

'The difficulties facing a political Europe' from Le Monde (27 November 1961)

Caption: On 27 November 1961, the French daily newspaper Le Monde outlines the positions of France's European partners on the implementation of a political Europe.

Source: Le Monde. dir. de publ. Beuve-Méry, Hubert. 27.11.1961, n° 4 934; 18e année. Paris: Le Monde. "Les difficultés de l'Europe politique", p. 1.

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The difficulties facing a political Europe

At their meeting in Bad Godesberg on 18 July 1961, the Heads of State or Government of the Six asked the Committee chaired by Christian Fouchet to ‘submit [to them] proposals which will as soon as possible enable a statutory character to be given to the union of their peoples.’ Since then, several delegations have submitted working papers, and the French Delegation has sought to summarise them in a draft ‘Union of States’ that was analysed in *Le Monde* on 31 October and 4 November.

The draft was based on the ‘Europe of Nations’ concept, insofar as all decisions have to be taken unanimously, with the possibility of abstention or absence by one or two Member States which would not be required to implement the decision adopted. However, Article 16 provides for a complete review of the Treaty’s provisions after three years.

Our Italian and German partners, although they had always actively supported the supranational idea and raised all manner of objections to General Charles de Gaulle’s confederative plans when they were put forward in the summer of 1960, believed that Article 16 opened the way to enhancing European unity. Although they tabled a number of amendments that were not unwelcome in the French Foreign Ministry, they strongly supported the French idea. Luxembourg adopted a similar position.

The Netherlands, which unwillingly agreed to sign the 18 July declaration, once again voiced its objections. Either, as their representatives keep saying, we stay within the framework of the Six, in which case the same principles should apply to our political cooperation as applied to our economic Communities, or we move beyond that framework. In that case, there is no reason not to include Britain in our talks.

This reasoning is not bereft of logic. But the fact is that the British public already finds it hard to get used to the idea of a Common Market. For that reason, London has no wish to be invited to talks on the Union of States. For the moment, Harold Macmillan’s Government considers the WEU framework to be quite sufficient and has let the countries concerned know it. In fact, one might wonder whether the Dutch reservations do not stem from deeper, quite legitimate motives, and whether the question in The Hague is about the very need for a Common Market.

Much more surprising is the Belgian U-turn. In the winter of 1960–61, there was no more effective evangelist for reconciliation than Paul-Henri Spaak. It could be claimed that, together with Jean Monnet, he played a key role in persuading Chancellor Konrad Adenauer to accept the de Gaulle plan, which was pruned of anything that might undermine existing supranational structures or strain the Atlantic alliance. Now, he is publicly condemning the dangers of this Europe of Nations and sides with the Dutch Delegation in asking for, and securing, the postponement of the meeting of the Committee planned for 29 November.

It is to be hoped that the meeting of Atlantic allies in mid-December will allow the Foreign Ministers of the Six to resume discussions, if they have not done so before then. The closer ties recently achieved between General de Gaulle and Walter Hallstein, together with the unequivocal support in Rome and Bonn for the French plan, should convince Brussels that the modest blueprint that Paris is proposing in no way threatens the age-old dream of a United States of Europe.

Abandoning this current attempt would only encourage those who are counting on divisions within Europe, and it might constitute a mortal blow to the Common Market which, especially if it is to expand geographically, requires a minimum of political organisation if it is to survive in its current form.