

'A more effective "Political Cooperation", and then?' from Europe (16 October 1981)

Caption: In his editorial of 16 October 1981, Emanuele Gazzo, Director of Agence Europe, comments on the scope of the report on European Political Cooperation (EPC) adopted three days earlier in London by the Foreign Ministers of the Ten.

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A more effective "Political Cooperation", and then?

We have already stated that, following the agreement between the Foreign Ministers of the Ten, the "Political Cooperation" which has been initiated since the Luxembourg Report of 1970, better known as the "Davignon Report" will pass into a new phase.

Be reassured, readers: nothing revolutionary has been planned, no "quality leap" foreseen. There is neither a change in method, nor a broadening of the field of action of the Political Cooperation, and its evolution towards a genuine "common foreign policy" is frankly not discernible. The idea of "security" is introduced only as an aside, as is evident from the following sentence: "As regards the scope of European Political Cooperation, and having regard to the different situations of the Member States, the Foreign Ministers agree to maintain the flexible and pragmatic approach which has made it possible to discuss in Political Cooperation certain important foreign policy questions bearing on the political aspects of security". We have underlined the significant passages: the first contains an allusion to Ireland, which is not a member of the Atlantic Alliance (but could concern other countries whose defence "situation" is different to that of its partners...); the second limits the security idea to its "political" aspects.

The idea of political cooperation had its beginning in The Hague in 1969, along with so many other notions for the future. However, at the Summit in The Hague, the "achievement of progress in the area of political unification" was discussed. On the way, the "political unification", which the natural counterpart of economic integration, has become an "intergovernmental foreign policy cooperation", which is a completely different thing.

Let us acknowledge that, since the Act which gave birth to this cooperation, some progress has been made, following the second, or Copenhagen 1973, Report, and more generally, thanks to the "flexible and pragmatic" method employed, to the creation of a certain "reserve" between the Foreign Ministries of the ten countries, and to a more active circulation of men and often to "good will". Progress has also been made through the turn of events, and through pressure from happenings internal and external, which obliged the Ten to consult and seek a greater efficiency. In this case particularly, the Community, enlarged, having become an "economic giant", could not always remain a political non-entity. Unfortunately, this cooperation has not allowed it to reach a high level of political presence in the world. Europe is there, of course, in the midst of the big questions, but remains "on the sideline". Her size is that of a dwarf. A man who had a deep knowledge of the subject, Ambassador Philippe de Schoutheete, had to acknowledge, in the conclusion of a study on the matter, that "coordinated diplomatic efforts run the risk of stagnating at one level which, although praiseworthy in itself, is not very conclusive".

The new report, drawn up on the initiative of Lord Carrington, and which will no doubt have the blessing of the European Council, does not fundamentally modify the form of this "coordinated diplomatic effort". On the contrary, by confirming its "pragmatic" nature, by stressing as never before the confidential character of its work, (including the "Gymnich" Councils) it renders this so-called "Political Europe" less and less understandable to public opinion, to citizens, to the electorate. Of course the Ministers have decided to "refer" more often, in their debates and declarations, to the resolutions adopted by the Parliament, and to establish closer contacts with it. Well, so what! The influence of the European Parliament in "European secret diplomatic endeavours" will never be significant. Certainly, a crisis procedure, with possibility to meet within 48 hours, is now planned. Nobody will tell you, though (neither will anybody remember) that even in the Davignon report, the case of "serious crisis or particular urgency" was provided for. It took...11 years, to notice that practical measures had to be taken...

Our eternal reproach of Political Cooperation, which remains a useful mechanism, and a necessary one, is that, from the very fact of its existence, it creates the false image of a "political entity" Community in its foreign policy, thus paralysing any initiative, any combat, for a genuine political Community.

Emanuele Gazzo