

'The Eurocrats are weary' from Die Zeit (10 March 1972)

Caption: As Franco Maria Malfatti announces his early retirement from his post as President of the Commission of the European Communities for 22 March 1972, the German newspaper Die Zeit stresses, on 10 March 1972, the importance of the Commission President's personal commitment if the institution is to maintain its role as political motor for European integration and not become a mere administrative service.

Source: Die Zeit. [ONLINE]. [Hamburg]: [15.04.2004]. Disponible sur http://www.zeit.de/archiv/1972/10/Zt19720310_026_0066_wt.

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A new course is set for European domestic policy within the Council of Ministers of the EEC. Pragmatism without a sense of direction is no longer enough.

The Eurocrats are weary

Rudolf Herlt

Franco Maria Malfatti, President of the Commission of the European Economic Community since July 1970, is to retire from office on 22 March. He wishes to involve himself in the election campaign for the Italian parliamentary elections, which have been called early.

Malfatti's term of office would have expired in the middle of the year. Originally, however, he had declared himself ready, like his three deputies, Frenchman Raymond Barre, Dutchman Sicco Mansholt and Wilhelm Haferkamp of Germany, to remain in office until the end of the year. On 1 January 1973, a new Commission with 14 members instead of the current nine must in any case be formed following the accession of the candidate countries.

The Italian was the third President of the Commission, following in the footsteps of Walter Hallstein of Germany and Jean Rey of Belgium. In his short time in office, he has made no mark on the European political landscape. When compared with Hallstein, a committed European, and the temperamental Liberal Jean Rey, Malfatti seemed somewhat colourless.

Hallstein was spurred on by the false hope that the economic unification of Europe must automatically lead to political unification. He was an emphatic supporter of the rapid completion of the Common Market. From 1967 onwards, Rey continued the work that Hallstein had begun. It was thanks to his skill that, in the negotiations on tariffs and trade in the Kennedy Round, the European Community participated as a united bloc for the first time. Rey was the spokesman for the EEC.

Nothing comparable can be said about Malfatti, although two important events occurred during his period in office — the first steps towards economic and monetary union and the agreements on the accession of four new Member States.

In their time, neither Hallstein nor Rey would have accepted the situation with which Malfatti was presented. The six Foreign Ministers who were to hold a working session on 1 February to prepare for the EEC Summit Conference had not invited a member of the Commission to attend. As was meaningfully said, 'a delegation' had expressed the wish to ignore the Commission.

At the meeting of Foreign Ministers of 28 February, the Commission was, again, left out in the cold. The fact that Malfatti was once again unable to assert himself underlines how things stand in Europe.

Hallstein had once dreamed that the EEC would establish diplomatic relations with the rest of the world. The ambassadors of friendly powers would have been accredited to the Commission in Brussels. Rey represented the Community in negotiations on tariffs and trade, yet, because it is not to a delegation's liking, Malfatti's Commission is not even invited to participate in preparations for a summit conference of EEC countries.

Admittedly, that is not Malfatti's fault alone. He simply became the witness and victim of a process of erosion that is increasingly reducing the Commission's weight as a European institution. It is true that, under the Treaty of Rome, the Commission may submit proposals to the Council of Ministers, attend all Council meetings, conduct the day-to-day business of the Community and act as guardian of the Treaties. In practice, however, it no longer does anything nowadays without the knowledge of the six governments. It does not usually take action except at the suggestion of one of the national governments.

It has been emasculated since France provoked the 'empty chair' crisis, when it boycotted meetings of the Council of Ministers in 1965. Later on, Paris allowed itself to be persuaded to return by a concession that contravened the Treaty. France imposed on the Community rules of procedure under which all decisions in the

Council of Ministers are adopted unanimously or not at all. The Treaty of Rome provides for an increasing number of processes to be subject to majority voting from 1966 onwards. Yet political practice has disregarded this rule, just as it disregarded the supranational euphoria of the Hallstein era.

This does not mean that Europe should be in mourning. Only in the Federal Republic of Germany does the idea of transferring sovereignty from national level to Community level find enthusiastic adherents. On the other hand, the nation states that survived both world wars virtually intact — France and the United Kingdom — want to retain their sovereignty without restrictions.

It is within this system of political coordinates that the Community must find a way forward. Following a transitional period with Vice-President Haferkamp, Malfatti's successor will presumably be a Frenchman. It is an irony of history that he will have to prevent the Commission from being demoted to the level of a secretariat dealing with European matters.

During his term of office, the question will have to be clarified of which institutions will in future be responsible for determining important elements of economic and monetary policy, policy that is of such paramount importance for the continued existence of the Community. This will set the course for the future. Looking outward, relations with the USA, Japan, the Eastern Bloc countries and China, as well as with the Third World, must all be regularised. A straight path leads from foreign trade policy to a common foreign policy.

The 'grand design' of the Hallstein era did not stand a chance once the threat from the East became less serious. For the future, the autumn Paris Summit must redefine the political role of the enlarged Community, both within and outside the Community. Otherwise pragmatism will continue to lack a sense of direction.

A federation of European states presents itself as the next achievable stage in European policy. It will not require any renunciation of sovereignty, but it will accustom everybody to common policy decisions. The economic muscleman must at last be given a head.