

Interview with Antonio Segni from the Corriere della Sera (15 June 1962)

Caption: On 15 June 1962, Antonio Segni, the Italian Foreign Minister, grants the Milanese daily newspaper Corriere della Sera an interview on the implications of the second stage of the European Customs Union.

Source: Corriere della Sera. 15.06.1962, n° 13; anno 1. Milano: Corriere della Sera. "Segni illustra la portata delle decisioni di Bruxelles", auteur:A.A. , p. 1.

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Segni discusses the scope of the decisions in Brussels

‘By strengthening and speeding up the economic community we have completed a great work of peace, worthy of every sacrifice’

Rome, 15 January, evening.

The Foreign Minister, Antonio Segni, met our editor, who asked him about the outcome of the last meeting of the Council of Ministers of the European Community in Brussels. The questions that we put to the Minister and the answers that he was kind enough to give us are reproduced below.

Question: How important is the transition to the second stage of the European Economic Community?

Answer: ‘I have to go back to the Treaty signed in Rome less than five years ago (25 March 1957). As set out in its Preamble, one of the essential goals of the Treaty is to ensure the social and economic progress of the contracting countries and, as a basis for that progress, ever closer union between the peoples of Europe.

To prevent this union from being an empty formula, the Treaty does not establish a simple customs union (i.e. the abolition of customs duties between the contracting countries), but an economic union, in the sense that it creates the instruments and rules for union in all economic sectors. It therefore provides for the introduction of a common external tariff, and lays down the principles and rules needed to ensure, between the six countries, the freedom of movement of goods, the common agricultural policy (Articles 38 and following), the freedom of movement of persons, services and capital, common economic, taxation and social policy and the approximation of legislation.’

Independent powers

‘Such a vast unification in the economic and social field cannot take place quickly; the Treaty therefore makes provision for a transitional period, made up of three “stages” of four years each, whose length can nevertheless be extended, for the gradual implementation of the principles of the Community.

The Treaty also establishes common organs acting for the Community (and not for the individual States). These common organs are: the Council, made up of representatives of the Member States, which has decision-making powers, the Commission, composed of nine members, which is the executive organ of the Community, the Parliamentary Assembly (with consultative powers) and the Court of Justice.

There is no need at present to analyse the nature of these organs, but they will operate as the genuine organs of a body which is above the individual States and has its own powers. The decision-making powers vested in the Council and the Commission are based on the principle of unanimity in the first stage of implementation of the Common Market; when the transition to the second stage takes place, however, all decisions, apart from those regarding agricultural issues, will then be taken by a majority (in most cases a qualified majority, i.e. with a weighting of the votes of States). A body which is no longer driven by the wishes of the individual States, but which has its own driving force, will therefore come into force. This body or system will be very different from past and present alliances and unions and will be genuinely supranational: the principle of European union is therefore placed on a concrete footing by these institutions.

The decision to move to the second stage, taken yesterday morning in Brussels, is therefore of exceptional importance for Europe’s future.’

Question: Were any other decisions made during the long session of the Council of the Community?

Answer: ‘Many decisions were made during the long session and were all important in their own way.’

Political act

‘I shall look at only some of these decisions. Rules extending the period of payment of family benefits from three to six years in the case of workers emigrating to a State while leaving their family in their own country were approved; the regulation implementing Articles 85 and 86 of the Treaty prohibiting agreements, cartels and trusts within the Community was approved; a series of rules implementing the common agricultural policy and therefore gradually abolishing restrictions on the freedom of movement of agricultural produce in the territory of the Community were approved.

This was the main area of discussion for many days. Unifying agricultural policy is no easy matter because our countries have such different types of agriculture, but the individual regulations for cereals, fruit and vegetables, eggs and poultry met all the prerequisites for the gradual unification of these markets.

These regulations put the political skills and acumen of the negotiators to the test; their approval does not just pave the way for a sensible and balanced economic agreement, but is also an act of high political significance: the construction of a broader-ranging agricultural policy, which, since it now covers a market of 170 million inhabitants (and 220 million if Britain joins), will therefore have to be geared less to self-sufficiency than individual policies. For this purpose, the Council also decided to hold a further session in February, at which it will decide whether to speed up the dismantling of customs tariffs between the six Member States of the Community and the external tariff.’

Question: What political repercussions have the decisions reached had outside the sphere of the six States?

Answer: ‘When the Community was formed, there were many doubts, both within and outside, about its ability to function. It was felt that the reduction of internal customs tariffs would lead to economic recession; that reactions from outside (whether already stated or predictable) might slow down the Community’s development.

Exactly the opposite has happened. The Community’s economic development has been greater than expected. Industry has grown at a pace which has outstripped worldwide development; we can therefore attribute this growth to the Community and not simply to the economic situation. Any hostility on the part of third countries, especially in Europe, has been cancelled out by the appeal that the Common Market now has for European countries (and not just European countries).

Britain, in particular, has asked to join the Community, and I am in favour of Britain’s accession.

Economic union will lead to political union, and necessarily to an irreversible political union. The conflicts of interest between western powers, which brought about all this century’s wars, will become a thing of the past.

It therefore paves the way for the widest and safest of political unions: De Gasperi would have seen this as the achievement of his Europeanist dream. More fortunate than him, we are in the vanguard of this achievement.

By strengthening and speeding up the economic community we have completed a great work of peace, worthy of every effort and worthy of every sacrifice.’

A. A.