solidarity between European States conceivable without the prior institution of a political community of solidarity? And can we imagine a fair distribution of the increasingly scarce and expensive petroleum without a European confederation? Will we, until then, not have to witness nations with stronger currencies fight for a greater share at the expense of the weaker countries? Can the problems surrounding migrant workers in the Community be solved in any way other than by transferring industries

and investment from the host countries to the immigrants' countries? Which national government, however, under pressure from high unemployment figures at home, will summon up the political will to make this happen?

The much-needed reform of the European Community's Constitution is facing many obstacles, including some expressly stated reservations from the parliaments in Paris and London. The Community's future directly-elected Parliament will, therefore, hardly be able to establish itself as a constitutional Assembly. But it can open and maintain the debate about the Constitution. It can publicly argue its case. It can run political campaigns. It can act as the Commission's support. It can reply, through the political parties, to national parliaments and thus exert pressure on national governments. It can give guidance to the public in individual European countries. That is why this Parliament needs backing. It needs the legitimacy deriving from a high election turnout.