

## The Treaties of Rome: Continuity and Discontinuity in SPD's European Policy

*Gabriele D'OTTAVIO*

July 5<sup>th</sup>, 1957: the German Social-Democratic Party (SPD) voted in favour of the ratification of the treaties establishing the European Economic Community and the European Atomic Energy Community. The decision has a relevant historical significance, not the least for the fact that it was the first time that a European initiative, supported by Konrad Adenauer's government, received the approval of the main opposition party. As we know, until that time, the SPD had rejected all the main integrationist steps: the Federal Republic's participation in the International Ruhr Authority, its entry in the Council of Europe, the ECSC treaties and the unsuccessful EDC, and finally the treaties of Paris in 1955.<sup>1</sup>

However, the voting position, although rather relevant, is not an element which in itself may help us establish whether and to what extent the treaties of Rome marked a rethinking within the German social-democracy, and specifically its relations with Europe. In order to assess its widest meaning, in terms of continuity and discontinuity, the vote of July 1957 should be re-examined within a wider framework, taking into consideration the European policy pursued by the SPD in the previous period, the specificity of the context, where the choice of supporting the Common Market and Euratom was elaborated, as well as the specific reasons pushing the SPD to embrace the contents of the treaties signed in Rome on March 25<sup>th</sup>, 1957.

A thorough analysis of development stages within the European policy of the German social-democracy from 1949 to 1957 exceeds of course the scope of the present paper. Therefore, we will focus here on the phase of the so-called «European revival»; a period between June 1955 and July 1957, which in the history of SPD's European policy has not yet been fully studied and explored, especially with respect to the importance attributed to phases following the signing of the Rome treaties.

In particular, starting from the prevailing position in historiography, establishing 1955 as the «turning» point in SPD's European policy, an analysis will be carried out in order to assess whether the social-democrats' position on the Common Market and Euratom, was converging, or diverging, with the governing party's, and whether, and to what extent, the decision to cast a vote in favour of the

1. The article is the expanded and amended version of a paper presented in the workshop organised by *Società italiana di Storia contemporanea* (SISSCO) at Marsala in September 2007.

ratification of the Rome treaties should be considered a sort of natural outcome of a process which had evolved since 1955.<sup>2</sup>

### 1. 1955 as «turning point»: a point of convergence among scholars

As regards the 1949-1955 period, historiography has reconstructed in precise details the European policy pursued by the SPD, also with similar conclusions. In order to grasp their essence, it is necessary to start from the end of the period of interest, namely from the divide represented by the signing of the treaties of Paris in October 1954, by which the Federal Republic acquired its sovereignty back, and, with the institution of the WEU, became a member of NATO. In a wider-scope historical perspective, the treaties of Paris marked the final demise of the illusion that the problem of the country's separation could be solved before the Federal Republic entered a system of military alliances. The full awareness of this development was however not immediate: the SPD continued in fact to put forth – in the following months – the request for negotiations with the Soviet Union on the unification, before the treaty ratification made the re-armament decision irrevocable. With the treaties coming into force, the social-democrats continued nonetheless to present proposals, such as the «German Manifesto» of 1955 or the «Plan for Germany» (*Deutschlandplan*) of 1959, which advocated the need for detaching the Federal and Democratic Republics from the two existing systems of military alliances, and to attain unification within a system of collective security under the aegis of the United Nations.<sup>3</sup>

2. For SPD's European policy in the first half of the 1950's, see a recent essay by D. RAMUSCHKAT, *Die SPD und der europäische Integrationsprozeß: Kontinuität und Wandel in der Sozialdemokratischen Europapolitik 1949-1955*, Videel, Niebüll, 2003. For a long-term reconstruction, see two pioneer works by R. HRBEK, *Die SPD-Deutschland und Europa. Die Haltung der Sozialdemokratie zum Verhältnis von Deutschland-Politik und Westintegration 1945-1957*, Europa Union Verlag, Bonn, 1972 and by W.E. PATERSON, *The SPD and European Integration*, Westmead-Farnborough-Hants, Saxon House, 1974. For the phase following the treaties of Rome: J. BELLERS, *Reformpolitik und EWG-Strategie der SPD. Die innen- und außenpolitischen Faktoren der europapolitischen Integrationspolitik einer Oppositionspartei (1957-63)*, München, Tuduv, 1979 and R. MARKOWITZ, *Option für Paris? Unionsparteien, SPD und Charles De Gaulle 1959 bis 1969*, Studien zur Zeitgeschichte, Oldenbourg, München, 1996. For an analysis of the relationship between the SPD and Europe in a comparative perspective, see: K. FEATHERSTONE, *Socialist Parties and European Integration. A comparative history*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1988, pp.141- 169; A. AGOSTI, *Le radici e gli sviluppi dell' europeismo. Sinistra italiana e tedesca a confronto*, in: G.E. RUSCONI, H. WOLLER (ed.), *Italia e Germania 1945-2000. La costruzione dell' Europa*, il Mulino, Bologna, 2005, pp.295-321; D. ROGOSCH, *Vorstellungen von Europa: Europabilder in der SPD und bei den belgischen Sozialisten 1945-1957*, Hamburg, 1996.
3. See also the contribution by A.L. LEUGERS-SCHERZBERG, *Von den Stalin-Noten bis zum Deutschlandplan: Die deutsche Sozialdemokratie und der Neutralismus in den 1950 er Jahren*, in: D. GEPPERT, U. WENGST (ed.), *Neutralität-Chance oder Chimäre? Konzepte des dritten Weges für Deutschland und die Welt 1945-1990*, Oldenbourg, München, 2005, pp.45-58.

The effects of the treaties of Paris and subsequent developments taking place in the international scenario resulted much more disrupting for the social-democrats' European policy. In particular, with the Federal Republic becoming a member of NATO, the issue of defence was separated from European integration, so that, from that time onward, the backing by the SPD of a project for a united Europe based on economic integration, became certainly easier or, better still, less compromising for its national-neutralist wings. The close resolution of the Saar question, after the defeat of the referendum of October 1955 in favour of the Europeanization of the territory, removed a second important aspect which until then had made it difficult for the SPD to support the integration process.<sup>4</sup>

Several internal factors also contributed to the shift in the SPD's European policy, such as the pressure of trades unions, which, already in 1950 had decided to back the Schuman Plan, and in particular the growing influence within the party of Willi Birkelbach, Fritz Erler, Karl Mommer and Herbert Wehner.<sup>5</sup> Thanks to the experience developed within the ECSC Common assembly and the Consultative assembly of the Council of Europe, these politicians had acquired relevant negotiating skills and – what is more important – a wider awareness of how much the association between economic welfare and European integration was widespread in the public opinion of the six founding countries. In the Federal Republic the younger generations seemed increasingly attracted by the European idea, also in view of the opportunity it provided to distance themselves from the Germans of the Nazi period.

In this perspective, the SPD joining the integration project around the mid 1950's may be read also as a process of internal maturation, in close connection with the phenomenon of de-ideologization and modernization of the party, leading to the turning point of Bad Godesberg in 1959. However, even scholars who have pointed at the gradualness of the change taking place, linked to the disappearance from the political scene of Kurt Schumacher, agree in recognizing the importance of the year 1955.<sup>6</sup> This year, in fact, the *revirement* in the SPD's European policy seemed to come to its full definition, by taking for the first time the form of specific decisions. Firstly, in June-July 1955 the SPD expressed its position in favour of the Messina resolution, by which the 6 ECSC member states assigned a preparatory commission the task to study the possibility of implementing the two presented projects:

«the creation of a joint organization for the peaceful development of atomic energy and [...] the creation of a common market to be implemented on stages, via the pro-

4. On the solution for the Saar problem, see: B. THOß, *Die Lösung der Saarfrage 1954/1955*, in: *Vierteljahresshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 47(1999), pp.57-86.

5. The latter, in particular, according to Paterson's reconstruction, played a «crucial role» in fostering a change of direction in the European policy, also in views of his ties with Jean Monnet. W.E PATTERSON, *op.cit.*, p.118.

6. *Ibid.*, p.115. See also K. FEATHERSTONE, *op.cit.*, p.150, A. AGOSTI, *Le radici e gli sviluppi dell'europeismo. Sinistra italiana e tedesca a confronto*, in: G.E. RUSCONI, H. WOLLER (ed.), *op.cit.*, p.308.

gressive reduction of quantitative limitations and the unification of customs regimes».<sup>7</sup>

Secondly, in the following October, several important party members, like president Erich Ollenhauer and Herbert Wehner, joined the Action Committee established by Jean Monnet in order to put pressure on the governments of the Six so that the Messina conference would become an «effective step towards the United States of Europe».<sup>8</sup> A few historians, like Hanns Jürgen Küsters, recognized in Monnet's initiative the pivotal factor for the SPD's shift towards the idea of Europe:

«Now it was Monnet's initiative for the Action Committee which caused the change of the Social Democrats' attitude towards European Integration».<sup>9</sup>

## 2. SPD, *Bundesregierung* and «Europe's revival», 1955-1957: different perspectives, shared goals

The great relevance assigned to events in 1955 ended by influencing on the one hand also the analysis of the SPD's European policy in the following months. In particular the assertiveness of some scholars, starting from William Paterson, in pointing at the turning point of 1955 as the time from which the process of European integration stopped to represent an arena for political division between the main party in government, CDU-CSU, and the social-democratic opposition, should be remarked: «In the following years, the SPD's policy on European affairs became virtually indistinguishable from that of the CDU/CSU».<sup>10</sup>

Now-available documents on German European policy in the phase of the «European revival» show, however, a much more complex context than it may be expected.

Since the first favourable statement backing the projects presented during the conference of Messina, several authoritative party representatives, such as Wehner and Mommer, clearly stated that for SPD the creation of a pool for the peaceful exploitation of atomic energy should have the priority over the project of the Common Market.<sup>11</sup> In this perspective, also the subsequent decision of Ollenhauer

7. The text of the Messina resolution is mentioned in: P. GERBET, *La naissance du marché commun*, Ed. Complexe, Bruxelles, 1987, pp.165-168.

8. Political and Economic Planning, *Statements of the Action Committee for a United States of Europe*, Allen & Unwin, London, 1969, p.11.

9. Cf. H.J. KÜSTERS, *The Federal Republic of Germany and the EEC-Treaty*, in: E. SERRA (ed.), *Il rilancio dell'Europa e I trattati di Roma. Actes du colloque de Rome 25-28 Mars*, Bruylant, Giuffré, L.G.D.J, Nomos, Bruxelles, Milano, Paris, Baden-Baden, 1987, p.505.

10. W.E PATERSON, op.cit., pp.X f.

11. Cf. H. WEHNER (24 June 1955), in: *Proceedings of the ECSC Common Assembly*, pp.609-611; H. WEHNER (8 July 1955), *Verhandlungen des Deutschen Bundestags*, pp.5415-5418; K. MOMMER (7 July 1955), in: *Proceedings of the Council of Europe Consultative assembly*, pp.112-116. Mommer again reconfirmed the priority action on favour of Euratom in an article published by *Vorwärts*, 10.02.1956.

and Wehner to join the Action Committee seems a logical and consistent consequence, not least because the Committee's founder, Jean Monnet, fully shared the priority option.<sup>12</sup> In order to understand the thorough commitment by which the SPD prepared to support the Euratom plan right from the start of the negotiations, we should consider the relevance of prospects associated by the social-democrats to the implementation of the project: responding to modernization challenges in the atomic era; neutralizing the danger that one day Europe and Germany might come to hold weapons of mass destruction; and finally making the socialist option prevail in this important and strategic production sector.<sup>13</sup> To this end, the speech by Ollenhauer of 18 October 1956 seems particularly relevant, by which the party president explained in the plenary session the main reasons why he had decided, together with Wehner, to join the Monnet Committee:

«You know that at the time we decided to join the so-called Monnet Committee, as it established a series of principles concerning the exploitation of atomic energy for peaceful uses, and the need to assure an effective control. We thought that this was the right thing to do [...], as there was the opportunity to secure public property and public control of raw materials and finished products in a sector where no consolidated ownership interests yet existed».<sup>14</sup>

At first, also the Christian-Democratic chancellor Adenauer seemed to share the priority option in favour of Euratom, when the delegation sent to the conference of Messina were given the task to support only what France was willing to accept. This means – as clearly emerged from a note by the Foreign ministry: «Consider the issue of atomic energy as the most important item on the agenda».<sup>15</sup>

However, the reasons behind Adenauer's decision to adopt this cautious stand resides outside the scope of the integrationist preferences of the government and the majority party: at the time the chancellor believed in fact that the right time had not yet come to promote a new and wider initiative in Europe, particularly in view of the weak position held at the time by the forces favouring integration in the French IV Republic.<sup>16</sup> On the other hand, later negotiation rounds clearly showed how for the German government and the so-called sector experts (*Experten*) the Common Market was the priority project, while Euratom was the most problematic. In particular, especially after Adenauer himself had Franz Josef

12. The priority option clearly emerges also in the two final resolutions of the 2 meetings of the Committee, taking place in January and September 1956, respectively. Cf. Political and Economic Planning, *Statements of the Action Committee for a United States of Europe*, op.cit., p.11 and pp.16-18.
13. The aspirations are explained also in an article by the social-democratic MP, Kreyszig, published in *Vorwärts*. G. KREYSSIG, *Sozialistische Forderungen zu Euratom*, in: *Vorwärts*, 18.05.1956.
14. E. OLLENHAUER, speech of 18 October 1956, made during the joint meeting of the party's executive Committee, the party branch and the control Commission. AdsD, *PV Protokolle 1956*.
15. PA AA Berlin, 900, Bl. A9010, *Ermächtigung Adenauers für Messina*, 26.05.1955. Document quoted by M.L.L. SEGERS, *Zwischen Pax Americana und Pakt Atomica. Das deutsch-amerikanische Verhältnis während der EURATOM-Verhandlungen 1955-1957*, in: *Vierteljahreshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, 3(2006), pp.432-458 (438).
16. Cf. H.J. KÜSTERS, *Adenauers Europapolitik in der Gründungsphase der europäischen Wirtschaftsgemeinschaft*, in: *Vierteljahreshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, 31(1983), pp.646-673, here, p.650.

Strauss indicated for the post of minister for Atomic energy issues in October 1955, the German government moved to strongly critical positions on the Euratom dossier, despite more conciliatory positions by the ministry of Foreign affairs and pressures from the United States.<sup>17</sup>

For our analysis, it is noteworthy to stress how the main controversial point, on which minister Strauss and other influential cabinet members remained adamant throughout negotiations, referred to France's demand that the future Atomic Energy Community should be assigned an exclusive right of ownership and procurement of fissionable materials; an aspect of the project which – as we have seen – was instead quite appreciated by the SPD. And more precisely, contrary to the social-democrats, during the negotiations, the German government did not hint at a possible sacrifice of private interests of the German nuclear industry, and the more so if this was deemed necessary in view of the surreptitious financing of France's military nuclear programme.<sup>18</sup>

Here we have come to the second question which saw the party in government and the social-democratic opposition supporting totally opposite positions during negotiations. While the SPD continued to consider essential the principle according to which the exploitation of nuclear energy should be limited to civilian use,<sup>19</sup> the German government, at least from the intergovernmental conference of Paris of February 1956, no longer harboured any illusion of banishing the military use of uranium within Euratom.<sup>20</sup> Also, in close correlation with later developments on the international arena, such as the announcement of the Radford plan in July 1956 and the position taken by the United States during the Suez canal crisis, chancellor Adenauer started to increasingly consider – despite the never-assuaged perplexities of minister Strauss – the Euratom project more of an opportunity enabling the Federal Republic to «produce their own nuclear weapons as soon as possible».<sup>21</sup> This seems also to explain Adenauer's decision to participate directly in the negotiations in order to find a compromise solution concerning the definition of exclusive rights of properties and procurement of fissionable material, as well as his willingness to let himself be involved by the French government in a programme envisaging the first French nuclear test within the next 5 years. This position was later to lead to the signing of the tripartite agreement between Germany, France and Italy for atomic bomb development. When the military cooperation agreement was made public on 21<sup>st</sup> January 1958, in Germany a wide extra-parliamentary campaign was started «against atomic death» (*Kampf dem Atomtod*), which the SPD decided to take part in, a further confirmation of the

17. M.L.L. SEGERS, op.cit., pp.439 f.

18. Ibid.

19. E. OLLENHAUER, speech of 18 October 1956, op.cit.; H. WEHNER, *Europa mit Vorbehalt*, in: *SPD-Pressedienst*, 10.01.1957.

20. Minutes of the cabinet session of 15.02.1956, published in U. HÜLLBÜSCH (ed.), *Die Kabinettsprotokolle der Bundesregierung*, vol.9, München 1998, pp.194-202, here, p.202.

21. Minutes of the cabinet meeting of 05.10.1956, in: *ibid.*, pp.618-631, here, p.626.

chasm existing between the position of the party in government and the main opposition party.

In reality, also the social-democrats drew from the Suez crisis the understanding of the urgency to establish as soon as possible the Community for Atomic Energy, but moving from positions and strategic perspectives quite different from the chancellor's. While Adenauer measured the negative outcome of the diplomatic mission of France and Great Britain in the light of the price that Europe was ultimately to pay, were it not to strengthen itself at political-military level,<sup>22</sup> for Ollenhauer the Suez crisis pointed instead to the urgency of solving the problem of oil dependence and, at the same time, the need to promote détente on the international arena.<sup>23</sup> This diversity of view helps us also to explain the reason why the SPD, despite many objections, especially touching on the clauses enabling individual member states to use atomic energy for military purposes,<sup>24</sup> decided to accept the final proposition.

As regards the dossier on the Common Market, the discourse is undoubtedly more complex, also because within the individual parties very different, if not contrasting, positions could be found side by side. This is certainly true for the government forces, which, starting from spring 1955 developed within their midst a wide-ranging debate on integration forms and methods, with the backers of a free trade area enlarged to OEEC countries on the one hand, and people like Walter Hallstein and Hans von der Groeben, who believed that the Common Market had to be anchored to an institutional structure following the ECSC's, on the other hand.<sup>25</sup>

For the SPD, instead, institutional issues, which had nonetheless some weight in the debate over Euratom, had only a secondary importance in the debate over the ECM. Within a widespread consensus on the perspectives of growth and social welfare that the project of an economic integration, no longer sector-based but rather horizontal, seemed to embody, the SPD's internal debate developed mainly around the long-drawn national issue: whether and to what extent the merging of

22. At this regard, what Adenauer said during the meeting of 6<sup>th</sup> November with the French Prime minister Guy Mollet is particularly relevant: «En ce moment, les pays européens doivent s'unir. Il ne s'agit pas de supranationalité. Mais nous devons nous unir contre l'Amérique et, après les élections, demander aux Américains ce qu'ils veulent. C'est l'Amérique qui est responsable de la crise de Suez. Les Etats-Unis sont si mal informés sur la situation en Europe et sur la politique européenne, c'est à en pleurer», in: *Documents Diplomatiques Françaises* [DDF], 1956, vol.II, doc.138, pp.231-238, quoted by L. NUTI, *La sfida nucleare. La politica estera italiana e le armi atomiche 1945-1991*, il Mulino, Bologna, 2007, p.124. See also Adenauer's speech in Amsterdam on 23<sup>rd</sup> November 1956 for the *Europäische Kulturstiftung*: "Die Selbstbehauptung Europas. Grundsätzliche Ausführungen zur europäischen Einigungspolitik, vor allem zur Zusammengehörigkeit von Ost- und Westeuropa", in: K. ADENAUER, *Reden 1917-1967*, Böhlau, Köln, 1998, pp.373-380.

23. E. OLLENHAUER, speech of 18<sup>th</sup> October 1956, op.cit.

24. *Verhandlungen des Deutschen Bundestages*, second legislature, session of 9<sup>th</sup> May 1957, p.12022.

25. On the topic, see H.J. KÜSTERS, *Der Streit um Kompetenzen und Konzeptionen deutscher Europapolitik*, in: L. HERBST, W. BÜHRER, H. SOWADE (ed.), *Vom Marshallplan zur EWG. Die Eingliederung der Bundesrepublik Deutschland in die westliche Welt*, Oldenbourg, München, 1990, pp.335-370.

Western European economies would contribute to further deepen the division of the country. As clearly emerging from the minutes of the meeting of the SPD's executive Committee, at the time not all the party members were convinced that a Europe free from political-military aspects did not represent a hurdle in view of a reunification of Germany. Thus, for example, the vice-president of the party and parliamentary group, Wilhelm Mellies, recalled during the meeting of 7<sup>th</sup> March 1957 that:

«the economy of the Federal Republic will increasingly intermingle with the Western camp. Vice versa, the DDR is increasingly integrated with Eastern economy. This will make unification much more difficult. Further difficulty will be engendered by customs tariffs».<sup>26</sup>

The shared interest in kindling the hope for unification led the German government to ask for, and receive – in the closing phase of negotiations – an important formal commitment of the Six to not recognize as definite the division of Germany. Firstly, it was established that the single external tariff was not to be applied to trade relations between the Federal Republic and the Democratic Republic. Secondly, in an additional protocol of 28<sup>th</sup> February 1957, which had been promoted on the initiative of Carl Friedrich Ophüls, the five *partners* accepted to add a clause for the review of treaties in case of a future German unification.<sup>27</sup> These measures were not deemed enough by the liberals and the party of the «expelled and exiled», who ended by voting against the ratification of the treaties. However, also CDU-CSU and SPD continued to back their clearly diverging strategic perspectives: while Adenauer's party perceived the process of European integration as a *containment* tool, precisely, as a resource to counter the activism of Nikita Khrushchev's leadership, also following the constantly increasing calls for *détente*,<sup>28</sup> Ollenhauer's SPD, instead, never stopped stressing the *détente* potential of economic integration. Particularly relevant is Ollenhauer's statement reported by the newspaper *Die Welt*:

«on the long run the true political progress of the Common Market will depend on the Federal Republic's readiness to develop relations with countries from the Eastern bloc».<sup>29</sup>

The diverging perspective between the two sides is also mirrored in the perplexities stated by both parties, during the parliamentary debate of 21<sup>st</sup> March 1957, concerning the failed participation of Great Britain, the definition of an external tariffs which were deemed too high, and assistance measures for overseas

26. W. MELLIES, session of the SPD's executive Committee of 7<sup>th</sup> March 1957, AdsD, *PV Protokolle*.

27. The protocol was referred to by Hallstein at the *Bundestag* four days before the signing of the treaties. W. HALLSTEIN, *Erklärung der Bundesregierung vor Unterzeichnung*, Bonn, 21.03.1957, in: G. RINSCHKE (dir.), *Frei und Geeint. Europa in der Politik der Unionsparteien. Darstellungen und Dokumente*, Köln, Weimar, Wien, 1997, pp.133-143 (139).

28. Also, W. LOTH, *Adenauer's Western Choice, 1955-1958*, in: W. LOTH (ed.), *Europe Cold War and Coexistence, 1953-1965*, Frank Cass Publishers, London, 2004, pp.7-22.

29. E. OLLENHAUER, in: *Die Welt*, 05.05.1957.

territories.<sup>30</sup> In particular, while the Erhard-like liberalists continued to consider Great Britain as the natural meeting point between the Atlantic and the continental-European perspective within the framework of a single free trade zone enlarged to OEEC and GATT countries, the majority of social-democrats lamented the absence of the United Kingdom, as well as Scandinavian countries', for their presumed higher affinity and reliability at ideological level. At the time of voting, Great Britain's absence represented in particular for some SPD members a sufficient reason to oppose the ratification of the Rome treaties. Let us recall here the names of Helmut Schmidt, Helmut Kalbitzer and Fritz Baade; and not by chance the three political personalities were coming from areas geographically and culturally closer to Nordic countries.<sup>31</sup> As regards instead objections concerning the single external tariff, several majority members supported the interests of big industrial concerns, which feared that the customs union could turn into a sort of protection to the detriment of trade relations with third countries, whereas the social-democrats, supported by trade unions, voiced the fear that protectionist measures could entail negative effects on social and employment policies, as well as on the trade relations with Eastern Europe. Finally, with respect to the association policy of overseas countries envisaged by the treaties, the German social-democracy stated a strong concern for a possible neo-colonialist drift, which instead we do not find in the declarations of the majority party. The initial proposal of presenting a common resolution at the time of ratification, came probably to nothing also due to the different ways by which CDU and SPD perceived or, at least, declared to perceive, the diverse aspects of the treaty.

### 3. The vote of 5<sup>th</sup> July 1957: an expected, but not forgone vote

A more attentive analysis of the debate which developed inside the SPD executive Committee in the last months before ratification leads us to move away from essentially deterministic interpretations, which consider the voting stand in July 1957 an already inescapable conclusion, after the decision of October 1955. Please refer also to Paterson's position:

«[...] with the entry of the SPD into the Monnet Action in October 1955, any prospect of real opposition to European Institutions was over».<sup>32</sup>

What seems instead significant is the fact that Wehner himself, one of the protagonists of the 1955 turning point, even in May 1957 was still proposing abstention at the time of ratification in view of the already outlined controversial

---

30. *Verhandlungen des Deutschen Bundestags. Stenographische Berichte*, second legislature, session of 21<sup>st</sup> March 1957, pp.11332-11340.

31. Cf. W. LOTH, *Deutsche Europa-Konzeptionen in der Gründungsphase der EWG*, in: E. SERRA (ed.), op.cit., pp.585-602, here, p.598.

32. Cf. W.E. PATERSON, op.cit., p.125. Similarly, the scholar Kevin Featherstone «[...] the SPD had entered Monnet's Action Committee in October 1955, and this in itself represented the end of the earlier opposition strategy. Cf. K. FEATHERSTONE, op.cit., p.150.

issues.<sup>33</sup> This voting option would not however jeopardize the treaty ratification; however, considering that the SPD was not discounting the possibility of abstaining, the persistence of a strong uncertainty within the party was thus shown. An uncertainty which found its explicit expression also in the speech of the social-democratic member of parliament, Ludwig Metzger, at the time of the vote:

«the SPD's indecision springs from the fact that positive and negative aspects of the treaty are mixed together, to the point that it is difficult for me to cast a clear-cut yes».<sup>34</sup>

Officially the decision to vote in favour of the ratification of the Rome treaties was formalized within the executive committee only 10 days before the vote, on 24<sup>th</sup> June 1957, with a vote declaration not bound by the president's directive. The outcome of the internal voting confirmed, however, the presence of a rather substantial minority: of the 16 members, 10 voted in favour, while 6 abstained. Then a voting internal to the parliamentary group took place with the majority supporting the vote in favour of ratification, but with 13 abstentions. Finally, on 5<sup>th</sup> July 1957, a minority of 17 MP's, including the already-mentioned Helmut Schmidt, Helmut Kalbitzer and Fritz Baade, ended in any case by voting against the treaty ratification.<sup>35</sup> Nothing to do, however, with the compact front shown in the previous period by the social-democrats in their almost unanimous opposition against the ECSC treaty and later the failed EDC.<sup>36</sup>

The now-accessible documents also clearly show how the voting behaviour of the social-democratic executive members was strongly influenced by several factors which in 1955 were not present. In particular, the political election set for the following month of September certainly played an important role. To this end, Fritz Erler's statement of 30<sup>th</sup> May 1957 appears quite significant:

«We must keep on stating our criticism, also in the case of us voting in favour. However, we cannot afford that in the election the SPD is accused of voting "no" once again, or of not knowing what to do. Abstention is almost a "yes". This is why we must say a clear "yes".<sup>37</sup>

Ollenhauer himself, a week later, lamented that the treaty ratification would precede the political election of September 1957,<sup>38</sup> while Adenauer has expressively requested European partners a date before the German election day.<sup>39</sup>

33. The proposal was put forward by Herbert Wehner during the session of the party's executive committee on 30.05.1957. AdsD, *PV Protokolle 1957*.
34. L. METZGER, *Verhandlungen des Deutschen Bundestags*, Second legislature, vol.38, session of 5<sup>th</sup> July 1957, p.13345.
35. Cf. W. LOTH, *Deutsche Europa-Konzeptionen ...*, in: E. SERRA (ed.), op.cit., p.598.
36. According to figures reported by Haas, of 131 social-democratic MP's elected in the *Bundestag*, 123 voted against the ratification of the ECSC, and 128 against the EDC. In either voting, no SPD MP's voted in favour. Cf. E.B. HAAS, *The Uniting of Europe*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1968, p.156.
37. Thus Fritz Erler, during the meeting of the party's executive Committee of 30 May 1957. *AdsD Protokolle 1957*.
38. E. OLLENHAUER, in: *SPD-Pressedienst*, 07.06.1957.
39. M-T. BITSCH, *Histoire de la construction européenne de 1945 à nos jours*, Ed. Complexe, Bruxelles, 1996, p.122.

The two perspectives mirrored the same strategic consideration, namely that of two parties vying for power in the election, the governing one would certainly benefit more in terms of consensus from the new integrationist phase. This also explains the reason why the social-democratic leaders, despite the growing awareness of the popularity of the integration process in public opinion and the impossibility to “vote no again”, decided to downplay themes of European policy during the election campaign.

Besides the contextual motivation, we should also recognize that for the majority of social-democrats approving the text of the EEC treaty as a framework agreement was easier, or better still, less compromising, considering that a lot was depending on the political battle around the implementation of the Common Market. Thus, for example, for Zinn the EEC treaty was like a «offspring needing care and assistance in order to be successful in life»,<sup>40</sup> while for Mommer it represented only «the beginning, a base for later developments».<sup>41</sup>

## Conclusions

With the shift observed in the SPD's European policy around the mid 1950's on the background of the vote in favour of the ratification of the 1957 Rome treaties cannot surely be considered an accident in history. The social-democrats themselves were the first to claim – in their vote declaration on 5<sup>th</sup> July – a certain degree of continuity and consistency with the policy expressed in the previous period:

«European cooperation and the bypassing of political and economic nationalism are fundamental principles for the SPD. However, previously the SPD has always considered the possible consequences for our divided country of the proposed integrationist measures for the integration of the Federal Republic with our Western neighbours. A military and politico-constitutional integration makes reunification more difficult. The SPD considers economic, social and cultural sectors as the most promising ground for the success of European policies».<sup>42</sup>

These motivations mirror, however, only a partial truth. Perplexities, and in particular criticism raised by several authoritative SPD members, during the closing debate, were neither few nor little relevant. The voting behaviour of social-democrats also showed the convergence of motivations lying outside the specificity of the contents of the Rome treaties. Undoubtedly, the constitutive nature of the EEC treaty, namely its being a «framework treaty», where implementation timeframe and regulatory contents were not detailed, facilitated the

40. G. ZINN, *Verhandlungen des Deutschen Bundesrates, Sitzungsberichte*, second legislature, session of 3<sup>rd</sup> May 1957, p.618

41. K.MOMMER, *Verhandlungen des deutschen Bundestags*, second legislature, session of 5<sup>th</sup> July 1957, p.13321.

42. Voting declaration of 5<sup>th</sup> July 1957, published in: *SPD Jahrbuch 1956/1957*, pp.15 f.

final decision for social-democrats (and probably not only for them). This last remark may help us to explain how it was possible that CDU/CSU and SPD, although moving from diverging assumptions and totally opposed strategic prospects, came to share the same objectives.

Finally, for the SPD the treaties of Rome represented an acceptable compromise not only because, as Mommer said in 1963, they did not contain «any trace of a crushing victory of the majority»,<sup>43</sup> but also because they offered the party a big opportunity to counter the charge of being anti-European, without forcing it to openly challenge the guidelines of its foreign policy and its *Deutschlandpolitik*. Thus, detecting an anticipation of the shift in foreign policies, which was to be outlined by the well-known speech of Herbert Wehner in June 1960 on the primacy of the Western choice, would be an evident overstretched interpretation. At the same time, however, undoubtedly, with the choice to vote in favour of the ratification of the treaties of Rome, the SPD took a first important step to become, in the eyes of the German constituency, a possible and legitimate alternative candidate for government. As is well known, the SPD was to start reaping benefits, in terms of consensus-building, from its progressive transformation into an ideologically-moderate party only after the «Bad Godesberg» turning point of 1959.

Another totally different matter would be whether the social-democratic leaders, by bending – in some cases quite openly – the interpretation of the meaning of the Rome treaties, had not contributed to disseminate that specific ideological approach to European themes, consisting in considering in a positive way the development of Community institutes independently from their specific contents.

---

43. K. MOMMER, *Europa als Ziel und Wirklichkeit*, in: *Neue Gesellschaft*, 3(May/June 1963), p.192.