
Editorial

A Brand New Box of Soldiers?

Readers will no doubt recall the editorial in this *Review* in July 1994 in which attention was drawn to the very real threat of non-cooperation by the Parliament in the approval of the new Commission. Despite some pretty ropery performances by some of the candidates for approval Jacques Santer managed to pull approval out of the hat by making certain concessions in the allocation of portfolios. If there is a lesson to be learned it is that the Member States must pay more attention to the requirement in Article 157 (1) EC that the members of the Commission shall be chosen on the grounds of their general competence. Moreover, candidates for appointment will clearly have to master their briefs more convincingly if they really are to command the confidence of those who are called upon to appoint them and of those who are called upon to approve the nominations for appointment. It is of course understandable that the candidates were advised not to give political hostages to fortune. This is also understandable in view of the fact that the Commission acts as a collegiate body and that the individual opinions of commissioners expressed before entering office cannot bind the Commission once it has assumed its duties. Nevertheless, it may be assumed that the Parliament is entitled to require that the candidates for appointment demonstrate an understanding of the policies hitherto pursued and of the issues involved, in order to demonstrate their competence to the Parliament. The performance of some of the candidates was so lamentable as to disgrace even the worst attender on a university course. It would be difficult to say that all candidates would qualify for honours, let alone a degree on the basis of their performance. That said, the confirmation hearings certainly provided a degree of entertainment not normally associated with the great and the perceived to be good.

The new Commission has a great deal of important work to do, not least in relation to the preparations for the intergovernmental conference in 1996 and the preparations for the accession of some of the Central and East European countries and the possible accession of one or two of the smaller Mediterranean countries. Accordingly, it is a time for a radical rethink as to the way in which Community legislation is adopted and as to the relationship between supranational action and intergovernmental cooperation. In view of the less than wholly satisfactory working of the second and third pillars of the European Union it is certainly time to consider increasing the Commission's responsibilities in these fields. The Commission as a body is really the only forum which has the chance of properly coordinating a Union policy in these pillars, given the notoriously unreliable lines which the Member States follow if left to their own devices. The Euro-sceptics will no doubt squeal and scream but the fact remains that more progress is achieved through the workings of the Commission than through the less than transparent channels of intergovernmental cooperation.

The brand new box – much of which is recycled (in most cases positively and everyone is pleased with the reappointment of a number of very effective Commissioners) – must build on the solid achievements of the Delors years, without perhaps emulating the somewhat presidential style of those times, in order to lead both the Community and the Union in a positive direction in tune with the ambitions of the citizens of the Union. Central to that task is transparency and information, so that the Commission must ensure that people understand what it proposes and why. Only with understanding will citizens accord the Union their wholehearted support.

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