

Interview with Leo Tindemans on the European Union ('s Hertogenbosch, 27 September 1975)

Caption: On 27 September 1975, Belgian Prime Minister Leo Tindemans gives an interview to the Dutch section of the European Movement in which he describes the objectives and procedures of his mission to define the notion of a 'European Union'.

Source: Internationaal Instituut voor Sociale Geschiedenis, Amsterdam. Sicco L. Mansholt (1945-1995). Europese eenwording. Documentatie over het 'Rapport Tindemans' inzake de Europese Unie. 1974-1976, 463.

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'Europa in beweging' interview with Leo Tindemans (Belgian Prime Minister) ('s Hertogenbosch, 27 September 1975)

Mr Tindemans, what exactly is your brief?

My brief is to draw up a report. In the first instance, the European Parliament, the Commission and the Court of Justice are to produce their reports. The Court has already done so. A summary report will be drawn up on the basis of these documents. At the same time I will consult the governments of the Member States and groups representative of European opinion. The report must be completed by the end of 1975.

Which bodies will you consult?

The final communiqué of the most recent summit in Paris called on me to consult not only the governments of the Member States but also the groups most representative of public opinion. A large number of bodies come under this heading. I cannot list all of them for you but the European Movement is definitely on the list. As a matter of fact, I have had another interesting exchange of views with your international president, Jean Rey.

In the Netherlands, the 'Spierenburg Committee' has spent a considerable amount of time drawing up a report on the European Union to be established. That report will be published at the end of March.

Will you also include that report in your considerations? Are there any similar groups in other EC Member States also drawing up reports on what the European Union should be like?

I am looking forward to the Spierenburg Committee report with great interest and will certainly include it in my considerations. Furthermore, there are in fact similar study groups dealing with the same problem. However, I fear that we are not aware of all the committees and working groups active in this field.

Are you able at present to take any preparatory documents as a basis?

We have many studies, many of which date back to the beginning of this difficult integration process. One need merely think of the famous 1953 Fouchet Plan. The issue must now be brought up to date but that does not alter the fact that we can already draw on an entire stock of more or less ambitious plans.

What definition of the term 'European Union' are you using at present to draw up your report?

My brief is precisely to define this term. Clarity is indeed needed in this area. However, for the moment I am unable to answer your question directly. Indeed, it would not be appropriate to do so at this juncture.

The essential part of my work will be to outline development towards a future vision of Europe, a Europe which needs a definite, clear perspective more than ever before. Young people expect us to create a new framework in which they can live and realise their ideals.

Is there a difference between the term 'European Union' and the term 'supranational and democratic Europe', as used by the European Movement and the European Federalists?

I want to avoid theological arguments at all costs. What we need is attainable objectives.

Naturally, we want to establish a democratic community.

Therefore, we will endeavour to implement as swiftly as possible the decision taken at the Paris Summit to introduce direct elections to the European Parliament by 1978.

The notion of supranationality and surrender of sovereignty is linked to the very essence of the European integration process.

I take the view that European sovereignty can be formulated without completely abolishing the Member States' sovereignty.

Some time ago the Werner Report on economic and monetary union was drawn up. This report has gradually been put to one side by the EC Member States and it is generally assumed that development towards economic and monetary union has come to a halt.

Is it not strange that an attempt is now being made to come up with a more ambitious plan, when a relatively modest goal appears unattainable?

I am not sure that it is a more ambitious plan. On the other hand, the desire for political cooperation is not so strange, since the final stage of the Werner Plan, namely full economic and monetary union, involves political decisions or at least decisions with political repercussions.

The establishment of economic and monetary union remains a key element in the road to further integration. We must merely introduce new tactics and, amongst other things, place greater emphasis on social and regional policy.

The strengthening of mutual consultation procedures in the economic field is nevertheless promising. It is opening up the way to cooperation on domestic economic policy, that is to say a more systematic effort is being made to establish compatibility and complementarity. The way is also thus being opened up for a common position towards the outside world in the economic and monetary field.

I assume that within the European Union there will be greater cooperation not just in the field of foreign policy, etc., but also in the field of defence. Is that correct?

Defence is one of the areas which could be covered by a common policy. Europeans must take a sober look at their defence and the 'European Union' must address the matter fully.

The problem falls within the scope of political cooperation. How to bring these two ideas of cooperation and integration together (under the same heading?) is precisely one of the difficult questions to which we must find an answer.

If defence is to be incorporated, it would appear inevitable that you will have to give an indication of the strategic military implications of the European Union for relations within NATO and Western Europe's relations with Eastern Europe.

Defence does indeed raise difficult problems, but let us adopt a prudent approach and take account of both the historical and economic ties with the United States and our desire for *détente* and cooperation within Europe.

Are there, in your view, any circumstances which make it likely that in the near future the EC Member States will be willing to pool important aspects of national policy, such as foreign policy, defence, and energy policy, in a European Union?

As far as foreign policy is concerned, a process is under way whereby all external economic relations will become an exclusively EEC domain.

You will be aware that as from this year no trade agreements may be concluded by Member States individually. The adoption of a common position at all important international conferences is a necessary consequence of this process.

An adequate basis is absent in the field of defence, but cooperation in this regard is, to say the least, inevitable.

With regard to energy supplies, we have discovered that our mutual dependence is a reality. In 1975 the Commission will concentrate on a common energy policy, and the Member States are aware that cooperation within the EEC provides the only framework for dialogue with producers.

Does the matter of the British referendum still play a particular part in the drafting of the report? One could imagine that the issue of sovereignty, which played such an important role in the preceding referendum, would be further highlighted if a European Union were envisaged in which significant parts of national policy were pooled within it?

We hope that the British people will soon express a positive view on membership of the European Community.

In a certain sense this has hampered all European activities for some time. However, as soon as Britain has expressed its desire to make a constructive contribution to building a new community, the discussion of the transfer of sovereignty, which is an essential part of integration, will be put in its proper perspective.

Some people have already noted that in terms of its importance your work is comparable with the work of the Spaak Committee which led to the Messina Conference, which in turn led to the establishment of the EEC.

Do you agree with that?

This brief provides an opportunity to draw a historical perspective. The possibilities open to us should not be underestimated, but we are resolved to seize the opportunity on offer. Not only do the Europeans themselves have high expectations of the future vision of their Community, the wider world, too, is watching our development model, which emphasises human worth and promotes the realisation of a democratic ideal.

Many thanks, Mr Tindemans.