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Brussels, March 1975

EUROPEAN COUNCIL IN DUBLIN

10-11 March 1975

BACKGROUND NOTES

For the meeting of the European Council in Dublin on 10 and 11 March, the Spokesman's Group has prepared background material for the press concerning the principal items to be discussed by the Council.

These notes are intended solely to help journalists by providing factual and background material on each problem as well as brief reminders of the debates which have taken place in the Community institutions on the same questions.

Contents

1. British membership of the Community - chronological review and the present situation
2. The unacceptable situation and the correcting mechanism.
3. Relations with the developing countries
4. The European Council - Background and the Commission's views on the European Council
5. Energy policy in the Community and its rôle in the international context since December 1974
6. Follow up of the main decisions taken at the meeting of Heads of Government of the Community held in Paris on 9 and 10 December 1974 : Situation as at 4 March 1975¹

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- Annexes:
- Energy policy in the Community (1973-1974) - P-69 (1974)
 - The Lomé Convention between the European Economic Community and the African, Caribbean and Pacific States - P-13 (1975)
 - Stocktaking of the Common Agricultural Policy - P-15 (1975)¹

¹ Available in French only.

THE "EUROPEAN COUNCIL"

- I - Background
- II - The Commission's views on the "European Council"

I - Background

At his press conference on 27 October 1973 Mr. Georges Pompidou, the President of France, stated: ".....if, for example, the feeling is that political cooperation, in order to gather momentum, must be discussed by the highest authorities meeting on their own from time to time at regular but not too frequent intervals, I would endorse such a view and, although I do not intend to take the initiative, I am prepared to discuss it with our partners".

In October 1973 Mr. Edward Heath, the then Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, put forward the idea of biannual summit meetings. ¹⁾

On 31 October 1973 President Pompidou made a statement about the Middle East situation to the French Cabinet, stressing that Europe had not been involved in attempts to start negotiations (on this issue), and announced: "The French Government intends to propose to its partners in the political field that a decision be taken establishing the principle, in accordance with precise rules, of regular meetings of Heads of State or of Government, without advisers, to compare and coordinate their views in the context of political cooperation".

In December 1973, at the Summit Conference in Copenhagen, the Heads of State or of Government of the Community agreed on the following:

"They decided to meet more frequently. These meetings will be held whenever justified by the circumstances and when it appears necessary to provide a stimulus or to lay down further guidelines for the construction of a united Europe

"It will be for the country providing the President to convene these meetings and to make detailed proposals concerning their preparation and organization." ²⁾

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- 1) Address to the Conservative Party Conference on 13 October 1973 at Blackpool.
 - 2) It was this sentence which gave rise to the term "Presidential Conferences", which was used for a time between the Copenhagen Summit and the Paris Summit of December 1974.

In October 1974 the President of France, Mr. Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, declared that he thought it essential from an institutional point of view to hold "periodical meetings of European Heads of Government several times a year in order jointly to assess the progress made towards European Union and jointly to exercise supreme responsibility for political cooperation. This would be done within the Treaty of Rome for all matters relating to progress towards European Union and in the context of political cooperation for all matters relating thereto." ¹⁾

In Paris on 9 and 10 December 1974 the Heads of Government of the Community decided:

" to meet, accompanied by the Ministers of Foreign Affairs, three times a year and whenever necessary, in the Council of the Communities and in the context of political cooperation.

"The administrative secretariat will be provided for in an appropriate manner with due regard for existing practices and procedures.

"In order to ensure consistency in Community activities and continuity of work, the Ministers of Foreign Affairs, meeting in the Council of the Community, will act as initiators and coordinators. They may hold political cooperation meetings at the same time.

"These arrangements do not in any way affect the rules and procedures laid down in the Treaties or the provisions on political cooperation in the Luxembourg and Copenhagen reports. At the various meetings referred to in the preceding paragraphs the Commission will exercise the powers vested in it and play the part assigned to it by the above texts."

On 21 January 1975 in Brussels the Ministers of Foreign Affairs decided that the first "European Council" would be held in Dublin in March.

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1) Press conference, 24 October 1974

II - The Commission's views on the "European Council"

On 11 December 1974, during a debate in the European Parliament on the results of the Paris Summit, President Ortoli stated that there was reason to be pleased that the political impetus provided by the Heads of Government would henceforth be fitted into the framework of the Treaties and that what he called "headline" summits would give way to more normal Community procedures. These meetings of Heads of State in the Council must not be transformed into a sort of court of appeal and supplant the normal machinery. Greater political momentum could be achieved while retaining the efficient machinery the Community already had.

At a press conference on 10 January 1975 President Ortoli made the following remarks: "While respecting the Treaty and the responsibilities of the various institutions, the last meeting of Heads of Governments held in Paris made a major change in the Community's decision-making machinery by agreeing to regular meetings of Heads of Government. The decision contains the germs of progress since its purpose was to provide the Community with an efficient decision-making body, a body with real authority, and Europe with an overall policy."

Moving on to the Commission's role, President Ortoli said: "The Commission must play its role in the new scenario approved at the Paris meeting. If certain decisions are to be taken by Heads of Government from now on, then it is at this political and legal level - which is accepted and proper - that the Commission must act."

On 18 February 1975, in the "programme address" to the European Parliament, President Ortoli stated that the decision taken at the Paris Summit to hold regular Council meetings at Head of Government level provided new opportunities but involved some risks.

"It (the decision) may respect the letter of our system but it represents a major change in spirit and may, if we are not careful, shake the institutional structures set up by the Treaties to their Foundations.

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"We must therefore take a chance and shorten the odds. But this means that the Commission must be true to its refound political vocation.

"The Commission must adapt its modus operandi to the new system in which ideas will come from the top. It must insure against the risks involved - for risks are involved - by converting Member States to its conviction that the real answer to the major problems facing them lies in the collective Community solutions implicit in the construction of Europe. It must make vigorous and incisive use of its power of initiative when choices which are decisive for Europe's future are being made. It must not betray its own ideals."
