

EUROPEAN LEADERS TO MEET ON DECEMBER 9 AND 10 IN MAASTRICHT FOR CRITICAL SUMMIT

On December 9 and 10 in Maastricht, Netherlands the European Community Heads of State and Government will meet for a European Council, a reunion held twice a year. However, this December meeting is particularly noteworthy since it will mark the close of two year-long intergovernmental conferences drafting major EC changes to the EC's founding treaties and constitutional base.

The EC Commission, an active participant in the intergovernmental conferences, sets out its final ideas and concerns in a November 27 declaration which serves as a bulletin of the issues before the Summit leaders.

DECLARATION OF THE EC COMMISSION ON THE TWO INTERGOVERNMENTAL CONFERENCES ON POLITICAL UNION AND ON ECONOMIC AND MONETARY UNION

On November 23, 24 and 27 the EC Commission discussed the draft Treaties for Political Union and Economic and Monetary Union as they stand at the current stage of progress in the intergovernmental conferences. The Commission has contributed all that it can in the preparation of these drafts and in the search for a dynamic compromise. It is, after all, keenly aware of their importance and of the promise they hold out for the construction of a United Europe.

The Commission conceives this unity in a perspective which would guarantee the effectiveness of the European Community, its democratization and a clear distinction between the powers enjoyed by the Community, its member states and their regions, in full respect of the principles of subsidiarity and diversity. To qualify this perspective as a federal one reflects the present construction of the Community as well as the conception of future developments.

In this spirit the Commission expresses its concern about the concept of union, as defined in the current version of the draft Political Union Treaty. As matters stand, the Union is to develop alongside the Community without there being an explicit restatement, as there was in the Single Act, of the determination to bring together in a single entity all the powers which the member states plan to exercise jointly in political and economic matters. Moreover, the Union is not expressly given a legal personality in international law. This raises serious difficulties about the Union's representation and about the coherence between foreign policy as such and external economic relations or development cooperation.

The Commission believes that these difficulties could be overcome by spelling out the fact that all the activities provided for by the Treaties are part of a process leading progressively towards attaining Union or a Political Community.

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To go to the root of the problem, the new Political Union Treaty must make a qualitative leap forward towards a common foreign and security policy, greater democracy in decision-making and a coherent, balanced economic and social area. The planned provisions should also put the twelve member states in a position to step up the quality and effectiveness of their cooperation in matters of law enforcement and the protection of the individual as this common area is established.

Regarding foreign policy, the proposed new framework of "common actions" will have little meaning unless the Union has the capacity to take quicker decisions and act more effectively in those areas where the Twelve unanimously decide that they share a common interest which they must defend and promote. Within this framework and taking account of the guidelines decided by the European Council, the Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs should be able to decide by qualified majority, possibly reinforced.

Injecting greater democracy into Community life should be achieved primarily by giving the European Parliament greater powers. Parliament should be able to confirm the Commission by a vote of investiture. Its ultimate role is to become fully a co-legislator through the establishment of a co-decision procedure which, while respecting the rules governing efficiency, should apply generally in respect of competences where the Council acts by qualified majority. The number of competences where Parliament's assent is required should be extended.

The Commission regards the Community as an area where the spirit of competition, the will to cooperate and a sense of solidarity reign. Its powers need to be extended and strengthened on the basis of these three principles. Hence the importance attached by the Commission to improving Treaty provisions on research and technology, energy, industry, the environment, consumer protection and the social dimension. Hence also its proposal that the effectiveness of the internal market be boosted by the full application of competition policy and buttressed by infrastructure programs designed to contribute to improved competitiveness and greater cohesion.

The point is that this economic, monetary and social area will be unsatisfactory if each and every region and each and every member state does not enjoy truly equal opportunities under the Treaty. The Single Act expressed this requirement by introducing economic and social cohesion, which is now one of the pillars of the Community. By adopting the Commission's proposal, the February 1988 European Council made it possible to develop policies designed to promote that cohesion. A new set of proposals will be made next year in the context of the new financial perspectives for 1993-97. It will contain measures affecting both the structure of expenditure, in particular the reinforcement of structural policies, and the structure of resources. Its political basis would be strengthened if the new Treaty contained a provision for establishment of a progressive resource.

Stronger economic and social cohesion would make a vital contribution to the success of economic and monetary union, to the benefit of all member states. The discussions at the intergovernmental conferences have confirmed that there is absolute opposition to the idea of a two-speed Europe. But some countries might be allowed derogations, if need be, to give them a few extra years to catch up with those which have already reached the final state of economic and monetary union - the single currency and an independent central bank ranking among its salient features.

At the present stage of development of the European construction, it is vital that all the member states confirm their full acceptance of the objective of European and monetary union. The Commission therefore alerts the member states to the risks of a general opting-out clause. There was no question of any such clause, for example, when the Twelve adopted the 1992 program. That program has hence attained full credibility and the Community institutions are correspondingly stronger. The Community's dynamism has been strengthened and this is precisely what makes it possible to take new decisive steps towards a stronger economic and social area, towards economic and monetary union.

The Commission obviously understands the problems that this or that member state might have in accepting the full twofold package. But there are compromise solutions which, while meeting the sensibilities of certain member states, will avoid the risks referred to above and guarantee the political credibility of the European venture. The Commission will do all it can to help the necessary consensus emerge and make the forthcoming European Council a complete success.

The Community has too many international responsibilities to allow itself the luxury of failing to clear the hurdle that so many convinced Europeans want it to clear.

Contact: Peter Doyle
Tel: (202) 862-9530

Ella Krucoff
Tel: (202) 862-9540