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Tindemans' Mission

The European Community is at a new crossroads. The British decision to stay in the EC and the Greek desire to join it have been greeted with so much official enthusiasm that one must get doubts whether it is real. Indeed, both events — and some others in addition — have once again brought the question into focus how the future Community is going to look like both politically and economically. Is it to be reduced to a mere common market endowed with a number of financial funds to draw upon without own obligations, or is it to gain a new (and democratic) dimension, with institutions, procedures and instruments capable of responding to the mounting internal and external challenges?

By the end of this year, Leo Tindemans, the Belgian Prime Minister, is to report to the heads of governments what "European Union" may in fact mean. He has no enviable job. Under the present circumstances when everybody is overly concerned with short-run economic and financial problems he will find it hard to detect constructive conceptions for the European future. Yet this is exactly what the Community is lacking. After the failure of the "Werner" approach to economic and monetary union the EC needs new (intermediate) goals which are both attractive and realistic. And it needs a strategy to get there.

The EC Commission and the European Parliament have recently presented their views. Both of them are looking into a far distant future. What they see is a union which covers first of all the EC's traditional fields of economic activity, though at a higher level: It has a common

currency managed by a more or less autonomous central bank system. It disposes of a budget financed by own taxes (both indirect and direct) which is large and flexible enough to enable the Community to pursue effective structural and redistribution policies and even to engage in demand management. Its regional policy is no longer restricted to financing national programmes but is guided by truly common objectives. And in the social field minimum standards for social security (including unemployment insurance) are realised throughout the Community.

In addition, foreign policy, the coordination of which currently takes place under a different roof, is formally integrated into the union and flanked by a common defense policy. Finally the European Union takes care of the human rights of the citizens. In the institutional field Commission and Council are replaced by a single decision-making center with the characteristics of a "real" European government and responsible only to a two-chamber Parliament. The bright picture is only slightly clouded by the Parliament's disharmony over the use of the term "sovereignty".

Yet again, as with the aim of economic and monetary union there is the question: How to get to elysium? In that respect both statements are remarkably vague. They prefer speaking of a gradual process which is somehow to lead to the desired end (some wag even smuggled the word of the Community's "dynamic character" into the Parliament's paper). The member countries' governments seem by no means more imaginative. Given the decision of the

1972 Paris Summit to realise European Union before the end of this decade Mr Tindemans will have to find out by himself what might then be sold to the public under that label.

Looking ahead to 1980, rather than to 2000, one might perhaps think along the following lines. First, as to the Union's scope of activity, it should have general competence for the co-ordination of foreign policy. This would also imply that the Commission as the core of a future European government is given equal status with the national representatives and that it acts as the secretariat. Secondly, in the institutional field, the European Parliament is to be elected by direct vote. In addition, there should be agreement on a fixed time schedule according to which it will gradually assume the functions of a regular parliament, including legislature in specific areas, the raising of taxes, disposition of expenditures and election of the Commission members. The Council when acting as a legislative organ ("Second Chamber") should confer publicly and more promptly. Procedures exercised in the German Bundesrat may serve as an example. Thirdly, in the economic (and general political) field a new intermediate programme should be launched aiming at an abolition of border controls at least for private citizens (though perhaps not yet for merchandise trade at large). This would require that the various harmonisation efforts now taking place (or not) are directed towards that goal.

There is now a unique opportunity to make once again a major step forward in European integration.

Hans-Eckart Scharrer