

'Luxembourg: the European Council gets off to bad start' from Le Figaro (2 December 1985)

Caption: On the eve of the first day of the Luxembourg European Council, 2 December 1985, the French newspaper Le Figaro gives an overview of the European issues which stand in the way of reform of the Treaty of Rome.

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Luxembourg: the European Council gets off to a bad start

The preparatory discussions on the reform of the Treaty of Rome, the markets and disparities in the resources available to EEC Member States have produced disappointing results. Mitterrand has turned down an invitation to lunch with the Grand Duke.

Luxembourg: from our correspondents Henri de Kergorlay and Robert de Suzannet

The European Council meeting here in Luxembourg begins today on something of a false note. François Mitterrand has not seen fit to accept the invitation to lunch extended by the Grand Duke to the Heads of State or Government of the Community and of Spain and Portugal. For its part, the French delegation was talking yesterday of the President's prior engagements, though without offering any details. And yet the date of the Council session has been known for six months.

The Luxembourg meeting is fully in line with last June's meeting in Milan at which it was decided to convene an intergovernmental conference with a view to 'making real progress towards a European Union' through 'a treaty on a common foreign and security policy' as well as through certain changes to the Treaty of Rome, devised more than 30 years ago for a six-member Community. With this in mind, the participants in the Milan Council also set themselves the task of expanding the scope of the Treaty, which had initially been concerned primarily with economic issues. It would now feature a number of areas that have acquired a new dimension, such as the environment, culture and technology, and would give a definite Community slant to initiatives which had hitherto been a matter for intergovernmental cooperation, an example being the European Monetary System (EMS).

The work done over the last three months has produced rather disappointing results. Even the surge of enthusiasm that had led certain Member States to envisage a split in the Community, with some countries making progress towards political and economic integration, the others being left behind, has now subsided. France had been among those ready to take risks in order to move forward. The United Kingdom had preferred to hold back. As usual, Chancellor Kohl was in two minds.

Distressing inhibitions

Admittedly, the initial project defied all logic in so far as the decision to convene the intergovernmental conference was taken by seven votes to three, the United Kingdom, Greece and Denmark voting against, whereas Article 236 of the Treaty requires the unanimous vote of the ten Member States if the proposals concerned are to be adopted. Nor has the question been pursued in the various meetings since September of modifying the 'Luxembourg Accords' which, in practice, have, since January 1966, allowed any Member State to invoke 'very important interests' in order to block a decision. Yet this return to the letter of the Treaty had been viewed as essential if the Community was to act effectively and move forward. Commenting on this shortcoming, the President of the Commission, Jacques Delors, recently explained in disenchanted tones: 'Here in the Communities it's rather like in bourgeois families. There are words that must not be spoken. They would offend the lady of the house, and the children should not hear them.' For Jacques Delors, the Ten are suffering from distressing inhibitions.

Today, the Ten find themselves in a situation where each has very little room for manoeuvre. The many meetings in recent weeks of the Council of Ministers have highlighted a series of obstacles which will be difficult to surmount:

- **Internal market.** — This began as a brilliant Commission proposal seeking the completion, by 1992, a genuine single market of 320 million consumers. As matters stand at present, the 'Ten' have not even managed to agree on a definition of what is meant by 'internal market'.

The Commission's proposal included the free movement of goods, services, capital and persons. If this is to be achieved, the voting rules in the Council of Ministers, as currently laid down in a number of Treaty articles, must be changed. There is no agreement in view on this point. What has emerged from the

discussions is that each of the protagonists has its own conception of what the single market should look like.

The United Kingdom is opposed to the free movement of persons on security grounds and, backed by Ireland on this point, wishes to retain its own veterinary rules and regulations. The Germans, for their part, insist on retaining certain technical standards, introduced to protect the consumer, which, in practice, act as fully-fledged protectionist barriers.

As for France, it will have no truck with the free movement of capital in the absence of parallel advances with regard to goods and services. There is a real risk that the initial Commission proposal will end up a hollow shell, with each Member State raising objections to the proposed timetable and seeking derogations to safeguard its own interests and the prerogatives of its national authorities.

The rich and the poor

- **The monetary domain.** — The outlook is no brighter on this front. Jacques Delors, with a zest of optimism, had proposed that the European Monetary System (EMS) be incorporated in the Treaty, with provision for step-by-step advances in the system. The idea was to give scope for possible development of the EMS through to the ultimate creation of a European Monetary Fund. An indirect effect would be to enhance the role of the ecu. The Federal Republic of Germany and the United Kingdom are blocking these proposals, though for different reasons. Both, however, see in them an unacceptable relinquishment of sovereignty in the monetary domain.

- **Economic and social cohesion.** — Progress in this area, narrowing the disparities in economic development from one European region to another, is fundamental to what the European Commission is trying to achieve. The countries at the outer edges of the EEC, whether it be Ireland, Portugal or Greece, are sometimes very poor. Changing this state of affairs would imply changes in the way that the structural funds operate, which, in turn, would allow the gap between rich and poor countries to be narrowed. But, here, one comes up against the usual split between the haves and the have-nots.

- **The powers of the European Parliament.** — The European Parliament, an assembly elected by direct universal suffrage, currently enjoys only very limited powers. It would be both democratic and a normal course of action to increase those powers. The Italians are the most ardent defenders of the European Assembly and, like the Commission, wish it to play a significantly enhanced role. This approach has met with varying degrees of resistance from the other Member States. For its part, Denmark wants nothing to do with it. And indeed, it wants nothing to do with anything. The issue is not just that of the extension of the European Parliament's powers; there is also the question of its relations with the Brussels Council of Ministers and, hence, with the national administrations.

Two ways out

All in all, things do not look good for this meeting of the European Council. A total failure does not, however, seem likely. The Heads of State or Government are left with two ways out. One is to try to cover an excessively meagre outcome with the vague cloak of institutionalised political cooperation or even with the mantle of a Treaty on European Union. It would then be a matter of seeing to what extent the words match the reality. Alternatively, they may fall for the charms of their favourite strategy, that of postponing a solution to the problems concerned.

This would automatically push back any decision on these key issues to June 1986 at the earliest, bearing in mind that the European Council will next meet betwixt two elections: almost immediately after the French legislative elections and just a few weeks prior to those to the Netherlands Parliament.

H. K. and R. S.