

'Political impetus or mere speculation?' from Europe (30 October 1981)

Source: Europe. Dir. of publ. RICCARDI, Lodovico ; Editor GAZZO, Emanuele. 30.10.1981, n° 3239. Brussels.

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URL: http://www.cvce.eu/obj/political_impetus_or_mere_speculation_from_europe_30_october_1981-en-39fc2d9e-28c3-4743-8498-5175075a9e06.html

Publication date: 16/09/2012

Political impetus or mere speculation

As we said at the time, the Genscher plan for giving European Union fresh momentum and the Italian plan more or less along the same lines but with the addition of a weighty section on the economic aspects were officially put to the Community member governments at the ministerial political cooperation meeting in London on 14 October.

It is still not clear whether these two plans are to be merged into a joint or "single" document, in accordance with the wishes of Ministers Genscher and Colombo (meeting in Rome on 3 October - see Political Day of 5 October). Entirely agreed that it is necessary to forge ahead with European Union (which has not gone beyond the stage of the statements of intent given at the summit meeting of October 1972, in spite of the ad hoc report by Mr Tindemans), the German and Italian governments also generally agreed on "the substance that should be given to the concept of European Union". The question now is whether this agreement will show up on paper. We cannot tell as yet. Will this single text or the two plans separately get their first airing at the meeting of heads of government in London on 26 and 27 November? Nobody could say for the time being, even though the two governments behind the plans would like to take the matter up. Still more difficult to predict is the reception which the plans will get.

Our readers are already familiar with the gist of the German and Italian plans (Political Day of 8 October). They will no doubt have realised that in some instances they cover the same ground and complement each other at the same time. The Italian plan seems to call for the start of a process that would establish a genuine European decision-making power, competent to deal with all major political and economic issues (on the understanding that it will deal with those issues which could be handled better by the future "Union" than by the Member States individually).

This being the stage reached so far - the supporters of re-launching putting forward their plans - analysis and commentaries have laid their emphasis on different points.

The first thing that has been said is that new impetus is needed and that the time is right, given the complex and dangerous political situation at the moment and the fact that the Community is about to make some important economic policy decisions.

It was for this reason that we posited the view that re-launching through a "solemn act" might not be enough or whether it might not provide confirmation of the fact that the political will of governments is too weak to stand any precise and irreversible commitments. At one point (Editorial of 21 September), we wondered whether Germany really wanted to be part of a global and dynamic strategy or whether it wanted to put the brake on. However, we have realised that a process had been started and that it had to be given as much encouragement as possible because it was certainly better than inertia. The thing now is to get it moving in the right direction. And we have already noted how significant it is that it was Germany which took the initiative.

However, all that would still not prevent us from wondering why precisely it was Germany that made a move, at the very time when the Germans seem so reluctant to commit themselves to the European venture. In the long run, it would be in Germany's interest to play a dynamic role in Europe. Others have gone further and have seen in the German move an attempt to give the appearance of positive political will, covering a genuine determination to wriggle out of the commitments that would be inherent in more advanced European integration. In other words, the Germans are giving the "illusion" that they are moving head on the political side, so as to be more easily able to throw the ballast overboard when it comes to the economic issues.

No doubt these are just attempts to get to the bottom of the matter but such speculation always reveals some aspects of reality or states of mind. They should not be under-estimated. In this particular case, there is twofold justification. On the one hand, there is the doubtful consistency of the plan (especially once the political cooperation procedures have been improved and on the other, the negative or at least reluctant attitude which the German delegation is still showing in the difficult negotiations on the mandate. Only by

changing this attitude can Germany show that the speculation has no real foundation. Which is what everybody wants.

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