
Editorial

Divided They Stand?

The recent urging of M Alain Lamassoure that when the decision is made to pass to monetary union, certain European countries, including France and Germany, should propose the status of "new founding members of Europe" for the largest possible number of countries applying all of the European Union policies in the monetary, security and social field, resurrects the scenario of a two-speed or even multi-speed Union which was much under discussion in relation to the Community in the early to mid-eighties. That scenario relies for its attractiveness on the contagious effect of a core of Union States attracting less stout brethren by the sheer dynamism of a large, economically powerful bloc. In some senses this happened with the old Community itself, as successive accessions showed life inside the club to be better than life on the streets outside. The rush to accede (albeit in some cases with notably muted enthusiasm) owes perhaps more to fears of being left out in the cold than to a real desire to pursue the path of deeper integration. This rush coincides with sounds from vociferous (some might say over-vociferous and unrepresentative) circles in a number of Member States who now more than ever question the direction of the Union.

Variable geometry has already been accepted in the Treaty on European Union in what was more an unseemly rush to grab what exemptions one could than a considered evaluation of the commitment by the Twelve to the proper functioning of a common market characterised by equal conditions of competition. Indeed, the amendments to the EC Treaty promising a Community economic policy based on the close co-ordination of the Member States'

economic policies, on the internal market and on the definition of common objectives, and conducted in accordance with the principle of an open market economy with free competition, sit rather uncomfortably with opt-outs whose nature is incompatible with the level playing field of undistorted competition demanded by the concept of a common market. Accordingly, whilst the commitment of certain Member States to the fulfilment of all the monetary, security and social obligations of the Union is in principle to be welcomed, there is a certain danger in continuing with a political institutionalisation of fundamentally flawed compromises. On the positive side, though, those Member States with more vision and commitment to enlightened socio-economic co-operation would not be held back by backwoods sirens. In due course the citizens of those countries on the periphery of the Union members may express their dissatisfaction at being relegated to a second-class level of social protection when next given the opportunity at the ballot box.

If, however, core Union members are to convince anyone that their co-operation in the field of security is to mean anything, there will have to be a considerable change in the political cynicism which characterises the foreign and commercial policy relations of some of their governments. Until the mutual confidence between administrations, emphasised on myriad occasions by the Court of Justice, finds a firm expression in political level solidarity, the attractiveness to the peripheral countries (whether Member States or not) of a hard core may well be less than wholly evident. To be successful, the core must operate well. That is not yet the case.

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