A Salutary Shock? The 30-years struggle for the introduction of European Elections.

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Abstract
This Working Paper focuses on the origins of the 1974 European Council decision to introduce direct elections to the European Parliament. Contrary to a dominant interpretation, that puts such a decision in a teleological perspective of extension of democracy in Europe, the paper argues that direct elections for the European Parliament became possible only when the issue was separated from, and to some extent in opposition with, the idea of enhancing the powers of the European Parliament. Intertwining several perspectives – namely the federalist views on the evolution of a federal and democratic Europe; national governments' resistance toward an elected supranational parliament; and the evolution of the inter-institutional balance – the paper will focus on three different moments.

Firstly, it will discuss early proposals to elect a European Assembly. Since the late Forties, a strong movement for the introduction of the European suffrage developed. With a vague notion of European integration and inspired by federal activists, its focus was on the introduction of direct elections for the Common Assembly, the precursor of the European Parliament. To supporters of vote, this step was the key for further evolution: it would have led to the attribution of new powers for the Parliament.

Secondly, during the Sixties, Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) began to fight to obtain more concrete power. This would have turned the issue of the Assembly's election into inescapable fact. It was a reversal in strategy, yet the objective was still the same: strengthening the European Parliament within the European integration process.

Yet, it was only with the crisis of the Seventies that Member States accepted direct elections. In particular, two new dynamics intertwined. On the one side, the introduction of direct elections was part of a broader attempt to redefine the community’s institutional framework, in order to give Europe a clear political leadership. On the other one, it was meant to address the emerging democratic deficit – a democratic deficit that became clear only in the Seventies. In this sense, the introduction of direct elections was aimed at containing and appeasing the European Parliament’s firm and growing actions in a moment in which – many believed – the Eec was lacking a political leadership to face the international crisis of the Seventies – a political leadership that would be provided by the institutionalization of the European Council, not by the elected European Parliament.
Introduction
In June 1979, the citizens of the nine countries of the European community elected for the first time in direct elections by universal suffrage their representatives to the European Parliament. As the only directly elected institution, the European Parliament has always represented the stronger democratic basis for the entire community. Yet, historians had little to say on the introduction of direct elections and the role of the European Parliament more in general. This neglect depends in part on the idea that the European Parliament was nothing more than an expensive, polyglot and powerless talking shop. But it also depends on the fact that historians of European integration are mostly diplomatic historians and their research focus is on national governments’ bargains and preferences or moments of crisis. Despite this scholarly neglect, there is a general consensus both on the idea that the introduction of direct elections was part of a continuous process of extension of democracy within European institutions and on the fact that such a decision would have contributed to solve the innate democratic deficit of European institutions. Indeed, to many scholars, the democratic deficit found its origins in Jean Monnet’s approach to European integration.

Against this background, the paper will argue that the democratic deficit played an important – albeit not exclusive – role in the 1974 European Council’s decision to directly elect the European Parliament and that such a problem should be analyzed in the framework of the deep crisis Europe got involved in the Seventies. For this reason, the paper will suggest that direct elections by universal suffrage became possible only when the issue was separated from, and to some extent in opposition with, the idea of enhancing the powers of the European Parliament and its role within the EEC institutional constellation. Indeed, for about two decades, the introduction of the vote was considered as the key for further evolution: it would have led to the attribution of new powers for the Parliaments and to greater unity among European citizens. Facing a strong opposition from national governments, during the Sixties many members of the European Parliament modified their approach. They began to fight to obtain more concrete power. This would have turned the issue of the Assembly’s election into inescapable fact. It was a reversal in strategy, yet the objective was still the same: strengthening the European Parliament within the European integration process. Yet, it was only with the crisis of the Seventies that Member States accepted direct elections. In particular, two new dynamics intertwined and reinforced the claims for direct elections. On the one side, the introduction of direct elections was meant to address the emerging democratic deficit which challenged the legitimacy of the European construction, especially within new Member States (Great Britain, Denmark and Ireland). It was also to contain their criticism toward the undemocratic features of the Community that national governments accepted direct elections for the European Parliament. On the other one, the introduction of direct elections was part of a broader attempt to redefine the community’s institutional framework, in order to give Europe a clear political leadership – a political leadership that would be provided by the institutionalization of the European Council, not by the elected European Parliament. It was, in the end, a window dressing action, that was aimed at appeasing critics and containing the Parliament’s autonomous activities which challenged national governments’ leading role within the Community.


At the Origins. Which Institutions for a Democratic Europe?

After 1945, “democracy” became both a buzzword and a political compass that drove the reconstruction of European political systems. As popular as the concept was, it was also a contested term. Not only did the Cold War create a split between Western liberal democracies and Eastern people’s democracies, but, for most of the 1940s and 1950s, the word democracy assumed several meanings. One, of course, was the idea that Western democracy was an antithesis of fascism and communism. Another one was the diffusion of the idea that people’s participation in political affairs should be channeled through representative parliaments, with a limited role for referendums and mass participation. As the quintessential democratic institutions in postwar Europe, national Parliaments were the only national political body to be directly elected by citizens. They would assure checks and balances, hold governments to account. It was in national Parliaments that representatives would debate the future of the country and legislation adopted.

“Democracy” was also a project that began to be defined in a European framework. Although the focus of political elites was on the reconstruction of national parliaments and institutions, the European dimension of parliamentarism became increasingly important in the institutional landscape of Western Europe. On a very general level, the existence of European parliaments was supposed to contribute to the democratic stability of European political systems: being part of a European process of democratization and contributing to a generalized democratic milieu, national parliaments find an international legitimation in their European counterparts. Yet, the Europeanization of parliamentarism had another dimension: the creation of supranational and European assemblies. Between the late 1940s and early 1950s, four supranational assemblies were established: the Consultative Assembly of the Council of Europe; the Parliamentary Assembly of the Western European Organization; the ECSC Common Assembly, which was then reinforced to operate as the Ad Hoc Assembly for the creation of the European Defense Community/European Political Community. Although largely neglected by scholars, supranational parliaments played an important role. They soon become the target of federalist hopes for the construction of a federal and democratic Europe: they were the most obvious sites to start such an evolution. Equally important, they presented some common traits. First, their members were almost exclusively Christian democrats and moderates and, to a certain degree, representatives in an assembly were the same representatives in the other assemblies. As Antonin Cohen demonstrated, when the Ecsc Common Assembly was established, 37 of its 78 Members were also members, or substitute members, of the Assembly of the European Council.

Secondly, by introducing a parliamentary representation based on the size of the national populations, these international assemblies broke with a traditional principle of international law, namely, the equal representation and sovereignty of states. Finally, these assemblies had limited powers and were not directly elected by citizens. They personified the prevailing features of democratic thought of the time, a democratic thought that was based on citizens’ limited participation and with a focus on the domestic level.

The issue of direct elections to a European assembly was almost immediately tackled, although there was little consensus on which international organization should lead the democratization and the integration of Europe. To supporters of a European vote, the Council of Europe

offered the first chance to enhance democratic participation. To Dutch socialist and federalist Hendrik (Henri) Brugmans believed that the Council of Europe would bring “a parliamentary revolution, a Saint Bartholomew’s Night of national sovereignties.” Yet, once the Council of Europe began its work, it soon became clear that it would not lead the democratization of Europe, nor its unification, for a number of political, ideological and institutional limits. Despite its almost immediate failure, early federalists in its Consultative Assembly, such as Paul Reynaud, René Courtin, and Henri Brugmans, drafted proposals for direct elections. Reynaud would become one of the leading advocates of direct elections. In 1951, he explained the rationale for its commitment toward the democratization of Europe:

“In a democracy no assembly can have prestige, unite people, take any effective action, unless it stems directly from the sovereign people. Also because if we were to raise the interests of Europe above those of the different nations it was necessary to give a psychological shock to public opinion in those nations. So it is to the people themselves, I argued, that we must talk by the democratic means of an election”.

Not only the “psychological shock” Reynaud was referring to would become a political leitmotiv for supporters of direct elections at the European level for the following twenty years, it also perfectly described federalists’ basic aim: once an elected supranational assembly would be in place, it would have an implicit constituent legitimacy and lead member states into a supranational democracy.

To federalist activists and politicians, the creation of the European Coal and Steel Community (Ecsc) did not represent a concrete opportunity to have an elected European Assembly. They were disappointed by its technocratic and functionalist features and aims. Its institutions raised similar concerns. Not only was the 78-member Ecsc Common Assembly appointed by and among members of the national parliaments, but it also had just limited powers. As B. Rittberger has explained, in the original French proposal for the Ecsc there was no room for the Common Assembly. Yet, Monnet and the other French delegates had become very receptive to the German and Italian insistence on the idea of having a transnational control body comprised by representatives from national Parliaments. Being a supranational assembly, not only did it reinforce the democratic stability of its Member States, but it was also consistent with the democratic consensus of the time.

A concrete chance to transform the Common Assembly into a true Parliament arrived with the inception of the Korean War and the discussion over the creation of the European Defense Community (Edc). During the negotiations, the Italian delegation urged to put the new community under sufficient democratic control. Consequently, article 38 of the Edc Treaty promoted “the construction of an Assembly of the European Defense Community, elected on a democratic basis.” An Ad Hoc Assembly (made by members of the ECSC Common Assembly and other nine representatives) was responsible for drafting the statute of the new European Political Community. On 15 September 1952, the Ad Hoc Assembly started its work. The issue of direct elections entered the original proposal, after a short debate which led

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9 See, for example, P. Reynaud’s Speech at the Council of Europe, 10 May 1948, available online: http://www.cvce.eu/obj/intervention_de_paul_reynaud_au_congres_de_l_europe_la_haye_10_mai_1948-fr-dd0c2424-73a7-42a7-ab4e-af1164e900a1.html (last access: 22 September 2015).

to the idea of a two-chamber system, with a people's chamber and a senate. The rapporteur on this was Pierre-Henry Teitgen, who urged his colleagues to take a significant initiative on direct elections: “If the subcommittee were to abandon these elections once and for all, it would deprive the future community of the only real new institution and revert back to an assembly like the one described in the Schuman Plan”. The vast majority of the Ad Hoc Assembly supported Teitgen's proposals: only one member openly opposed the idea of a directly elected European Assembly. To Gaullist representative Michel Debré, an elected Parliament within a European federal system was “dangerous and unreal” because “Europe (did) not exist, yet”.

Debré’s words apart, the main point of discussion was the introduction of a transition period before the complete introduction of direct elections, as proposed by two amendments: one by Pierre Wigny and the other one by several Dutch representatives led by Marinus van der Goes van Naters. The debate over the introduction of a transition period was in reality a debate on European citizenship and on the idea that European citizens were ready (or not) for European elections.

The main arguments for a transition period were that it would allow the development of supranational parties and adequate procedures. In addition, the transition period would create a window of opportunity to educate European citizens on European affairs and politics. Dutch socialist Marinus van der Goes van Naters, for example, believed that the immediate introduction of direct elections was “an historical mistake” and underlined the need to prepare European citizens for the creation “of a true Parliament, elected by European citizens”. Similarly, Pierre Wigny feared a low electoral turnout. This would have led to two major problems: “people will not attach adequate importance to an Assembly that is not fully representative” and the risk that citizens would cast their vote to national representatives instead of European political parties because they would not yet be familiar with European politics.

Many Members of the Common Assembly took the opposite position. According to Paul Reynaud, a transition period was like saying to the European people: “You will have to wait for another four years, as you have clearly understood nothing of the matter.” European citizens — “will simply think that Europe is not for the people, it is for politicians and professionals of Europe”. The Subcommittee on Political Institutions, represented by Belgian Socialist, ardent federalist and international lawyer Fernand Dehousse also advised against adopting a transition period. To Dehousse, the argument of an “insufficient degree of maturity of the public opinion” did not hold.

The amendments proposing a transition period were rejected. Yet, what is striking is that both

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11 Assemblée ad hoc définition, Commission constitutionnelle, Program de travail de la Commission Constitutionnelle, CARDOC AH AA AH-X002/ 52 0080; et Sous-commission des Institutions politiques, CARDOC AH AA PR AH-X006/ 52 0050.

12 Assemblée ad hoc définition, Commission constitutionnelle, Program de travail de la Commission Constitutionnelle, CARDOC AH AA AH-X002/ 52 0080; et Sous-commission des Institutions politiques, Minutes of a Meeting of 14 November 1952, CARDOC AH AA PV/SCPO 1952 SCPO-19521114 0020.


14 Amendement n. 26 de M. Wigny" e "Amendement n. 51 de MM. Van Der Goes Van Naters, Viseboxse, Bruins Slot, Korthals, Rip, Kapteijn", in HAEU, FD 309.

15 Marinus van der Goes van Naters Speech to the Ad Hoc Assembly, March 1953 (original in French), HAEU, FD 309.

16 Paul Reynaud, Speech to the Ad Hoc Assembly, March 1953 (original in French), HAEU, FD 309.

17 Dehousse Speech to the Ad Hoc Assembly, March 1953 (original in French), Historical Archives of the European Union (hereinafter HAEU), Accession FD 309.

18 Dehousse Speech to the Ad Hoc Assembly, March 1953 (original in French), Historical Archives of the European Union (hereinafter HAEU), Accession FD 309.
supporters and opponents of this measure voiced their opinions with European citizens and their Europeness as the main arguments. Except for Reynaud, they all agreed that the average citizens was far from what they considered a “good European” and that they had to be educated and initiated to European politics. They differed, however, on the best way to cope with this problem. To supporters of a transition period, some kind of public awareness could develop over a few years through an adequate information campaign. To critics, each European election would develop an “inherent educational value”. Despite such a difference, nobody really disputed the democratic nature of both the inherent paternalism that this educational view suggested and the issue of the democratic credentials of European institutions. To them, the lack of democracy of the Community was not an issue at the time. On the contrary, they believed that the institutional balance drawn by the treaties was a democratic surplus, not a deficit, which assured the stability of national democratic systems.

The failure of the EDC also meant the failure of the first concrete attempt to directly elect a European parliament. Yet, the issue was still alive. When in mid 1954, the Political Affairs Committee of the Common Assembly charged Pierre Henry Teitgen with presenting a report on how to strengthen the scrutiny powers of the assembly, direct elections re-emerged. The Teitgen report was presented in November 1954 and debated by the assembly the following month. It took the existing institutional balance as the starting point, pointing out that the assembly was far from being a traditional Parliament because it was not directly elected and lacked the power typical of a Parliament (such as legislative and budgetary powers), although it enjoyed some forms of scrutiny through the motion of censure and could participate in making revisions to the treaty. Yet, to Teitgen, the assembly could claim a driving role in integration and could be even more influential if it was elected by universal and direct suffrage, which would provide it with moral and political authority and, eventually, lead to an increase in its power.

While Teitgen considered the introduction of direct elections a step forward toward integration, others considered it as a threat toward disunity. Wigny, for example, expressed puzzlement over the helpfulness of general elections in raising public awareness. Conversely, he feared that direct elections would trigger a premature rivalry between the elected European Assembly and national parliaments. He explained:

“If there are no longer personal ties between national parliaments and ourselves; if there is a different mode of suffrage and different results of representation, such that we argue over the representative value, within the nations themselves, of such-and-such an Assembly; if, this unity having been achieved, the Chambers are not re-elected at the same time and the vote of one side can be considered by the other side as involving a necessary change in government, then I fear that, through these highly premature reforms, which try to do too much too soon by endeavoring to guarantee a democratic nature which, I repeat, is indispensable, but already largely accomplished, we will arouse the fears of those who worry about the colossal shadow of a hypothetical Europe which would efface the various differences which exist and which must continue to exist between historic states and ancient nations.”

Meanwhile, Ecsc member states began negotiations for the Treaties of Rome, which lead to the creation of the Eec and the Euratom. From an institutional perspective, the new communities were modeled on the Ecsc institutional framework. When it was established, its European Parliamentary Assembly was no different from the other European supranational assemblies. Yet, since its creation, it began a process of differentiation from the other

20 Rapport présenté le 19 novembre 1954 par Pierre-Henry Teitgen sur les poivoirs de controle de l'Assemblée commune et leur exerce, on line: http://www.cvce.eu/en/collections/unit-content/-/unit/d590df5-483-4603-85f7-0eabc24b9fe1/cf0abbd44aeabf4fd2-b763-7443b0d9d65e/Resources#e5e6e8-035-d4e0-a0d-6d747a4b198 en&overlay
supranational parliaments. This process has a threefold rationale.

First, legislative activities of the EC constantly increased: in 1958, 13 regulations were adopted, while, in 1967, the EC adopted 309 regulations and 19 directives. The Eec voluminous favoured a progressive differentiation in membership from the other supranational assemblies: in 1967, for example, only three Members of the European Parliament (out of 142) were at the same time members of the Consultative Assembly of the Council of Europe.22

Secondly, when negotiations of the Treaty of Rome began, Members of the European supranational assemblies took a diplomatic initiative aimed at creating a single parliamentary space for Western Europe, in order to avoid a growing fragmentation of parliamentary activities and to strengthen the perspectives for direct elections. As Teitgen explained, “It would be easier to justify the direct election of the assembly if the community was not solely concerned with coal and steel, and direct election would make an assembly with greater powers of scrutiny more influential.”23 In a two-day meeting in February 1957, the Political Bureaus of the Common Assembly, the Council of Europe Consultative Assembly, and the Western European Union Assembly took the initiative to prevent the establishment of two new intra-European assemblies. Speaking on behalf of the ECSC Common Assembly, Hans Furler proposed to extend the Common Assembly’s functions to the new communities, while Pleven, at the time president of the WEU Assembly, and Fernand Dehousse, on behalf of the Council of Europe, strongly supported the establishment of a single European Assembly, which encompassed all the existing assemblies.24 The final resolution called for the extension of the competences of the Eeec Assembly over the two new communities and an enlargement in the number of its members. Through such an initiative, the European Parliamentary Assembly became increasingly important, as its competencies encompassed three Communities.25 Finally, the Common Assembly immediately developed a new esprit de corps, which gave cohesion to Members of the European Parliament beyond political affiliation and national identities. As Aurelie Gfeller noted in a recent article, a transnational consciousness emerged almost immediately among members of the European Parliament, who “forged ties, exchanged ideas, and pursued projects, which went beyond their national boundaries” starting with the transformation of their institution into an elected and stronger parliament.26

Discussions on the introduction of direct elections shaped the negotiations of the Eec. Two different proposals were debated: the first one was for the introduction of direct elections for the European Parliamentary Assembly in the treaty; the other one, which was then adopted as art. 138 of the Eec Treaty, called the Assembly to “draw up proposals for elections by direct universal suffrage in accordance with a uniform procedure in all Member States”.27 Writing in the mid-1960s, leading federalist Altiero Spinelli observed that the pledge to elect the European Parliament was “an almost purely formal concession made by the treaty negotiators to the democratic-federalist approach”.28 Yet, at the time, many federal activists and

23 Assemblée Commune, Debates, Session of 2 December 1954.
25 Texte de la Recommandation adoptée le 2 février 1957 par le Bureaux des Assemblées Européennes et présentée par une délégatione ceux-ci aux Ministres participant aux travaux de la Conférence Intergouvernementale, AS/3 B (57) 1, Cardoc Archives.
28 A. Spinelli, The Eurocrats: Conflict and Crisis in the European Community, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins Press, 1966,
Members of the European Parliament considered Article 138 as an opportunity to transform their institution into a truly supranational parliament. The European Parliamentary Assembly immediately took up the opportunity. It charged a working group with the task of drafting a proposal for direct elections. Fernand Dehousse was elected as its rapporteur. Its 13 members first convened in October 1958 and finished the draft convention on the election of the European Parliament by direct universal suffrage in May 1960.29 Prudence was the driving force behind the Dehousse Committee because every trespass of the treaty was a potential reason for the Council to reject the assembly's proposals. For this reason, the working group immediately discarded its one explicit task to come up with a proposal for “a uniform procedure in all member states” and offered some basic rules for European elections. National electoral systems were an inherent part of national political culture and Member States should define their national electoral systems. Dehousse even urged the European Movement not to elaborate on its own proposal for direct elections, in order to avoid confusion and fears about a democratic-federal evolution of the Eec.30 Dehousse had been one of the advocates of European elections within the European Movement, but now democratizing the Common Assembly had paradoxically become a matter for its members alone, eventually supplemented by a few number of experts and political leaders in each member States.31 After 2 years, Dehousse presented his Draft convention. It contained a number of moderate proposals: it called for tripling the number of MEPs, the summoning of elections every five years, a transition period during which the 142 original members, delegated from the national parliaments, would keep their seats in both the European and their respective national parliament, as to ensure the secure handing over of the Common Assembly to the newly elected members.32 The general debate within the European Parliamentary Assembly took place on 10 and 11 May 1960. As in the case of the previous debate on the European Political Community, no member of Parliaments was in opposition to the principle of direct elections. Yet, despite Dehousse's prudent approach, many believed it was too maximalist and premature. Wigny, for example, denounced the gap between national and international representation in a moment in which European integration was at its very beginning and required a high degree of cohesion between the national and the European political systems. Representative Zijlstra believed that the introduction of direct elections would become possible only after the complete realization of the common market, while Representative Tilanus rediscovered the terms of the previous debate on the transition period, by arguing that European citizens were not yet prepared for European affairs and elections.33 Other members of the Common Assembly criticized the Dehousse Convention for being too minimalist. Maria Probst, for example, urged the assembly to elaborate on a new proposal with a single uniform procedure. She explained that the Treaty of Rome had called for a single electoral procedure for all six member states. Reversing the point made by supporters of the Draft Convention, who claimed that ministers would not be prepared to accept the direct election of the entire assembly based on a single procedure, Probst argued that, by signing and ratifying the Treaty of Rome, the choice in favour of a single procedure had already been made at the national level. To address Probst's point, Dehousse replied by explaining a point the Working Group accepted since its first meeting:

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31 Memorandum from professor Van Der Bergh to the Dehousse Working Group, 15 April 1959; and "Relevé des réunions", undated, both in HAEU, FD 314.

32 Fernand Dehousse Speech, 10 May 1960, in CARDOC PE0 Ap DE 1960 DE 19600510-02-03.

33 Assemblea Parlamentare Europea, "Opinioni espresse sull'elezione diretta dei membri dell'Assemblea Parlamentare Europea", 5 giugno 1959, HAEU, PEO 152.
uniformity did not mean identicalness. He then added:

“Of course, the way we looked at it, we had to make a choice which was rather difficult at times and which has earned us criticism from members of the pro-European movements. We have been constantly forced to choose between what is feasible and what is desirable, which has meant, life being what it is, that we have often had to sacrifice the desirable for the feasible. Does this mean that we have become minimalists? Let me just say, Mr Chairman, that I do not think so. We only wanted to do realistic work, we wanted to allow political Europe to realize its full potential. This led us to act as we did”.

Maria Probst was hardly alone in criticizing the Draft convention for its minimalist approach to direct elections. To Metzger, for example, the vote for a powerless assembly could have a negative impact on the European construction. In addition, he challenged the idea that direct elections would make the assembly more prestigious, enabling it to obtain much greater powers: there was no reason why governments would give an elected assembly powers that they were not prepared to give it under the current conditions. For this reason, he suggested a different approach to the issue of direct elections: it was necessary to increase the parliament’s powers before introducing its direct election.

Dehousse took the opposite stance. He was determined to make European elections a reality, in order to transform both the European construction and the assembly which

“Our Assembly is not a traditional Parliament, but is certainly something more than a Consultative Assembly; it is an institution in the middle of an evolutionary transition. And we don’t know if we will go back toward a consultative and diplomatic ideal or if we will move forward in the direction of the ideal of a truly supranational parliament”.

This transformation – Dehousse explained – would be triggered by the direct elections themselves, that would give the assembly the momentum to empower itself. Echoing Reynaud’s words on the “psychological shock”, Dehousse spoke about a *choc salutaire*. The “salutary shock” almost grew into a doctrine for the working group, as a Dutch jurist observed at the time: “Professor Dehousse himself happily admits that he considers European elections […] a new driving force behind political integration […]. The Working Party seems to follow him a great deal in these views, for that which is known about its preliminary deliberations and conclusions, reflects on various points the express wish to make European elections a source and not a mere result of political interest in Europe”. This salutary shock did not materialize and, for about ten years, the Council failed to examine the Dehousse Convention.

The Sixties: Charles De Gaulle vs the Parliament

When the document was submitted to the Council, a short communiqué announced that five members were willing to proceed with discussions on it, while the French delegates objected it was not the right time. For the following decade, the Council failed to take a position on the convention and, more in general, states procrastinated any decision on direct elections.

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35 Assemblea Parlamentare Europea, Seduta di Martedì 10 maggio 1960, p. 25.
36 Assemblea Parlamentare Europea, Seduta di Martedì 10 maggio 1960, CARDOC, Pe0 AP DE 1960 DE 196000510-02-03, p. 27.
37 Ibidem.
38 Assemblea Parlamentare Europea, Commissione per gli Affari Politici e Istituzionali, Progetto di Convenzione e documenti allegati redatti dal gruppo di lavoro per le elezioni europee sulla elezione dell’Assemblea Parlamentare Europea a suffragio universale diretto, febbraio 1960, HAEU, PEO 152.
39 Communiqué of the foreign ministers meeting in Bonn on 10 July 1961, reported in EP Committee on Legal Affairs, Report on the Motion for a Resolution (doc 50/68) presented by Mr Deringer relating to the election of Members of the European Parliament by direct universal suffrage (doc 214/68) in CARDOC PE0 AP RP/JURI 1961 A0-0214/68 0010.
National governments had many reasons to oppose them. They wanted to exclude communist forces from representation within the European institutions. Some technical aspects – such as the definition of the electoral system or the dual mandate – created many obstacles to holding a European election. In addition, national governments feared that a distribution of consent different from national majorities could weaken their political stability. Above all, an elected European Parliament was perceived as a direct threat to national parliaments and governments’ role as repositories of popular sovereignty. Being directly elected, the Parliaments would claim more power, thus reducing member states’ roles in European decision-making. Indeed, this assumption, which put governments in opposition with direct elections, was at the core of the strategy followed thus far: to Dehousse and many other supporters of direct elections, the vote was perceived as the key to both the affirmation of the Parliament and the political evolution of the community.\(^\text{40}\)

A more specific obstacle came from the general rethinking on the nature of European integration, as a result of Charles De Gaulle’s attempt to bring the Eec decision-making back under the control of member states. General De Gaulle had no hesitation in rejecting the Dehousse Convention and any other supranational plan, thus limiting the sovereignty of member states. For this reason, in 1961 De Gaulle openly supported French diplomat Fouchet’s draft treaty establishing a Union of European Peoples, which proposed an intergovernmental evolution of the community. Initially, the European Parliament criticized the choice to have such a discussion held at an intergovernmental conference, without any role for the commission or the parliament.\(^\text{41}\) Yet, before the summit opened, the European Parliamentary Assembly adopted a resolution in which it made its approval of the organization of periodic summit among the heads of state and government dependent on certain conditions aiming at preserving the “Community method” and at having a definitive decision on the Draft convention by the Council.\(^\text{42}\)

Disappointed by the content of the Fouchet Plan and the lack of a reply on the Dehousse convention, many Members of the European Parliament modified their strategy to enhance their assembly. Contrary to Dehousse’s approach, they prioritized the search for more powers over direct elections. This strategy would make the Parliament more relevant, especially through the acquisition of some budgetary powers, thus making the issue of its direct legitimacy an inescapable fact.

The first act was the assembly’s autonomous decision to modify its name as “European Parliament.” This change demonstrated the Parliament’s ambition to reach a leading role in building a unified Europe, as many MEPs, such as Alain Poher, Dehousse or Charles Janssens, admitted during the parliamentary debate.\(^\text{43}\) Then, in late 1962, the Illerhaus Working Paper on the completion of the Common Market was introduced. It urged the merger of the executive bodies and the extension of powers of the European Parliament. Reversing previous approaches to the issue, the Working Paper explained that direct elections should take place at the end of the second stage of the common market, as a logical step following an increase in the Parliament’s power.\(^\text{44}\)

A few months later, some members of the European Parliament tabled a question asking the Council to take a decision on the Dehousse Convention. The answer reiterated Member States’ traditional argument: there was no unanimity on this point.


\(^{41}\) Assemblea Parlamentare Europea, Seduta di Martedì 9 marzo 1961, p. 111.


\(^{44}\) EP, Political Committee, Working Paper on the Community’s objectives during the second stage of the transitional period of the common market, in CARDOC PE0 AP/RP/POLI.1961 A0 0100/62.
“the problem of election of members of the Parliament by direct universal suffrage has been discussed by the Councils on several occasions. Under the terms of art. 108 of the Euratom Treaty, 21 of the ECSC Treaty and 139 of the EEC Treaty, the Councils must decide unanimously on provisions they recommend member states to adopt. As this condition has not so far been fulfilled, the Councils are not in a position to say when they will be able to decide on the provision in question”.

This was the last time in which the European Parliament discussed the issue of direct elections without any reference to the extension of its powers. Direct elections by universal suffrage remained crucial to the parliament’s search for a purpose within the EC decision-making machinery, but the acquisition of new powers moved to the top of the Parliament’s agenda. This attitude was then confirmed by the Furler Resolution, which proposed the extension of the parliament’s powers in five major areas: the selection of the community executive; the legislative process; treaty ratification; control over the budget; and nomination of members of the Court of Justice. The report included a strongly worded resolution:

“The European Parliament, convinced that any real progress made by the Community must be accompanied by a strengthening of its institutional structures, considers that the transfer of legislative powers from the national to the Community sphere must go hand in hand with a corresponding strengthening of parliamentary powers at the Community level; regards it as essential to widen the powers of the European Parliament so as to strengthen the Community’s democratic structure and the Community spirit”.

The Furler Resolution paved the way for a progressive, yet limited, increase in the Parliament’s powers, through the signing of a series of inter-institutional agreements. According to scholars Yves Meny and Richard Corbett, these agreements were the first concrete steps to assess the Parliament’s political legitimacy and to obtain the right to be directly elected. Progressively, the Council agreed on voluntary consultations with the European Parliament to all legislative and, later, non-legislative texts.

A few months later, German socialist Kate Strobel introduced a 15-point question to the Commission. To Strobel, developments within the EEC, with a dominant Council of Ministers, were creating an institutional imbalance. To reverse the course, Strobel proposed the granting of new powers to the European Parliament and its election by universal suffrage. The president of the Commission, Walter Hallstein gave a point-by-point reply, which was very encouraging: the Commission was “fully and completely” supporting the Parliament in its attempts to expand its authority and to be directly elected.

Hallstein’s support to the European Parliament’s search for a purpose was confirmed in March 1965. The Commission defined a new mechanism to finance CAP, based on the creation of “own resources” for the community. To assure an adequate democratic control over the funds, the commission and the Parliament would share powers of control over them. As Hallstein saw it, it was a logical step. Thus far, the Community was financed by national contributions and the European Parliament’s involvement in the budget procedure was superfluous because it was already under the scrutiny of national parliaments. Once the Community’s budget would become autonomous, only the European Parliament could provide the necessary oversight. In explaining this plan to the Parliament, Hallstein even recalled the well-known motto: “No taxation without representation.” It followed that the Parliaments would have to be directly

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45 EP Reply of 20 April 1963 to the written question of 7 February 1963, CARDOC PE0 AP QP/QE E-0163/63 0050-0160.
46 Parlamento Europeo, Dibattiti, Seduta del 27 Giugno 1963, pp. 156-161 and 185-186 “Resolution sur le competences et les pouvoirs du Parlement Europeen”.
elected if the people were to be truly represented.\textsuperscript{49} The Parliaments endorsed this proposal. A resolution calling for an extension of the Parliament’s budgetary powers was approved by a large majority (76 in favor and 10 abstentions).\textsuperscript{50} In explaining the rationale for the vote, German socialist Kate Strobel explained that the Parliaments was working for “parliamentary democracy and, consequently to make European citizens relevant in the community policy”.\textsuperscript{51} Despite the Hallstein Commission’s backing, the Parliament’s search for more powers and direct elections was stopped by the French government. The first July, the president of the Council of Ministers, Maurice Couve de Murville, suspended the discussion on the Hallstein Proposal. A few days later, the French government withdrew its representatives from the Community. In explaining this decision, Charles De Gaulle harshly criticized the supranational and federal evolution of the Community, an evolution in which: “Countries will lose their national identity (...) will be governed by some sorts of a technocratic, irresponsible, country-less Areopagus.” De Gaulle’s main target was the Commission. Yet, Parliament’s increased role was no less damaging to the general: “The assembly, which is essentially consultative and where representatives have never been directly elected, will do nothing different from increasing this sense of usurpation”.\textsuperscript{52}

French determination led to an uneasy compromise. With the 1966 Luxemburg Agreements, member states decided to proceed unanimously within the Council when “very important issues” were at stake. The agreements then specified that the commission should work more closely with the Council and that they would “define methods” to control the community’s own resources. Furthermore, it recalled that the commission could not divulge “proposals and other official acts” prior to its communication with the Council. As Dutch Foreign Minister Luns admitted, “One of the main victims, if not the only victim of the crisis which broke out in Europe on June 30 was beyond doubt the European Parliament and its powers”.\textsuperscript{53}

The institutional deadlock fueled activists’ determination to fight for the introduction of direct elections by universal suffrage to the European Parliament. Contrary to the developing strategy adopted by many Members of the European Parliament, federalist activists and organizations continued to perceive the introduction of direct election as paramount. A federalist initiative developed in a number of European countries with the proposal to hold unilateral elections to select national delegates to the European Parliament.\textsuperscript{54} These proposals failed for a number of reasons. The German Bundestag, for example, rejected the proposal after considerable discussion on 20 May 1965. To Hans Furler, a member of the German and European parliaments, unilateral elections would be counterproductive to the development of the European Parliament because they would lose their significance if they were not held by all six states. In addition, he questioned the legality of this election because the treaties specified that the Council should agree on a uniform procedure.\textsuperscript{55} No less important, the largest federalist organization, the European Federalist Movement (EfM), did not endorse such a campaign, which was considered irrelevant and an obstacle to the fulfillment of the Rome Treaty commitment to define a uniform procedure for the European vote.\textsuperscript{56} In 1966, the EfM modified its political approach to the unilateral elections, given the prospects for the community’s own resources and the need to introduce some forms of democratic control over

\textsuperscript{49} Parlamento Europeo, Discusioni, 24 marzo 1965, pp. 166-172.
\textsuperscript{50} “Risoluzione su taluni aspetti delle risorse finanziarie della CEE. In 1969, the Parliament approved another resolution calling for the strengthening of its budgetary powers which explicitly recalled the Commission’s proposal. See Proposta di risoluzione sul rafforzamento dei poteri del Parlamento europeo, in particolare in materia di bilancio, 3 October 1969, PE0 1022.
\textsuperscript{52} Quoted in P. Scalingi, The European Parliament, p. 90.
\textsuperscript{53} See S. Pistone, cit.
\textsuperscript{54} ibidem
\textsuperscript{55} D. Pasquinucci, Uniti dal voto?, cit., p. 142.
them. New proposals were introduced in Italy, Germany and France. To federalist-minded scholars Rossolillo and Majocchi, once the Efm officially endorsed unilateral elections, the campaign became the decisive element for the introduction of direct elections by universal suffrage to the European Parliament. It would be naive and wrong to suggest that this campaign had a direct impact on negotiations for direct elections. Indeed, European archives, as well as the parliamentary debates, show little record of the federalist initiatives to hold unilateral elections. Yet, the campaign had a significant result: activists kept the issue of direct elections alive and contributed to popularize it among the general public.

In May 1968, a group of Members of the European Parliaments tabled a new motion for a resolution that urged the Council to examine the Dehousse Convention and threatened to take the Council to the Court of Justice, according to Article 175. The motion for a resolution was finally discussed and approved by the Parliaments one year later in May 1969 during a sitting, which was interrupted by some federalist activists calling for the right to vote at the community level. On the real contribution of this resolution, historians tend to split. However, just a few days later it was approved, the Council of Ministers urged the Coreper to report on the subject before the opening of the summit among the heads of state and government, which opened at The Hague in December 1969.

There is a growing historical consensus that The Hague summit represented a new momentum for European integration. This outcome was made possible by de Gaulle’s retirement from the active political scene and the appearance of a pro-European consensus to move integration beyond the economic realm among major leaders, especially Pompidou, Heath, and Brandt. Under the well-known triptych “completion, enlargement, deepening,” The Hague summit was a real success, which paved the way for the first opening of the community; for the adoption of the definitive financial rule for CAP; for the introduction of the community’s own resources system; and, finally, for the transformation of the European Common Market in a truly political subject. Taken together, these measures would allow the community to enter the 1970s with a renewed sense of direction. Although the final communiqué of the summit failed to discuss institutional reform or the issue of direct elections, it nevertheless started a broader reflection on the evolution of the Community, on its institutional balance, and, incidentally, on the prospect of electing the European Parliament. At the annual joint meeting among the Parliament, the Council, and the Commission, which took place just 10 days later, the representatives from the Parliament disparaged the lack of emphasis on the institutional evolution of the community. The focus was, once again, on the role of the European Parliament and the prospect for direct elections at the European level. For this reason, during the meeting, Fernand Dehousse presented an interim report of the Political Affairs Committee on direct elections, which noted that direct elections would be an indirect consequence of two major decisions of the summit: the attribution of budgetary powers to the Parliaments and the enlargement of the community. For this reason, he invited the Council and the Parliament to set up a liaison working group to look in these matters.


58 Parlement Européen – Seance du Mercedi 12 mars 1969, Speeches by Mr. Dehousse, Mr. Boertien and Ribière, pp. 44-51, CARDOC PE0 AP DE 1960 DE 19600510-02-03


61 Parlamento Europeo, Documenti di Seduta, 28 gennaio 1970, Doc. 210: Relazione sulla elezione del Parlamento europeo a suffragio universale diretto e sulla proposta di risoluzione del gruppo socialista e
Indeed, it was the adoption of the 1970 Luxemburg Treaty (which granted the Parliament some limited, although relevant, budgetary powers) that introduced a clear and undisputed democratic deficit within the EC decision-making. According to political scientist D. Marquand, some critically important instruments of economic management were in the community’s hands, and none of the EC institutions were subject to “responsible political direction and control” unless Parliament would be elected. “The resulting democratic deficit – Marquand continued – would not be acceptable in a Community committed to democratic principles. Yet, this deficit would be inevitable unless the gap were somehow to be filled by the European Parliament.”

Marquand’s analysis was crucial to the Parliament’s action. Now that the Council had accepted the EEC own resource system and an increase in the European Parliament’s powers, it was essential to define a clear strategy to manage the introduction of direct elections.

Receiving Dehousse’s interim report, the Council set up a liaison body, which favored three meetings between the Council president and a delegation from the European Parliament. The first one took place in June 1970. Harmel, the Council president, admitted that, since the Hague Summit, the issue of “direct elections has not significantly progressed, because we find ourselves in a transition phase.” During the meeting, the Parliament’s group declared that they considered the 1960 Draft Convention still valid, although it was possible to introduce some adjustments in light of the enlargements.

At the request of Mario Scelba, president of the Parliament, a second meeting took place in December. Scelba was looking for the establishment of a mixed working group composed by officials from the Coreper and representatives from the European Parliament. President Harmel explained to Scelba that the Coreper was examining the document and that he was in charge of acting as a liaison officer between the two institutions. During the meeting, representatives from the European Parliament urged the Council to reach an agreement on principle on the issue of direct elections with an indication of the deadline and whether it was appropriate to wait until the accession of Great Britain and the other candidate countries. To prove their determination, they recalled the resolution, which threatened to take the Council to the Court of Justice if it failed to make a decision on the Dehousse Convention.

Although the issue of direct elections was now officially on the Council’s agenda, prospects for its discussions were small. In January 1971, Pompidou petrified supporters of direct elections. During a press conference, he pointed out that “speculations concerning the European Parliamentary Assembly are quite pointless” unless a “real European government” was established:

“One cannot imagine these powers being increased until there is a real executive power opposite it. As for designating its members, they are at the present time the representatives of various nations, nominated in random, almost arbitrary number. We can all, so long as we respect the Rome Treaty, have them designated as we see fit; nothing can be changed, neither the nature of their mandate nor the extent of their powers nor their limitation”.

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63 Ufficio di Presidenza del Parlamento Europeo, Processo Verbale del 8 giugno 1970 CARDOC PE0 OD PV BURE-197006080010IT_00288171.
To reply to Pompidou, federalist organizations started European-wide petitions and considered the possibility of coordinating the various unilateral campaigns they had already developed. The Commission tried to put the role of Parliament under the spotlight through two major initiatives. One was the publication of the results of a report on the perception of the community among European citizens, which expressed “more neglect than commitment.” To the Commission, the introduction of direct elections for the European Parliament would reverse this tendency, since it would reinforce the democratic character of the Community and blunt charges that the EEC was an unaccountable technocracy, far from citizens’ priorities. The other initiative was the establishment of a 14-member committee under the direction of international lawyer Georges Vedel to examine the strengthening of the powers of the European Parliament. The Vedel Report (published one year later) offered several controversial recommendations for a gradual evolution of the role of the Parliament, by granting it co-decision powers in many areas, stronger budgetary powers, and, eventually, through direct elections. Even within the Coreper, Pompidou's words were not welcomed: German representatives urged their colleagues to start new discussions because any delay would give voice to those members of national parliaments who support projects for the unilateral elections of Members of the European Parliament”. Yet, supporters and opponents of direct elections within the Coreper agreed on one major point: there should be no link between direct elections and the extension of the Parliament’s powers.

When a third meeting took place in March 1972, the Council had not reached a definitive position on the issue. The Council President, Gaston Thorn, explained that the Coreper would continue discussions on technical aspects of the draft convention but that the major contentious issues were political. A directly elected Parliament would have greater political influence, thus raising the issue of its powers. Accordingly, the Council, in unanimous agreement over the principle of direct elections, could not examine the issue in isolation from the resulting institutional framework, which was supposed to be discussed by the Paris Summit of December 1972 and, more importantly, could not reach a decision without a clear mandate from the four candidate countries.

Direct elections were, once again, in a political limbo. The deep sense of crisis of the early 1970s altered dramatically the prospects for direct elections. The October 1972 Paris Summit launched the project to create a European Union by the end of the decade and, on institutional matters, accepted the idea of a gradual evolution of the Parliament. It was a non-committal Final communiqué and, for this reason, it was harshly criticized by the European Parliament. Two years later, however, the European Council officially endorsed direct elections.

**Toward Direct Elections**

To many Members of the European Parliament, the 1974 Council’s decision to have an elected Parliaments proved the correctness of their decade-long stance. To federalist activists, it represented a logical consequence of their campaigns across Europe. On the contrary, to

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68 Agence Europe, 20 February 1971
70 The Vedel Report (25 March 1972), available on line: http://www.cvce.eu/content/publication/1999/4/7/a4f5b134-99b9-41b3-9715-41769d4e12a/publishable_en.pdf (last access: 20/06/2014)
73 ibidem
Georges Vedel, the decision in favor of direct elections came from out of the blue. Writing in the mid-1970s, he explained that direct elections were perceived as a possible solution to the crisis because “when all the paths so far explored are blocked, one is compelled to try new, hitherto unexplored ways."

The debate that developed among member states suggests that the introduction of direct elections was perceived as a minor part in a series of adjustments to face the crisis of the 1970s.

In 1973–1974, Europe was in crisis. The international environment in which Western Europe began its integration process was rapidly changing and traditional certainties began to fade. A radical decrease in productivity, the simultaneous rise of unemployment and inflation and the appearance of stagflation, the specter of de-industrialization, monetary and oil shocks, and even political terrorism in Italy and Germany, all transformed general anxieties into fears of decline. In a couple of years, the Hague momentum was lost, eclipsed by fears, anxieties, and disillusionment. The crisis also had two other sides, that are crucial to fully understand the introduction of direct elections: the unprecedented level of dissent within EEC institutions and the lack of a clear political leadership.

Previously, the few European citizens who opposed European integration and unity had been mostly supporters of Communist parties. Yet, the enlargement, the holding of national referendums on European integration, and the crisis moved opposition to European unity to central stage. Citizens were now asked to develop their own opinion on European integration. Referendum campaigns in France, Britain, Denmark, Ireland, and Norway generated an incredible information and formidable propaganda both in favor and against integration. At the same time, the inclusion of more skeptical Europeans, such as the British, within the boundaries of the community fueled a debate on the (non) democratic features of the community. Calls for the democratization of European institutions entered political life during the 1970s. They were no longer confined to federalist activists or advocates of a stronger Europe. Rather, the appeals now encompassed many vocal critics of European integration. For about two decades, federalist activists had been the stronger critics of an integration with a weak and non-elected Parliament. The arrival of Great Britain and Denmark “changed the dynamic of dissent”, as historian O’Connor recently argued.

Those in Great Britain who opposed membership zoomed in on the undemocratic features of the EC and of its decision-making. The British were hardly alone. The French Communists who entered the European Parliament in July 1973 addressed immediately this problem. They formed a new political group within the Parliament, joining their Italian fellows, although they did not share the Italians’ federalist penchant. Yet, they agreed on the necessity to make direct elections a priority for the future of the Community. The French Communists’ focus on European democracy found a resounding box just a few months before their first appearance in the European Parliament. In March and April 1972, on the eve of the French referendum on the proposed enlargement of the community, they constantly denounced the undemocratic features of the European community. Opposing European integration on capitalist terms, they called for greater “democratization” of European institutions.

French calls for a democratic Europe were somehow echoed in the British political debate. Anti-marketeers were horrified by the fact that their government could accept subjecting the British Parliament to the unelected technocracy of the EEC. “To join the common market,” wrote Anti-marketeer Ron Leighton from the Labour Party, “would mean transferring many of

74 G. Vedel, “The Role of the Parliamentary Institution in European Integration” in European Integration and the Future of Parliaments in Europe (Brussels, 1975), 241.
the powers of the Westminster Parliament to untried and undemocratic institutions outside this country, beyond our control and not answerable to us.” He then continued: “The striking feature of the institutional structure of the common market is the complete lack of democracy (…) the common market is a bureaucracy not a democracy”. Even Michael Foot, a Labour leader with a strong record of support for British membership, harshly criticized the European Parliament: “this last and ineffable invention—dumb legislature—must surely have been the touch of some Laputan satirist.”

British Conservatives, who entered the European Parliament in January 1973, took a more nuanced stance. Led by Peter Kirk, British Members of the European Parliament identified themselves as champions of democratic principles and procedures within the European Parliament. “From a Westminster point of view,” head of delegation Peter Kirk explained, a crucial problem for the parliament’s search for a proper role within the community was the “highly formalized” nature of the debate “most of the real discussion goes on in committee, and, in the plenary debate, priority is given to the official spokesmen of the party groups”.

On Kirk’s initiative, the newly established European Parliament’s Conservative Group presented the Parliament’s bureau a list of proposal to improve its effectiveness and transparency. The so-called Kirk memorandum saw “the development of an effective instrument of democratic control” as a priority for the future of the community, which would “depend largely on the active participation of the peoples of Europe, on their growing belief in themselves as citizens of Europe.” The memorandum listed a series of measures to improve the effectiveness of parliamentary action, such as the introduction of “question time” or a major emphasis on plenary works, instead of work in the committees. The main aim of these proposals was “to strengthen the role of the Parliaments as the only forum for scrutiny, control, and constructive criticism of executive institutions of the communities.” Yet, the memorandum admitted, the internal changes meant little:

“unless the powers of the Parliament are formally increased by agreement between the member of governments and between the institutions of the Communities, its ability to fulfill its proper role as the representative institution of a European democracy will be seriously limited. We therefore wish to express our support for the Parliament's efforts to enhance its position in the decision-making process of the Communities, and as democratic parliamentarians we will not be happy until the European Parliament both acquires real decision-making powers and is elected by the people of Europe”.

British representatives boosted the European Parliament’s activities. A number of resolutions asking for new powers were introduced, and the issue of direct elections reemerged prominently. In June 1973, the Parliaments debated the necessity to update the Dehousse Convention and the Political Affairs Committee found in Dutch socialist Schelto Patijn its rapporteur. Patijn’s actions followed many of the assumptions that drove Dehousse in the late 1950s. He accepted a minimalist approach to the uniformity required by the treaties, leaving member states the definition of the electoral system. As with Dehousse, Schelto Patijn’s prudent approach to the issue was focused on curbing member states’ opposition. For this reason, early actions focused on national governments and political leaders within member states. One of the first documents produced by his working group was a questionnaire on direct elections to be submitted to national governments, national parliaments, and representatives from European institutions.

To national governments, the European Parliament’s activities added a further layer of

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78 R. Leighton, quoted in Eric O’Connor, “A Salutary Shock?”.
79 Michael Foot, The Times, 23 May 1975.
problems in a moment of deep difficulty. To many governments, it became increasingly clear that the community was lacking clear political leadership, and the European Parliament’s search for more power added more confusion and lack of consistency to the EEC. Many governments felt that the Council of Ministers was becoming increasingly inefficient because it held too many meetings and dealt with too many questions. German Chancellor Schmidt believed that the most evident limit in the EEC action was its over-bureaucratization (something he later defined as “enormous malign cancerous bureaucratization”).

The new French president, Valéry Giscard D’Estaing, was among those who believed it was time to resume the drive toward European unity, giving the EEC a clear political leadership. The core of Giscard’s relaunch would become the European Council — thus, a more institutionalized forum for the Summit of Heads of States and Governments — but his plan contemplated direct elections to the European Parliament and monetary cooperation. To many scholars, the introduction of direct elections in Giscard’s plan represented the bargaining chip Giscard paid to Schmidt to assure the German commitment to the European Council. Yet, some recent works and the greater availability of primary sources introduce some doubts on this reconstruction. First, as Pascal Fontaine has argued, Giscard d’Estaing lifted the French veto on direct election even before his election to the French presidency, during the 1974 electoral campaign. Giscard even wrote an open letter to the European Movement in support of direct elections to the European Parliament. Second, the idea of a bargain between the two does not tally with archival evidence. As E. Mourlon Druol has explained in his study of the origins of the European Council, “No single note, telegram, or letter evokes such a package deal” between Giscard and Schmidt, and, if it existed, the deal was “totally absent from the record of the discussions during the summit itself.”

Finally, since the early months of his presidency, Giscard instructed Foreign Minister Sauvagnargues to elaborate on plans for the future organization of Europe. In mid-1974, Sauvagnargues met twice with Jean Monnet to discuss a memorandum on a temporary European government, which was prepared and sent by Monnet to Giscard. This document was at the basis for the French official blueprint that circulated in October 1974 among European leaders. This document shared virtually all of Monnet’s proposals: the creation of a “European Council” as a forum for heads of state and government; the election of the European Parliament; the adoption of majority voting within the Council of Ministers and, finally, new common policies in the fields of energy, industrial development, transportation, the environment, research and development. Yet, there was one major difference: Monnet’s provisions regarding the strengthening of the European Parliament’s powers disappeared in the French document.

The supranational evolution of the community, however, was of secondary importance vis-à-vis the European Council, which was meant to give political impetus to the EEC. In this sense, Giscard’s plan for the future of the EEC was part of a broader scheme to create a three-branch European structure: the EEC would be an executive institution; the commission would act as a bureaucratic-administrative institution; and the European Parliament would be a stronger

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83 Note of a conversation between the Prime Minister and the Federal German Chancellor, 30 June 1976, British National Archives, PREM 16/894.
87 Document de Travail, undated (filed between 16 and 17 September 1973), FJM, AMK 116/2/18.
legislative institution. The attention devoted to the European Parliament and its election therefore does not represent a federalist evolution in the French attitude toward European integration. On the contrary, as Gabriel Robin, Giscard’s diplomatic advisor, explained in a well-known interview, Giscard’s acceptance of direct elections was aimed at containing the European Parliament in a moment of general difficulties for Europe and a surge in European Parliament’s demands. Robin admitted that he had suggested the French President to emphasize the role of the European Parliament by committing the French government to direct elections: “If France fails to make such a proposal, other governments will take the initiative and, given the circumstances, France will be obliged to accept them. If France should oppose to direct elections, the other governments will propose a strengthening of the parliament’s power and this outcome will be even worse”. An elected European Parliament was, in other words, the lesser of two evils.88

The German government had similar views on the institutional evolution of the community. Chancellor Schmidt believed the creation of the European Council would provide European leaders with a useful forum to tackle economic and political problems. Yet, to Schmidt, this intergovernmental evolution would find many obstacles, ranging from the commission and the European Parliament, to federalist movements and smaller countries. For this reason, Schmidt openly supported Giscard’s plan, which called for a balanced approach to institutional design by granting more power to the European Council and by calling for direct elections of the European Parliament. Schmidt’s support for direct elections, however, was also motivated by the evolution of the German political debate. It was aimed at strengthening Schmidt’s role within his own party, the SPD, which had identified the democratization of European institutions as a fundamental aim. Indeed, after the 1974 Paris Summit, which announced direct elections, the SPD gave its approval to Schmidt’s European policy and urged European institutions to enhance the European Parliament’s powers.89

Against this background, at the December 1974 European Council in Paris, a consensus on direct elections was easily reached and the Final Communiqué addressed the issue in the last sentences:

“The heads of government note that the election of the European Assembly by universal suffrage, one of the objectives laid down in the Treaty, should be achieved as soon as possible. In this connection, they await with interest the proposals of the European Assembly, on which they wish the Council to act in 1976. On this assumption, elections by direct universal suffrage could take place any time in or after 1978. (…) the competence of the European Assembly will be expanded in particular by granting it certain powers in the Communities process”.90

The European Parliament was caught by surprise. Despite inter-institutional discussions, nobody really expected the heads of state and government to take such a position. However, after an initial euphoria, two major problems emerged.

First, to many members of the European Parliament, the decision represented an illusory counterweight to the creation of the European Council. The following month, a working document from the Parliament’s Political Affairs Committee explained that “the essential decisions will be taken by an intergovernmental Council, in which the large states’ political weight and government stability will set the tone.” As a consequence, the supranational institutions — the Commission and the Parliament — seemed doomed to a marginal role. For this reason, it was essential to “substantially strengthen the European Parliament’s legislative

89 Parteitag der Sozialdemokratischen Partei Deutschlands, 10-14-04.1973. Protokoll der Verhandlungen, p. 158 and p. 1099. I wish to thank Dr. Stephen Salha for sharing these documents with me.
90 Final Communiqué of the Paris Summit (9-10 December 1974), in Archives of European Integration, University of Pittsburgh, Accession 420. European Integration – Summit Meeting.
powers” because “it will be directly elected, but its powers will be reduced”.

Second, to supporters of direct elections, especially those who were close to the federalist movements, the ambiguous wording of the final communiqué weakened the European Council’s commitment to direct elections. For this reason, the European Federalist Movement decided to develop a public campaign to avoid governments could step back on their commitment and to assure a high turnout for the first election. At the same time, the European Parliament took the initiative, and, in January 1975, it approved the new Draft electoral convention prepared by S. Patijn. The document was an updated version of the 1960 Dehousse Convention. The basic assumption — uniformity does not imply identicalness — was the same. The major change was in the number of MEPs, which was set at 355, while the Dehousse Convention had tripled the number of seats. However, such an approach would have produced a 600-member Parliament, thus a too large and ineffective Parliament. Yet, in presenting this figure, Patijn stressed that the Parliament would accept any other distribution that the Council would have proposed. During the debate, a controversial point was the allocation of the seats and the committee’s failure to define a unique electoral procedure. To the communist group, the lack of proportional representation was a major problem. But most of the Parliament was willing to accept the proposal, sharing Patijn’s realism on the issue. A total of 106 members of Parliaments voted in favor of the convention, with only two votes in opposition and 17 abstentions.

The Coreper Working Group began examination of the Patijn Convention on February 1976, yet a number of difficulties remained. The number and distribution of seats, the dual mandate and the single election date created a number of divisions among member states. Each member state wanted to maximize its representativeness within the assembly, and it was difficult to find an agreement on a specific formula. For the British government, there was also the problem of Scottish and Welsh representation within the European Parliament: it was looking for a figure that should balance representativeness while curbing nationalism. For the Danish government, the problem was the single date. These technical points prolonged discussions within the Coreper until 1976. Yet, as Paula Scalingi has argued, during 1975 and 1976, a number of positive developments made the introduction of direct elections unquestionable. The first was the conclusion of British renegotiation. In June, the British voted to remain in the community. Discussions could now focus on the introduction of direct elections, a point upon which supporters of integration and anti-marketeers agreed. Second, the Council accepted a revision of the 1970 budget treaty, with the signing of the 1975 Brussels treaty which gave the Parliaments the power to reject the entire community budget. Third, at the request of George Spenale, at the time president of the European Parliament, the Council accepted to develop a liaison committee between the Coreper and a delegation from the Parliament, in order to discuss the Patijn Convention and the introduction of the vote. Finally, at the December 1975 European Council, the heads of state and government reaffirmed their commitment to hold elections on a single date in May or June 1978.

92 On this, see for example, "Declaration de princeipe des federalistes europeennes sur l'élection au duggrage universel des parlementaires europeens", 11 December 1975, in HAEU, MFE, Folder 8.
94 European Parliaments, Debates, 14 January 1975, pp.55-93.
95 See, for example, Cabinet Meeting on Direct Elections, 25 June 1975, FCO 30-2568.
September 1976, the Council of Ministers proclaimed its act for the direct elections of the European Parliament, which called for the “EuroElection” in May 1978. Yet, the elections would take place in 1979, due to the British government’s failure to make electoral arrangements by 1978 and the political debate that developed in France.

In France, Communists and Gaullists opposed the introduction of direct elections to the European Parliament. The former contested the nondemocratic nature of the vote and, more in general, the undemocratic features of the community. Rediscovering a traditional argument, many Communists claimed that the lack of any concrete power made the European vote a sideshow, which had nothing to do with the creation of a more democratic Europe. The latter contested the very idea that a supranational democracy was possible. To Michel Debré, who has voiced his opposition since the early Fifties, democracy could be built only within the boundaries of a national community. A democratically elected supranational Parliaments would inevitably claim more power and threatened national parliament’s sovereignty. Other Gaullists confessed to a German newspaper that they opposed direct elections because an elected Parliament would have represented an indirect threat to the CAP.

To address these criticisms, the president of the European Parliament, Georges Spenale summoned a press conference in early January 1976 in which he openly addressed the doubts of critics of the elections:

“Since I have joined the European Parliament, I have heard critics of direct elections saying and repeating that one of the main obstacles is the Parliaments lack of any concrete power and that direct elections to a powerless assembly is meaningless. (…) I have heard others saying that we should not elect the European Parliament because it will receive too many powers and that, if we don’t give it new powers, it will take them. I ask critics to look at their internal contradiction. In reality, I think that they do not want direct elections nor new powers for the parliament: no elections before the strengthening of (the parliament’s) powers; no strengthening of (the parliament’s) powers before the elections. It would be better if they clearly state what they do not want: they do not want Europe.”

To those who contested the idea that a supranational democracy was possible, Spenale recalled the parliament’s budgetary powers: “The most elementary understanding of democracy implies that this new budget which, by definition, is not any longer under the national parliaments’ scrutiny, should be controlled by the European Parliament. You see that from a financial perspective direct elections are compelling.”

The French debate was so intense that the President, Giscard D’Estaing, decided to submit the act authorizing direct elections to the French Constitutional Council. On 30 December 1976, the Council observed that direct elections to the European Parliament posed no threat to French sovereignty because it did not contain any provision which modified the competencies and the powers that the treaty of Rome gave to the communities and their assemblies. Giscard could breathe a sigh of relief. Not only had the Constitutional Council stated that the act respected the French constitutional system, it also expressed the idea that it did not authorize a redistribution of competencies among European institution, thus limiting the parliament’s search for new powers. For this reason, Gaullist opposition to direct election diminished. The French prime minister, Gaullist politician Chirac, confessed to the German foreign minister that after the sentence the Gaullists had accepted the idea of direct elections because “the important thing was that the European Parliament should not have any

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100 Ibidem.
A similar position was shared by British Prime Minister Callaghan and German Chancellor Schmidt. Callaghan wrote to the labor secretary general that, “The government has never accepted that the community should develop into a federation. It is our policy to continue to uphold the rights of national governments and parliaments. We do not envisage any significant increase in powers of the European Parliament. Should any such increase in powers be contemplated it would need the unanimous consent of the member states and of parliaments”. Schmidt confessed to Prime Minister Callaghan that he thought the European Parliament was “A ridiculous waste of time and money” and that he would have preferred not to elect it. Yet, they “had passed this point. A failure to agree on direct elections now would destroy the Eec.” But he was “much opposed to giving the European Parliament any additional rights or powers. We should set it up, and allow it to struggle to acquire its own new powers”.

After the vote

For about two decades the issue of direct elections to the European Parliament was thoroughly linked to the issues of its role within the Eec, of its powers, and of the evolution of the Community along federalist lines. For this reasons, national governments were often in opposition with the introduction of the vote. Direct elections became a reality only in the Seventies and on completely different terms. The introduction of the vote was not aimed at democratizing Europe nor at providing a federal impetus. On the contrary, at least from national governments’ perspective, it now became a tool to avoid such an evolution. Three major changes occurred to this new perception.

Firstly, since the early Seventies, the democratic deficit was under the spotlight. As a consequence of the attribution of limited supervisory powers over the community budget to the not-yet-elected Parliament, a limit of democratic accountability and control emerged. The 1973 enlargement, which brought many critics of the non-democratic features of the Community popularized talks on this. It was also to address this problem that national governments opted for direct elections.

Yet, the introduction of the vote was not meant to give a more crucial role to the European Parliament. On the contrary it was aimed at containing its search for a purpose within the Community. It was part of a broader attempt to redefine the Community's institutional framework in a moment of deep crisis for Europe as a whole. To face the crisis, European leaders thought Europe should have a clear political leadership, which would be assured by the creation of the European Council. The introduction of the vote was part of this reform. But it was also a way to address the Parliament's increasing attempts to assume a leading role within the Eec. By granting it the right to be directly elected – many believed – it would have been possible to postpone a redefinition of its competencies and powers.

To some extent, this strategy worked and the elected Parliament did not receive any new responsibilities. Yet, if we move the spotlight from formal politics to informal politics, this plan completely failed: the democratic legitimation the Parliament received triggered a series of initiatives that reinforced its role within the EC and transformed European integration. The elected Members of the European Parliament immediately used the new legitimacy they had received to strengthen the role of their assembly within the EC machinery. The new president of the parliament, Simone Veil, was determined to impose the new authority elections had

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102 Note of a Meeting between the Prime Minister and the Federal German Foreign Minister in the House of Commons, 25 May 1976, British National Archives, PREM 16/893.
103 House of Commons Parliamentary Debates, Issue 1088, 25 Nov 1 dic, 816-817
104 Note of a conversation between the Prime Minister and the Federal German Chancellor, 30 June 1976, British National Archives, PREM 16/894
conferred to the parliament:

“Because it has been elected by universal suffrage and will derive a new authority from this election, this Parliaments will be able fully to perform its function of democratic control, which is the prime function of any elected assembly (…) Let us not be deluded into believing that the strictly institutional limitation of its powers can prevent a Parliaments such as ours from speaking out all times, and in every field of community action, with the political authority conferred on it by its election (…) our Parliaments must also be a motive force in European integration”.106

The new Parliaments gave a demonstration of its new political strength in November 1979 when it subordinated its approval of the 1980 budget to the cancellation of the unjustified cut imposed by the Council to development aid and CAP. The European Parliament then rejected the budget for the first time in the EEC history.107 It was – the Washington Post commented – the “first major demonstration of (the Parliament’s) independence from government control”.108 To testify to the political and formal status the newly elected Parliament had, the Court of Justice referred to the democratic control the Parliament had to exercise on the EC decision-making in its Isoglucose case:

“The consultation provided for … is the means which allows the Parliaments to play an actual part in the legislative process of the community, such power represents an essential factor in the institutional balance intended by the treaty. Although limited, it reflects at the community level the fundamental democratic principle that the people should take part in the exercise of power through the intermediary of a representative assembly.”109

Yet, the most ambitious action the newly elected Parliament developed was in institutional reform. Thanks especially to Altiero Spinelli, the Parliament adopted an ambitious political agenda to reinforce its role within the community machinery and to re-launch the ideas of a political union among EEC countries. These efforts were summarized by the parliament’s vote in favor of the 1984 Draft Treaty on the European Union. The Draft Treaty strongly reinvigorated the supranational dimension of the institutional system of the EC, which called for major legislative powers for the European Parliament through the introduction of the co-decision procedure and a vote of confidence on the commission and called for majority voting within the Council. These proposals would enter in a limited way in the Single European Act, that represented the first treaty which drastically transformed the Eec.

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106 Speech by Simone Veil at the European Parliament, Archives of European integration, University of Pittsburgh, Folder 423.
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