

'The Summit Conference: the need for firm decisions' from 30 Jours d'Europe (October 1972)

Caption: Published in October 1972 in the monthly journal 30 Jours d'Europe, this article sheds light on certain common guidelines, formulated in preparatory Coreper and Ministerial discussions, and on the proceedings of the next European Summit Conference, planned for 19 and 20 October in Paris. Agreement was reached, among other things, on the agenda, the basis of an agreement on Economic and Monetary Union (EMU) and on the publication of a solemn declaration which would be added to the final communiqué.

Source: 30 jours d'Europe. dir. de publ. Fontaine, François ; RRéd. Chef Chastenet, Antoine. Octobre 1972, n° 171. Paris: Service d'information des Communautés européennes. "La Conférence au Sommet", auteur:Mallet, Jacques , p. 7-8.

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The Summit Conference

The need for firm decisions

Following the meeting of the Ministers for Finance and Foreign Affairs, held on 12 September in the function rooms of the Villa Aldobrandini at Frascati, near Rome, the President of the Republic, Georges Pompidou, issued an official invitation to the heads of government of France's partner countries to attend a 'summit' conference, which took place as planned on 19 and 20 October.

A laborious process

It was in August 1971 that President Pompidou, associating himself publicly with a suggestion made by Chancellor Willy Brandt, spoke for the first time of a new European summit. The purpose of the summit, in his mind, was to reply to the American decisions of 15 August and to initiate a common response to the international monetary crisis.

The idea followed a slow and eventful course. At a lunch in Paris on 2 June in honour of the Prime Minister of Belgium, the President of the Republic stated that he would not take on the responsibility of inviting nine heads of government '*if the only results of the meeting were vague declarations of intent, agreements on minor points or, worse still, badly camouflaged disagreements*'. He spoke in much the same terms in the course of the official visit to France of the Queen of the Netherlands. In the weeks that followed, the fate of the summit conference was the subject of widespread speculation.

The French Government insisted that the issues must be thoroughly clarified so that the European summit could reach hard and fast decisions, especially in the monetary field. Its position was that the October summit should go ahead only if sufficient progress were made in this direction.

Since then, the Foreign and Finance Ministers and all the Community institutions have been hard at work. In the month of July, uncertainty still remained, but the Finance Ministers of the enlarged Community reached agreement on the main thrust of a common position on the international monetary problems. An *ad hoc* committee was created within the framework of the Committee of Permanent Representatives, which had been mandated to produce a document that would serve as a basis for the deliberations of the Ministers for Foreign Affairs and Finance. This review document, drafted between 4 and 7 September, was the point of reference in the Frascati discussions.

It may be said that the prospects for an agreement on the proposed meeting of 19 and 20 October seemed extremely bright thereafter. Bilateral meetings facilitated some convergence of positions, particularly President Pompidou's talks with the Italian Government and Chancellor Brandt and Maurice Schumann's talks with Walter Scheel and Edward Heath.

The Rome meeting confirmed this optimistic impression, thanks in great part to the Finance Ministers' agreement on the economic and monetary problems. The French Ministers were thus able to note after their conversations that there was a sufficient basis of agreement to justify the summit, leaving it to President Pompidou to make the final decision, which he announced three days later.

The three themes of the summit

Needless to say, it is impossible at the present time to anticipate the precise results of a summit that has not yet taken place. Nevertheless, the report from the Permanent Representatives and the ministerial discussions have revealed certain common lines of approach and fairly precise agreements on some points.

First of all, the wish was expressed that the Heads of State or Government should publish a solemn declaration as part of their communiqué. This declaration would reaffirm the principles and objectives of the European Communities, the irreversibility of the progress that has been achieved and the need to bring this great enterprise to completion. There are, however, various shades of opinion regarding the form and content

of the declaration.

Secondly, agreement was reached on the agenda for the summit conference.

The summit is to deal with three themes: the first is economic and monetary union and social progress; the second is external relations, where the aims are to assert the personality of Europe in the loyalty of its alliances and friendships and to reaffirm its desire for détente with the Eastern bloc and its will to provide increased development aid for the Third World, and the third theme is the Community's institutions and political cooperation.

The general intention is to enhance the effectiveness of the institutions by various means without amending the Treaties. Some voices are nevertheless emphasising the need to set a date for the introduction of direct election of the European Parliament by universal suffrage. An extension of the powers of the Community seems to have won universal acceptance.

Lastly, the will to achieve closer political union has been confirmed, but by common consent the thorny problem of the possible creation of a political secretariat has been put to one side for the time being.

Economic and monetary union

As well as these general goals, there are more specific points of agreement in the economic and monetary sphere.

The first is the creation, as part of the initial step towards European union, a European Monetary Cooperation Fund that will guarantee the proper functioning of the Basle Agreements with regard to the shrinkage of fluctuation margins between currencies by 'multilateralising' the relevant intra-Community regulations as well as managing short-term monetary support. This fund will use a European monetary unit of account. Moreover, the principle of fixed parities has been reaffirmed, which seems to suggest that the pound will stop floating in the near future.

Combating inflation

Lastly, in order to achieve parallel progress on economic union and monetary union, the ministers, who declared themselves in agreement with the Commission's report on the economic situation of the Community, have decided to coordinate their anti-inflation policies. They outlined the link with 'realigned policies' that would be required for the achievement of economic and monetary union. This means that the summit conference will undoubtedly define some principles for action in the field of regional policy in particular, but also on industrial and research policy and energy policy.

This set of agreements may seem modest, but it is nevertheless important.

In his press conference, to be sure, President Pompidou said that we must be under no illusions. He did not believe that the summit would mark a turning point in world history, or even in European history, but added that it would be far more than merely a celebration of the UK's entry into the Community. Recalling the points on which progress has already been secured in the course of the preparatory discussions, he expressed his conviction that it would be useful.

It is possible, and even probable, that the results of the summit will surpass present expectations.

Jacques Mallet