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Long live “Conservatism”!

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INTERVIEW

Long Live "Conservatism"!

Interview with Professor Dr Walter Hallstein, the former President of the EEC Commission (1958–67) on Tindemans' "Report on the European Union".

IE: Herr Professor Hallstein, Mr Leo Tindemans, the Belgian Premier, says in his "Report on the European Union" that the European Union, which is to bring a political merger as well as the Economic and Monetary Union, cannot be brought into being by 1980 as planned. Does this assessment not come as a disappointment to you with your intimate knowledge of and active participation in the work of European unification and your ten years of service as President of the EEC?

HALLSTEIN: It is impossible to answer your question as long as it is not certain what the "European Union" is. No binding definition has as yet been reached, and opinions still differ. There is only a modicum of agreement that it is an intermediate phase between the "European Economic Community" and the ultimate stage of the unification process, which — according to the dominant view — is the "Federation". Whether the Union will arise by 1980 thus depends upon what demands are made for it. If one is modest, it will be achieved earlier; if one is more ambitious (as Leo Tindemans is, fortunately), it will take longer. For the Union à la Tindemans he is probably right: Whether this is disappointing or not, the Union (Economic and Monetary Union, "common" foreign policy and security policy, etc.) can

hardly be brought into being by 1980.

IE: Tindemans proposes in his Report a number of "institutional" measures for the strengthening of the Community institutions. The European Council of the heads of government for instance is to be empowered to issue concrete instructions to the EC institutions or individual persons, the President of the Council of Ministers is to stay in office for one year instead of six months as hitherto, the EC Parliament is to be allowed a "right of initiative" for new steps forward, the EC Commission is as far as possible to be given decretory rights, etc. Are these proposed measures adequate and are they — a much more important question — attainable in the near future?

HALLSTEIN: Institutional (or properly speaking: organisational) issues undeniably call for stronger answers than the bashful governments seem to envisage so far. The details are a matter for argument, however. For example: The heads of government have up to now distinguished themselves by words rather than by vigorous action; one may also dispute whether arbitrary allocation of competencies — in one instance to A, in another to B, in yet another to C — ensures substantially better decisions than a

clear and binding arrangement of competencies. (I have my doubts.) To allow the President of the Council to stay longer in the chair may well be worth trying out. A right of initiative for the Parliament is a good thing — as is everything that makes the Parliament stronger; for it is not by the peoples that progress is retarded. It is also highly desirable that the Commission should be strengthened; it is by its nature ahead of the other organs. Whether all this is "attainable in the near future" only a true prophet can say; but "prophecies are difficult", said the young Lord, "especially about the future". It cannot however be argued against any of the improvements that they are not possible; all that is needed is more determination than those responsible have so far mustered.

IE: Beside the new institutions which are to be created the Report proposes that the EC Council of Ministers should in future take majority decisions or the EC states finding themselves in a minority during the discussion should give way to the majority "voluntarily". How do you judge the political prospects for the realization of this proposal?

HALLSTEIN: Majority decisions were already enjoined by the Treaty of Rome; to

dispense with them systematically is a perpetual violation of the Treaty. However, I had to remind the European Congress at its final meeting in Brussels (on February 7, 1976) already that majority decisions are only provided for the adoption of proposals by the Commission; this is a protection against majority rights being abused. To hope that the minority will submit to the majority of its own accord is pious self-deception, as has been proved by the sabotage of majority voting in the Community. Leo Tindemans says nothing to the contrary — at least not plainly. If this sabotage goes on, an appeal should be lodged with the European Court of Justice.

IE: The recommendation of graduated progress towards the Economic and Monetary Union has aroused fervent protests. What problems will arise if the integration is not carried out at the same pace but varied according to the capabilities of the member states?

HALLSTEIN: That is the most difficult problem posed by the Tindemans Report — with great courage, it must be acknowledged. The European Congress has come out against it. But in principle I share the view of the Belgian Premier. The procedure must however be determined

carefully. The stringent rule must be: Uniformity of attitudes in the Community. Distinctly circumscribed exemptions should however be permissible under strict conditions, perhaps: (1) on valid application, (2) subject to conditions imposed on the member state claiming exemption, to ensure that he makes all efforts to catch up with the others, (3) concomitant with solidary assistance by the other member states, (4) for a specified time only.

IE: The Tindemans Report demands a cohesive common stand by the nine EC countries towards the outside world in order to regain the lost influence on world-political and international economic developments. This includes a common security policy. How do you judge the prospects for the realization of such a common foreign policy?

HALLSTEIN: This demand also merits support. It is not unacceptable. A common foreign policy is by no means more difficult of execution than a common economic and social policy. On the contrary: To establish the Economic and Monetary Union is the more difficult undertaking. The same is true of the security policy; the existence and functioning of Nato prove it. They also prove it to be practicable.

IE: Is two-tier integration of the foreign policy of the European Union conceivable and practicable, analogous to two-tier implementation of the Economic and Monetary Union?

HALLSTEIN: No. The difference is this that in the case of the Economic and Monetary Union objective difficulties may arise for individual member states such as can only be overcome by overdimensional efforts. I see no analogous hazard in the field of foreign policy. We do not have to rely here on our imagination but can also draw on experience, e.g. with the common stand of the Community countries at the Conference for Security and Cooperation in Europe.

IE: The Tindemans Report has given rise to divergent assessments. The most severe criticism has come from Dr Sicco Mansholt, formerly a Vice President and President of the EC Commission and now Vice Chairman of the Association of Social Democratic Parties in the EC. No solution at all, he has said, was better than a "conservative" solution of the European question as proposed in this Report. Do you share this view?

HALLSTEIN: No. If the Tindemans Report is "conservative", I can only say: Long live conservatism!

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