

## EDITORIAL COMMENTS

### *The Enlargement of the Communities*

It cannot be said that the year 1968 has brought the problem of the enlargement of the European Communities any nearer to a solution. Since the French refusal of December 1967 in the EEC Council even to open negotiations for membership with the candidate countries, the basic disagreement between them and the other member States has remained virtually unchanged. By now the different plans to break through the existing deadlock seem to have complicated matters rather than to have facilitated them.

Since the autumn, discussions for "temporary" solutions have largely centred around two efforts: the German proposal for a "commercial arrangement" and the Belgian Harmel plan based on the original Benelux memorandum of the beginning of last year. Neither of them has been notably successful so far in achieving the desired result. In the German view a commercial agreement between the Six and other European countries is meant as a first step towards membership of the EEC. It is precisely this latter point which is essential for the British Government. On many occasions it has repeated that it will have nothing to do with any arrangement not linked with membership. The French Government on the other hand, which supports the idea of an arrangement, conceives such a plan as in no way precluding the issue of membership. Wide divergencies exist also as to the contents, mode and coverage of the tariff reductions to be agreed upon and the countries to which such offer should be made. Furthermore the question of the compatibility with the GATT provisions has been raised in this connection. And finally opposition has been voiced by countries outside Europe such as the United States, where preferential treatment might stimulate already active protectionist circles to propose countermeasures.

Under these circumstances it is not surprising that the EEC Council in its December session has made little headway and has returned the project to the technical level for further reflection.

The Harmel plan has fared hardly any better. It advocated co-operation with the applicant countries in fields outside the Community Treaties, such as foreign affairs, defence, development aid and technology, and proposed to charge WEU with these new tasks. After an initial impetus the plan has rapidly lost momentum and has dissipated into a new round of conversations.

Last January, however, Sig. Nenni, the new Italian minister of Foreign Affairs, took up the same idea and made concrete proposals to his partners in the WEU Council, for instituting a regular procedure for obligatory consultations to be held prior to national decisions in certain fields as indicated above. These proposals have met with strong support by five members of

the Council (for the first time the Five and Great Britain were clearly united) and with much hesitation by the French representative who reserved his position, both on principle and procedure, until the next session in May. It will not be before that meeting that the real importance of the Luxembourg debate will be revealed.

Amidst all the turmoil on the Continent the British position remains remarkably unspectacular. In general the British contribution to new forms of institutionalized European co-operation remains rather unimaginative as was evidenced by various statements of their parliamentarians at the occasion of the Hague Parliamentary Congress which was meant to relaunch the idea of integration. It was certainly not due to their inspired perseverance, that the resolution at that Congress indicated that co-operation in the new fields should be of a supranational character and that the executive institutions should be democratically controlled. It is to be regretted that in the light of the manifold European troubles a bold British political initiative in support of European integration is still lacking.

### *The Debré Plan*

In the midst of the discussions over the adhesion of new members, the French Foreign Minister M. Michel Debré launched a plan for the internal reinforcement of the Community. The purpose as explained in the memorandum submitted to the Council was to stimulate progress on economic policies of the Community where work is either blocked or retarded. The nine points for action include the harmonization of customs legislation, the removal of technical impediments to intra-community trade, the draft European patent convention, the European company statute, competition policy, technological co-operation, harmonization of fiscal laws and the common transport and energy policies. Discussions on all these items have been going on for a long time. It is therefore noteworthy that the French Government did not put forward any concrete solutions, but merely proposed new deadlines before which the necessary decisions should be adopted. It is equally striking that some other fields such as the common commercial or monetary policies are not touched upon, even though the need for progress in these areas is equally great. It may not be too bold to assume that the French aim was to persuade its partners to push ahead with the harmonization in fields where this is in the interest of France, and at the same time to draw the attention away from the "enlargement" issue which had been disputed at every Council meeting of the Foreign Ministers since the French veto.

Be that as it may, on most points the other member States raised no objection to continued exploration and study of the existing proposals at the administrative level. On the subjects of patent law, company law and technological co-operation disagreement was registered as before as to the question of participation of other countries. Nevertheless, discussions on

patent law and on technological questions have now been resumed with some success.

In summary, however, it cannot be said that the French plan has contributed to the solution of the central disputes between the Six. If anything, it is a renewed demonstration that the Communities will remain stagnant as long as its members are not prepared to strike a balance between internal and external developments.