

‘Europe of the Twelve minus one’ from L'Europe en Formation (Autumn 1990)

Caption: In autumn 1990, the leader-writer of the federalist magazine L'Europe en Formation criticises the policy of Margaret Thatcher, British Prime Minister, with regard to Economic and Monetary Union (EMU).

Source: L'Europe en formation. Automne 1990, n° 279. Nice. "L'Europe des douze moins un", p. 3-6.

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Europe of the Twelve minus one

Editorial

The extraordinary meeting of the European Council in Rome on 27 and 28 October was far from useless. It gave fresh impetus to the plans for economic and monetary union, and political union, on which there had not been much movement since the summer. It also confirmed that eleven of the Community's twelve Member States agree, in the standard phrase, to 'move towards European Union'. As Emanuele Gazzo comments in *Agence Europe*, 'we are convinced that economic and monetary union and political union must not take place without the British, but equally that no single country, by refusing to look for viable, effective solutions, can prevent all the others from seeking to achieve the aims which their twelfth partner has, moreover, already accepted.' Mrs Thatcher remained isolated in her obstinacy. This time there were no hesitations from the Danish, or from Portugal, Ireland or Greece. In the case of political union, in the 'more or less modest' form in which it is taking shape, that is no surprise. With regard to the 'Delors Plan' for economic and monetary union, however, it can only be welcomed.

The European Council confirmed its resolve to extend the Community's powers and responsibilities, to develop the legislative role of the European Parliament, to define a European citizenship in addition to that of the Member States, and to take due account of regional interests. In the sphere of foreign policy, the European Council recorded consensus on the objective of a common foreign and security policy. It also recognised the need 'to review the procedures and mechanisms for preparing, adopting and implementing decisions where foreign policy is concerned, so as to increase the coherence, speed and effectiveness of the Community's international action'. No aspect of the Union's external relations will in principle be excluded from the future common foreign policy. The European Council also noted that there was a consensus 'to go beyond the present limits in regard to security'.

There were significant commitments on economic and monetary union: the creation of a new monetary institution comprising 'Member States' central banks and a central organ'; a single currency (the ecu as an expression of the Community's identity and unity); the second phase of economic and monetary union to start on 1 January 1994 after the single market programme and other processes have been completed. Finally, it was agreed that no later than three years from the start of the second phase, the institutions will report on the progress made 'in order to prepare the decision concerning the passage to the third phase, which will occur within a reasonable time'.

That subtly phrased conclusion, which will permit finalisation of European monetary union towards the end of the century, is precisely what Mrs Thatcher rejected in Rome. And in such a tone! 'Never,' she said, 'will I present the abolition of the pound sterling to the British Parliament for ratification,' and she went on to denounce, in the grand style reminiscent of de Gaulle, the 'cloud cuckoo land' inhabited by Jacques Delors and the advocates of a federal Europe.

The British Government nevertheless said it was ready to 'move beyond stage one' of the economic and monetary union on which we have already embarked. But it is sticking to the concept of a 'common currency' (i.e. a parallel European currency) and, while not rejecting the idea of a 'new monetary institution', has in mind an intergovernmental fund and not, of course, a central bank or 'federal reserve system', or the 'Eurofed' which supporters of the Delors Plan are proposing.

At all events, the time has come to tackle the British problem — or rather the Thatcher problem — head on. That much is clear from the debate in the House of Commons on 30 October on the results of the Rome 'summit'. Mrs Thatcher began by stridently confirming her position: the decisions of intergovernmental conferences must be taken unanimously and ratified by all the parliaments. In her opinion, things would turn out as with the Single Act, which began as a 'very grandiose' document and ended up as something 'much more modest'. Reference should also be made to the report on her escapade to Rome which she submitted to her government on 1 November, provoking the resignation of Sir Geoffrey Howe, an avid Conservative and Deputy Prime Minister in Her Majesty's Government. Sir Geoffrey, a member of Thatcher's Cabinet since the beginning in 1979, could no longer stomach the Iron Lady's European policy.

Following the successive resignations of Michael Heseltine (1986), Nigel Lawson (1989), Nicholas Ridley (this July) and now Sir Geoffrey Howe, the European debate in Britain is assuming proportions that remind us of what France went through in the 1950s over the European Defence Community. It is no coincidence that the English tabloid *The Sun*, which has a print run of over four million and belongs to Australian tycoon Rupert Murdoch, is currently drumming up anti-French feeling against the country which it sees as the main instigator of the plan for European monetary union, for which the 'frog' Delors is responsible in Brussels. The British are being asked to 'tell these stupid Frenchmen where they can put their ecu': 'Up yours, Delors!'

So the Big Chief Eurocrat is getting it in the neck, but he should not let himself be drawn into vulgar polemics. The whole affair is all the more grotesque and pathetic at a time when the Community has unanimously decided to attach 'the highest priority' to solution of the Gulf crisis, to make 'a substantial, concrete contribution to the success of the reforms undertaken by the Government of the Soviet Union' and 'to work for a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict and the Palestinian problem [...] the tragic events that have occurred in Jerusalem [having shown] once more that the status quo in the Occupied Territories is unsustainable.'

L'Europe en formation