

EDITORIAL COMMENTS

The progress of negotiations

The first round of Ministerial meetings between the Communities and the applicant countries is now over and the dimensions of certain of the major problems in the path of the proposed expansion of the Communities can now more clearly be appreciated. This is particularly true of the proposals on agriculture which have been submitted by the British negotiating team. The British suggestion is that, although a three-year transitional period for industry might be feasible, agriculture should be the subject of a separate—and longer—transitional period of six years. The view of the Communities is that “adequate parallelism” should be achieved as between transitional periods; French spokesmen have, however, emphasized a preference for a single transition period for both industry and agriculture. This preference for “complete parallelism” in both sectors may present an acute problem for the British negotiators at an early stage of their task. There is widespread feeling in Britain that a three-year transitional period for agriculture would be inadequate on all counts; in some sectors of the industry, especially in horticulture, the view has been expressed that even a six-year period might be insufficient to avoid disaster for many smaller growers. The progress of negotiations on this point will be watched as a test of the flexibility of the two sides and of the latitude of the negotiations as a whole. It is clear that Britain hopes to see the main terms set for her own entry before July 1971, and, if possible, to complete the Brussels end of the operation before the end of next year. At the time of writing, Mr. Rippon has just made his first appearance at the Luxembourg negotiations and we may soon be in a position to see if this kind of timetable is practicable or over-optimistic. Mr. Rippon’s predecessor, Mr. Antony Barber, earlier this summer expressed the hope that “negotiations can be kept short and confined to essentials.” It has not taken long for an “essential” problem to emerge from the preliminary encounters. Mr. Rippon’s approach appears to have been flexible and undogmatic; he is on record as insisting that fair terms for British entry must be fair terms for all the member countries and the applicant countries as well. His first report to the House of Commons was framed in very optimistic terms and it would appear that the negotiations have started with a preference for finding solutions rather than for stating principles.

Towards a political union?

One of the results of the Hague Summit Conference of last December was that the Foreign Ministers of the Six were instructed to present a report before the end of July 1970 on “the best way of achieving progress in the matter of political unification, within the context of enlargement.” For this purpose an intergovernmental committee was set up, named after its chairman the Davignon Committee. On July 20, 1970, the Foreign

Ministers adopted the report of this committee. They agreed to hold half-yearly meetings, under the chairmanship of the acting president of the Council of Ministers, in order to consult each other "on all important questions of foreign policy." These meetings are to be prepared by a committee of Government officials, composed of the political directors of the various Foreign Ministries. The European Commission will be invited to be present and give its opinion whenever matters affecting the Communities will be discussed. The European Parliament will be kept informed by means of half-yearly "colloquia" between its political commission and the Foreign Ministers. The results of each Ministerial meeting will be discussed in a joint meeting with the countries which are candidates for adhesion to the Communities.

When evaluating this decision from the point of view of progress towards a real political Union, one cannot help feeling a sense of profound dissatisfaction. To quote the words of one Foreign Minister, the mountain has given birth to a mouse, and, we may add, the mouse does not even roar. . . . What has been done, may be a useful tool for diplomatic exchanges of views, it is by no means a first step towards real political integration.

In the first place this policy statement has significantly failed to describe the long-term objective of the planned consultations in other than vague formulae: "a better mutual understanding on the great problems of international policy" and "to reinforce their solidarity by promoting a harmonisation of viewpoints." No compulsory consultation is foreseen where foreign policy decisions are being taken by individual states, let alone a prior consultation, as in the case of the bilateral Franco-German treaty of 1963.

Furthermore no institutional machinery is arranged so as to provide the necessary framework for the consultations. The participation of the European Commission and of the European Parliament in the discussions remains marginal and not very effective. In the third place the absence of any reference to consultation in the field of defence is notably conspicuous, especially in the light of the statements by the United Kingdom in recent years, most recently on the occasion of the opening session of the negotiations for membership of the Communities. All of this demonstrates that there is an increasing and potentially dangerous discrepancy between the needs for further integration in the political field and the concrete actions taken. It is only small consolation that the Foreign Ministers have agreed to present a second report within the next two years. One may hope that by that time enough pressure has been exerted to realize something more imaginative than what has been rightly termed "a political free trade area."

National elections for the European Parliament?

The delegates to the European Parliament are appointed by the national parliaments of the member States from among their own members in

accordance with the procedure laid down by each member State. However, the Treaties envisage the possibility of direct elections to the European Parliament and call on the Parliament itself to draw up proposals for elections by direct universal suffrage in accordance with a uniform procedure in all member States. In fact the European Parliament adopted a draft Convention on this subject as early as May 1960, but the Council, which has to decide on the relevant provisions to recommend to member States for adoption in accordance with their respective constitutional laws, has not been able to do so up till now. Since the ECSC Treaty, in its original form, suggested direct elections by a procedure determined by each member State individually, as a possible alternative to present practice, it is understandable that the question is frequently raised whether—while we are waiting for general elections throughout the Community in accordance with a uniform procedure—a member State might provide for direct elections on a national basis in order to indicate which members of a national parliament should be appointed as delegates to the European Parliament. Since it seems that on legal grounds this question cannot be answered in the negative, several proposals to institute such national elections have been presented in the Parliaments of the Federal Republic (1964), of Italy (1964, 1965, 1968 and 1969), of Belgium (1969) and of the Netherlands (1970). In the German Bundestag the socialist proposals of 1964 were rejected on May 20, 1965. Most other proposals have never reached the stage of debate, let alone of decision. The latest proposal in Italy stems from extra-parliamentary action, instituted by the Federal Movement and supported by more than 200,000 subscribers. It is still under review.¹ The most recent proposal was made to the Dutch Parliament by one of the members of the European Parliament, Mr. Westerterp.

Evidently these attempts to provide for national elections meet with technical and political difficulties. National delegates to the European Parliament can only be appointed from among the members of the national parliament. Consequently the electorate can do no more than indicate to the national parliament which of its members it will have to appoint. This fact would apparently exclude the simultaneous organization of national elections for the European Parliament and elections for the national parliament. Nevertheless the proposal of Mr. Westerterp provides for both elections to be held on the same day: every elector² will have to vote twice. The result could be that, though a personality is elected to be a member of the European Parliament, he will nevertheless not be appointed as such, because he did not get enough votes to be nominated as a member of the national parliament. However, this possibility is not

¹ Details on all these proposals can be found in a publication of the European Parliament, entitled *Vers l'élection au suffrage universel direct du Parlement Européen*, September 1969.

² Mr. Westerterp suggests giving the right of vote not only to Dutch nationals but to every resident of the Kingdom who is also a national of a member-State of the Communities!

very likely to occur if the lists of candidates for both elections are sufficiently co-ordinated. But this very co-ordination might be difficult, all the more so in the Netherlands because the Dutch members of the Christian Democrat parliamentary group in Strasbourg originate from no less than three different political parties! No wonder that the Elections Council—an institution supervising national elections in the Netherlands which has been consulted by the Government—has given what looks rather like a dissenting opinion on the proposal of Mr. Westerterp.

Yet, it would be a pity if this new attempt to strengthen the democratic basis of the European Parliament—be it only that of the Dutch contingent—should come to nothing because of technical difficulties alone. A recent opinion poll demonstrated that 60 per cent. of all EEC citizens were in favour of direct elections for the European Parliament. The quest for real democracy seems strong enough to hasten any improvement in the present situation, pending the establishment of general European elections which we have been waiting for since 1960.