

'The expert breed' from La Libre Belgique (22 February 1957)

Caption: On 22 February 1957, the daily newspaper La Libre Belgique gives a tongue-in-cheek description of the experts of each of the national delegations who drew up the Treaties establishing the European Economic Community (EEC) and the European Atomic Energy Community (EAEC or Euratom) in Val Duchesse and who will most certainly play an important role in their future implementation.

Source: La Libre Belgique. 22.02.1957, n° 53; 74e année. Bruxelles: Société d'édition des journaux du Patriote. "La race des experts", auteur:J., D. , p. 1; 3.

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Reviving Europe in Paris

The expert breed (Eye-witness accounts)

Ministers take centre stage at international diplomatic conferences. Their photos and statements appear in the newspapers, and their names are included in the final communiqué. Behind the scenes, however, the experts are at work. These powers behind the throne prepare the files and draft the wording of treaty articles. They represent the corporate memory, provide the skills and often do the thinking for the Ministers. They may even act as their consciences. Ministers come and go; the experts remain. They will doubtless play a major role in the implementation of the Common Market and Euratom Treaties.

Given that the diplomatic phase of reviving Europe is almost over, it is worth trying to describe the world of these experts as we prepare to leave Paris. They are a real and significant feature of international life, one that is becoming more and more prominent.

These technocrats are at the most 50 years old and often younger. They are not into sport at all. They tend to be rather pale-faced and slightly stooped. Workaholics, they spend their evenings and into the night number-crunching and drafting memos. They speak several foreign languages.

As we have pointed out before, most German experts must be addressed as ‘Herr Doktor’, and they are alert and highly organised. Most of them are from the Rhineland, which gives them an advantage in the international milieu in which they work. In general, the French experts come from the Monnet stable. He was the founding father of the ECSC (the European Coal and Steel Community). They are polished, in the way that graduates of the Polytechnique (France’s Oxbridge) are polished, but in a high society way, too. They love plans, theories and soulless economics. They have their own Book of Common Prayer, in the form of a ‘digest’ of data on France printed on wafer-thin paper which allows them, at any time of day or night, to give the population figures for France, the number of cars in the Corrèze département, the growth rate in the Moselle and the degree of underdevelopment in the south-west. They are, of course, subtle, talkative and, moreover, very pleasant.

The Italian experts in the revival of Europe have the most beautiful ties and socks of all those working on reviving Europe. When they speak, statistics explode like scintillating fireworks. Each percentage point is accompanied by exaggerated hand gestures. Their fifteen minutes of fame during the Common Market negotiations came with the agricultural chapter. They explained the ins and outs one evening to journalists from across the Alps. It was a ball. Imagine a radio journalist describing not the drama of Fausto Coppi’s suffering and triumph in the uphill stages of the Tour de France but instead the saga of tomatoes and aperitifs.

The Belgians are, as the Americans put it, ‘cooperative’. They are always hauling their files around with them. They know them in the minutest detail just as they know the addresses of the good-but-you-don’t-pay-through-the-nose restaurants in Paris. The Dutch, strangely, look typically British. Their delegation has the most umbrellas per square yard. Several of them sport ‘handlebar’ moustaches copied from the Foreign Office Johnnies. They are proper and punctilious. Although they are at ease speaking the language of Pascal, they are, at the same time, the ‘least French’ of the European world of experts. The Germans, although very aware of the power that they have recouped, still have a sentimental weakness for France. This is not at all the case with the Dutch.

By definition, these powers behind the throne are tight-lipped, but we can still summarise their reactions to the Common Market Treaty over which they have laboured for months.

They know very well that this Treaty is far from being a rational, Cartesian construct. It was drawn up in more or less the following way: it started out with liberalising provisions that were steadily met by a number of counter-attacks that finally led to a mushrooming of safeguard clauses. These clauses, which were 90 % ‘made in France’, engendered opt-out measures that were demanded by those delegations that wanted to

escape protectionism. The experts readily admit that the 250 pages of the Common Market Treaty are an unpalatable cocktail of measures and chain reactions and that they are often mutually contradictory. They are all the more prepared to admit this fact because they put the blame on the politicians.

When their guard is down, when they are tired and think that they are with an 'unarmed' journalist (since he is not writing any notes in his pad), they predict that half of the articles in the Common Market Treaty will never be implemented. They refer to the precedent of the European Coal and Steel Community to back up their predictions. The problem is that our experts do not agree on which are the superfluous articles! Some are convinced that the liberal part of the Treaty will be smothered by the protectionist part. Others take the opposite view. The Dutch can swallow this bitter pill today in the hope of overriding, in years to come, the safeguards that were written into the Treaty under pressure from France. The French justify those safeguards in a tactical way by making much of their economy's weaknesses and the strength of feeling in Parliament. Some amongst them, however, see these 'temporary crutches' as the 'structural flying buttresses' of a European autarchy in the future in which the Polytechnique factor will play the starring role. In response to our remark about the preferential nature of the French goals, which run counter to the very notion of the Common Market, one of the French experts told us, 'Never use the word "preferential". The elegance of the French language allows us to speak of the free movement of goods sheltered by a high customs tariff.' That is indeed the autarchic concept in fancy clothing. The fact that it is extended to cover six countries makes it no less harmful.

It should also be pointed out that, amongst the experts of the European revival, there appears to be a sort of 'third force' ensconced between the conflicting parties of whom we have spoken. That 'third force' trusts above all in the natural laws of economics that, we are told, will prevail over the Common Market Treaty. The key, in the view of this group of experts, is to achieve the optimum economic scale in Europe. Europe's domestic markets are too small.

They hope that these markets will merge under the irresistible pressure of a trend that, they say, the Treaty enhances. Of course, they realise the danger of European autarchy resulting from a protectionist external customs tariff. But their bets are on this Great Wall of China not being ready before the end of the transitional period, which means within 15 years. On the contrary; they maintain that the higher this wall grows, the more fragile it will become. The British, they believe, will be quick to attack it by creating a free-trade area that will link the sterling area with small Europe. That is perhaps being over-optimistic. Will such hopes prevail over the wording of the Treaty? That is the question.

All this is just for the record and to put everyone in the picture.