

Interview with Hans-August Lücker: the powers of the European Parliament upon its establishment (Bonn, 15 May 2006)

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[François Klein] In 1958 you became a Member of the first European Parliament and you remained a Member until 1984. What role did this institution play in political interaction within the Community?

[Hans-August Lücker] I would like to answer by citing Robert Schuman, who was voted — or appointed — our first President, and who had a role in mind for Parliament. Firstly, in his opening speech as President of the European Parliament, Robert Schuman declared that the Parliament, or the Common Assembly as it was then called, would henceforth be called the ‘European Parliament’. The term ‘Assemblée’ was taken from the French, for the French Parliament is also called the ‘Assemblée nationale’, which is something quite different, and he wanted to use the title that was used in five other Member States for this Parliament. ‘We shall be called the European Parliament’. This was the statement made by Robert Schuman, and then he said: ‘The European Parliament has a unique and highly significant mission: that of bringing Europe to the people of Europe and of representing them’.

This was the task. This then developed according to the provisions of the Treaty of Rome: voting in the Council of Ministers, mostly by majority, unanimously on a very few occasions; the provision that the European Parliament could, at the very least, discuss a draft proposal of the Commission and accept or refuse it; thirdly, Parliament was also given the right to force Members of the Commission to resign as a body if the Parliament deemed that the Commission had not fulfilled its task. These were definitely the most important provisions.

Parliament definitely played this supervisory role. In Parliament, we were quick to make use of these rights. I remember that, on two occasions, we prepared to give the Hallstein Commission a vote of no confidence. I had a very strong interest myself in giving this vote of no confidence and I undertook the necessary preliminary work with the former Belgian Minister Jean Duvieusart. On the previous evening, the vote of no confidence was intended for Wednesday morning, the Hallstein Commission ... I felt sorry for Hallstein but an actual right was at stake: the Hallstein Commission had not taken the will of Parliament into account when it passed a directive or some sort of implementing measure and we were to give it a vote of no confidence for this. The majority for this vote of no confidence was obtained and Hallstein came to Duvieusart and me, and discussed the situation with us. We made it clear to him that it was not directed against him personally. Sadly, this was the only option. We demanded of Hallstein that he amend the decision of his Commission overnight. Hallstein did this. The Commission convened overnight in Strasbourg. He took our demands into consideration and we were able to withdraw the vote of no confidence the following day. It was in our hands.

That is how it went, and it went on like this for years. The most significant issue confronting us was that, in parallel with Pierre Werner’s proposal — as Prime Minister, he had been asked by the Heads of State or Government to draw up a proposal on the establishment of monetary union — the Christian Democratic Members of the European Council came to me and instructed me to draw up a proposal on the establishment of political union. Both proposals, Werner’s and mine, were being drawn up at the same time. My proposal was not complete by the time Werner had finished his ... and my report was adopted by Parliament, I think it was in June or July 1972, by a large majority with 77 per cent in favour of political union. This report was submitted to the Paris European Council under the Presidency of Georges Pompidou and our demands were, in large part, accepted by the Paris Summit.

First decision: the European Union was to be established by 1980. Second decision: the European Parliament was to be elected by direct universal suffrage by 1979; according to our proposal, it was to be elected by direct universal suffrage.

What was the third? Oh yes, elections to the European Parliament by direct universal suffrage and the establishment of political union by 1980. It all happened at the same time: elections to the European Parliament, political union, and suddenly a new Europe had arrived.

However, because of the world economic crisis of the 1970s, this did not come about — even though it had been decided. The increase in the price of crude oil from \$1.80 to \$32 turned the world economy on its head and, under the circumstances, these aims could no longer be achieved. It was a great pity.