

# Narratives of European Integration in Times of Crisis: Images of Europe in the 1970s

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A narrative is a “description of events in a story” or “an account of something that has happened”.<sup>1</sup> Scholars studying narratives aim to grasp how human beings mentally organize events, sequences of facts or a perceived reality in order to make sense of them. Narratives are about establishing and building a causal explanation between facts, allowing us to simplify situations which might be difficult to apprehend. In turn, those narratives, which can be individual or collective, reveal themselves (consciously or not) to be helpful to “interpret and understand the political realities around us”.<sup>2</sup> In that sense, narratives are quickly prone to bias, and in some (politically-oriented) cases, to putting forward the narrator’s opinion. Narratives are of great interest for the historian: even though the narrator sincerely believes a fair account of past events is being given, the way in which facts, intentions, perceptions and causality are organized reveals a particular vision of the world and often a will to shape the present.

Narratives display the underlying visions of the world carried by societal actors at a given time. They can be built with regards to different temporalities, either by actors in motion narrating the world in which they live in and act, or by people reconstructing a narrative a posteriori, long after the events they describe. This paper focuses on the first category. By investigating the perceptions of active agents of European integration in their present, its aim is to look at the narratives they bear on its past, present and future. More precisely, perceptions of European integration carried by political and socio-economic elites from the Member States in the middle of the 1970s will be considered here, as they were voiced on the occasion of the Tindemans Report on the European Union (1975).<sup>3</sup>

1. Respectively *Longman dictionary of contemporary English*, Pearson Education, Harlow, 2009, p.1158 and *Macmillan English dictionary for advanced learners*, Macmillan, Oxford, 2007<sup>(2)</sup>, p.993.
2. M. Patterson, K. MONROE, *Narrative in political science*, in: *Annual Review of political science*, 1(1998), pp.315-316; S. SHENHAV, *Political narratives and political reality*, in: *International political science review*, 3(2006), pp.245-247.
3. On the Tindemans report, see, besides the classic handbooks on European integration: B. HALLING, *Der Tindemansbericht. Entstehung – Inhalt – Bedeutung*, Magisterarbeit, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, 1996; H. SCHNEIDER, W. WESSELS (eds), *Auf dem Weg zur Europäischen Union? Diskussionsbeitr. zum Tindemans-Bericht*, Europa Union Verlag, Bonn, 1977; P. de SCHOUTHEEDE, *Le rapport Tindemans: dix ans après*, in: *Politique étrangère*, 2(1986), pp.527-538; L. TINDEMANS, *De Memoires*, Lannoo, Tielt, 2002<sup>(2)</sup>, pp.307-323; L. TINDEMANS, *Dreams come true, gradually: The Tindemans Report a quarter of a century on*, in: M. WESTLAKE (ed.), *The European Union beyond Amsterdam*, Routledge, London/New York, 1998, pp.117-127; J. VANDAMME, *The Tindemans Report*, in: R. PRYCE (ed.), *The Dynamics of European Union*, Routledge, London, 1989, pp.149-160; S. VAN DE GAER, *Le rapport Tindemans: évolution et évaluation*, Master Thesis in European studies, Université catholique de Louvain-la-Neuve, 2011; J.-C. WILLAME, *Le rapport Tindemans sur l'Union Européenne*, CRISP, Brussels, 1977.

As its name indicates, this report was drawn up by Léo Tindemans (1922-2014), Prime Minister of Belgium (1974-1978) and first President of the European People's Party (1976), at the request of his fellow heads of state and government gathered in Paris in December 1974.<sup>4</sup> The Paris Summit of 9 and 10 December 1974 was dedicated to institutional questions and the relaunch of the EEC.<sup>5</sup> First and foremost, heads of state and government decided to institutionalize their meetings, which would from then on have to take place at least three times a year, therefore creating the so-called European Council.<sup>6</sup> They also agreed to finally implement the direct election of a European Parliament, already foreseen in the Rome Treaty, even though its power remained limited.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, Tindemans was asked to issue a comprehensive report on the idea of a European Union by the end of 1975, sketching the ways to evolve from an economic to a political union.<sup>8</sup> While the six Member States of the EEC already agreed in 1972 to transform "the whole complex of relations between the Member States" into a European union, the concept had remained vague and without any concrete effects.<sup>9</sup> In the final communiqué of the Paris Summit, the heads of state and government reassured their ambition to progress toward a more integrated Europe. They also recognized the necessity to agree on what the concept of a European Union should cover.<sup>10</sup> When Tindemans was asked to submit a report by the end of 1975, the suggestion was made that it should be based on two different sources:

- The various reports on the European Union issued (or to be issued) by the European institutions;
- the consultation of the national governments of the Member States and a "wide range of public opinion" in those countries.<sup>11</sup>

On this basis, Tindemans built his report in three different stages. He and his team first put together an inventory of the problems affecting the Community. In a second

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4. J. ELVERT, *Die europäische Integration*, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, Darmstadt, 2013, p.104.
5. G. BRUNN, *Die europäische Einigung*, Reclam, Stuttgart, 2009, pp.201-202.
6. *Final Communiqué of the Paris Summit (09 and 10 December 1974)*, point 3, in: *Bulletin of the European Communities*, 12(1974), available on [http://www.cvce.eu/content/publication/1999/1/1/2acd8532-b271-49ed-bf63-bd8131180d6b/publishable\\_en.pdf](http://www.cvce.eu/content/publication/1999/1/1/2acd8532-b271-49ed-bf63-bd8131180d6b/publishable_en.pdf). See, in this regard: E. MOURLON-DRUOL, *Filling the EEC leadership vacuum? The creation of the European Council in 1974*, in: *Cold War History*, 3(2010), pp.315-339.
7. J. ELVERT, op.cit., p.104.
8. L. TINDEMANS, *De memoires*, op.cit., p.307; *Final Communiqué ... (09 and 10 December 1974)*, op.cit., point 13.
9. *Statement from the Paris Summit (19 to 21 October 1972)*, point 16, in: *Bulletin of the European Communities*, 10(1972), available on [http://www.cvce.eu/content/publication/1999/1/1/b1d-d3d57-f31-4796-85c3-cfd2210d6901/publishable\\_en.pdf](http://www.cvce.eu/content/publication/1999/1/1/b1d-d3d57-f31-4796-85c3-cfd2210d6901/publishable_en.pdf).
10. *Final Communiqué ... (09 and 10 December 1974)*, op.cit.; L. TINDEMANS, *European Union*, in: *Bulletin of the European Communities*, 1976, supplement 1/76; J.-C. WILLAME, op.cit., p.5.
11. *Final Communiqué ... (09 and 10 December 1974)*, op.cit., point 13.

stage, Tindemans visited each capital;<sup>12</sup><sup>13</sup> submitted a questionnaire on the EU, and met with trade unionists, members of Parliament, Ministers, employers and youth movements. Tindemans claims to have met, in his “pilgrimage across Europe”, no less than 600 people over eight months (often through collective meetings).<sup>14</sup> In a third and final stage, he analysed the reports of the Commission, the European Parliament, the Court of Justice and the Economic and Social Committee. Tindemans and his collaborators then wrote the so-called Report on the European Union, submitted to the heads of state and government on 30 December 1975, and to the press on 7 January 1976.<sup>15</sup>

In the different Member States, Tindemans triggered a certain interest for the European Union, or at least forced the opinion leaders consulted to reflect on this question. Before each visit, he sent one of his collaborators on the ground to prepare the meetings. He also elaborated a document in which he raised around thirty questions relating to the European Union.<sup>16</sup> This paper, sent beforehand to the people and organizations he was going to meet, contained four main sets of questions:

- a) What is Europe and what has been achieved so far?
- b) What should be the content of a future European Union?
- c) How should institutions evolve?
- d) Which method should we follow to establish the European Union?

In addition, before starting a meeting, Tindemans always tried to structure the conversation around three main questions: “a) What do we want to do together? b) Are the institutions adapted to what we want to do together? c) What is the final goal of European integration”?<sup>17</sup>

Tindemans’ mission brought the idea of European Union to the forefront and provided an impetus for political and socio-economical elites in the Member States to form and voice an opinion in this regard. Tindemans also tried to frame his consultations to make people reflect about what had been done so far and what should be the essence of European integration. Moreover, he willingly consulted and listened to “opinions voiced [...] by members of [the] governments and other powerful forces” of the Nine, including trade unions, Chambers of Commerce, Youth Associations,

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12. The Tindemans Report was, above all and despite its name, a teamwork. Tindemans’ main collaborators were Jacques Vandamme, Philippe de Schoutheete, Etienne Davignon, Jozef Van der Meulen, Etienne Cerexhe, Prosper Thuysbaert, Jan Grauls and Félix Standaert. See S. VAN DE GAER, op.cit., pp.36-44; L. TINDEMANS, *De Memoires*, op.cit., pp.310-311.
13. Respectively in Dublin (11-12 April); Luxembourg (11-13 May); The Hague (2-3 June); London, Edinburgh and Cardiff (29 June- 2 July); Bonn (14-16 September); Paris (21-23 September); Rome (3-6 October); Copenhagen (26-28 October). *Neuvième Rapport général sur l'activité des Communautés européennes en 1975*, OPOCE, Luxembourg, 1976, p.12.
14. Later on, in his Memoirs, Tindemans estimates that he has met a thousand persons and 200 organizations. L. TINDEMANS, *De Memoires*, op. cit., p. 314.
15. E. GAZZO, *La difficile mission de M. Tindemans*, in: *Agence Europe*, 14-15.04.1975; J.-C. WILLAME, op.cit., pp.5-12.
16. Edited in J.-C. WILLAME, op.cit.
17. KADOC, Archief Léo Tindemans, n°599. *Rapport n°562*, 31.10.1975.

MPs, etc.<sup>18</sup> Tindemans' mission was also, in this perspective, a consultation of the European people and was seen as a contribution to the democratization of the European polity.<sup>19</sup> A lot of the documents received by Tindemans during his mission are kept in his archives (deposited at the Documentation and Research Centre on Religion Culture and Society, Leuven/Belgium). It gives us, on the whole and despite a few flaws (the main being the lack of homogeneity between the different kinds of source), a good overview on the content of the exchanges that Tindemans conducted in the nine Member States.<sup>20</sup>

On this ground, a historical study of the narratives of European integration at play in the 1970s can be conducted on a transnational basis. For this particular study, we are not interested in the Tindemans report, its content and posterity, itself. Rather, this paper is focused on the narratives on European integration voiced by all those people met by Tindemans, within the limits of what the archives permit. Three sections structure this analysis, corresponding to three identifiable narratives. The first is that European integration has been, first and foremost, an economic process. The second section depicts a Europe in crisis, as narrated by its contemporaries in 1975. Finally, we will question the role assigned to the European Parliament. Thus we will explore how European integration was narrated in 1975. This article does not have the ambition to describe what really happened nor to assess the historical validity of the narratives at play: this is not a history of European integration, but rather of its perception.<sup>21</sup>

## The economic nature of European Integration

One narrative is largely, if not unanimously, shared: European integration, as designed by the Treaty of Rome, was, first and foremost, an economic business and an economic process. In the 1950s, the Founding Fathers – the perception of whom was often, already at the time, “dominated by legends of great men”, elevated to the status of “European saints” – struggled to build a more integrated Europe.<sup>22</sup> After the failure of the European Defence Community, Monnet and others identified the economic

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18. L. TINDEMANS, *European Union*, op.cit., p.5.
19. S. VAN DE GAER, *Le rapport Tindemans: évolution et évaluation*, Master Thesis, Université catholique de Louvain-la-Neuve, 2011, p.21.
20. Not all countries are equally well documented. Tindemans has kept/received few written documents regarding France or Italy for instance. Moreover, the notes taken by his collaborators or the documents produced by the associations/people met by him do not all have the same interest and wealth. We do not, therefore, have exactly the same information, both from a qualitative and quantitative perspective, on each country. This article is based (and therefore limited by) on the archives kept by Tindemans, which are representative both in quality and quantity, even though they are far from being exhaustive.
21. See for instance S. SHENHAV, op.cit., p.258.
22. A.S. MILWARD, *The European rescue of the Nation-state*, Routledge, London/New York, 2000, p.318.

sector as the least difficult area to relaunch European integration. In addition, the establishment of a Customs Union and competition rules was then seen as a good opportunity to defuse Franco-German rivalry.<sup>23</sup>

As a consequence, the provisions contained in the Treaty of Rome were purposely designed to “ensure the dynamic development of the Community”, while the objective of creating an interior market was, from the start, “inherent to the Treaties”.<sup>24</sup> The institutional design was then thought to be at the service of an economic integration. The Commission’s role was (and, in fact, has been) to make sure that all Member States comply with the provisions of the Treaty of Rome and the realization of a Customs Union. In the immediate period that followed the Treaty of Rome, European integration was thus a passive integration, consisting of the removal of barriers impeding the realization of a Customs Union.

When looking back in time, most of Tindemans’ interlocutors seemed to be nostalgic about this first period of European integration. It was a time when Europe was a coherent and harmonious whole, especially on the economic and monetary level. Many, especially among employers even if not exclusively, insisted on the success of the first years of the EEC. The establishment of a Common Market was a success, and had borne fruits. European integration in those years was characterized by positive results, which, in turn, permitted the raising of purchasing power and welfare within the Member States.<sup>25</sup> By contrast, the assessment made by the same actors regarding the current state of European integration (cf. *infra*) probably explains this almost idyllic view of the first years of European integration. It also explains the sometimes hagiographic view of the Founding Fathers, whose names are linked with an (economically) successful Europe, miles away from the paralyzed Europe of 1975. This narrative would have a lasting impact on the people active in this period. In 1997, Pierre Pfimmlin wrote:

“Au début [of the European integration], tout a bien marché. Ce fut une grande période d’expansion, de 1945 à 1975, qu’on a appelé “les Trente glorieuses”. Depuis le Traité de Rome, [...] le revenu moyen des européens de l’Ouest a été multiplié par cinq”<sup>26</sup>

Finally, this narrative should be understood in the light of the economic situation. After the exceptional prosperity of the so-called “Trente glorieuses”, the 1970s witnessed a deep economic crisis, with, notably, a strong increase in the unemployment

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23. KADOC, Archief Jef Houthuys (Bewaargeving ACV), n°244, Réunion commune du Conseil central de l’économie et du Conseil national du travail, 29.12.1975, pp.18 and 23.
24. KADOC, Archief Léo Tindemans, n°601 and 596, Note on Fine Gael policy with regard to European Community, sd, pp.1-2; Note résumant les vues sur l’Union européenne exposées par une délégation du Parti chrétien-social luxembourgeois, 12.05.1975, pp.2-3.
25. KADOC, Archief Jef Houthuys (Bewaargeving ACV), n°244, Conseil central de l’économie/ Conseil national du travail, Note sur l’Union européenne, 05.12.1976, p.28; Note on Fine Gael policy ..., op.cit.; *[Position du gouvernement allemand]*, 3 November 1975, p. 1; KADOC, Archief Léo Tindemans, n°603 and 604, UNICE, Union Européenne – premier rapport, 10.07.1975, p.3.
26. Quoted in P. FOLLOWALD, *J’ai vu naître l’Europe. De Strasbourg à Bruxelles, le parcours d’un pionnier de la construction européenne*, La Nuée Bleue, Strasbourg, 2014, p.141.

rate. The crisis provoked a fundamental break with the previous situation and the advent of new macroeconomic frameworks.<sup>27</sup>

Except for some trade unions, which were more nuanced, the general tendency was to consider European integration in the 1960s to be a success. However, when it came to the present and future, criticism came to the fore. There was, first, a refusal to believe any longer in the so called “spillover effect” – even though this belief did not entirely disappear. In May 1950, the Schuman Declaration established a clear causality between the economic integration of the coal and steel industries and the later construction of a European federation:

“By pooling basic production and by instituting a new High Authority [...], this proposal will lead to the realization of the first concrete foundation of a European federation indispensable to the preservation of peace”.<sup>28</sup>

The Founding Fathers were thus thought to have sincerely believed in that mechanism, at a time when neo-functionalism theories were influential. However, in the 1970s, when more intergovernmentalist theories had been progressively emerging since the mid-1960s, for several actors it was no longer possible to imagine that a political integration would mechanically and automatically ensue from economic integration.<sup>29</sup> Secondly, some people – especially youth associations and trade unionists – criticized the fact that, so far, European integration had solely been a matter of economy. They pleaded, instead, for a more political Europe, which should be a “business of ideas” and a matter of political debate.<sup>30</sup>

Despite these criticisms, however, the belief in the economic nature of the integration process did not, on the whole, disappear. During his meetings, Tindemans asked his interlocutors to describe what, in their view, should be the purposes of European integration in 1975. Some evoked common values, the necessity to ensure

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27. I. CASSIERS, *Le contexte économique. De l'âge d'or à la longue crise*, in : E. BUSSIÈRE, M. DUMOULIN, S. SCHIRMANN (eds), *Milieux économiques et intégration européenne au XX<sup>e</sup> siècle. La crise des années 1970*, PIE-Peter Lang, Brussels, 2006, pp.13-32.
28. The Schuman Declaration – 9 May 1950 on: [http://europa.eu/about-eu/basic-information/symbols/europe-day/schuman-declaration/index\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/about-eu/basic-information/symbols/europe-day/schuman-declaration/index_en.htm).
29. In a recent article, Ben Rosamond explains how the academic field of EU studies has been organized a posteriori according to a framed, narrated and quasi-mythological opposition between neo-functionalism and intergovernmental theories in the 1960s and 1970s, while the latter were not so prominent in those days. We do not intend to discuss this hypothesis. However, one should note that such intergovernmental theories, even though they did not have the importance that we assume today, already existed and developed progressively from the 1960s onwards. Moreover, there exists, in documents from 1975, a clear questioning of initial neofunctionalist-like expectations of a mechanical transformation of an economic integration into a political one. B. ROSAMOND, *Field of dreams: the discursive construction of EU studies, intellectual dissidence and the practice of 'normal science'*, in: *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 1(2016), pp.19-36; W. VAN MEURS et al., *Europa in alle staten. Zestig jaar geschiedenis van de Europese integratie*, Vantilt, Nijmegen, 2013, pp.112-113.
30. IISSH, ETUC, n° 1553, Position du bureau national MOC-ACW concernant l'Union européenne, 19.09.1975, p.1.; KADOC, *Archief Léo Tindemans*, n° 596, Union Européenne. Consultations au Luxembourg les 12 et 13 mai 1975, s.d., p.4; Note remise à Tindemans, 12.05.1975, p.1.

peace and to neutralize the Franco-German hostility. But, in essence, European integration's main *raisons d'être* were considered to be economic and strategic, not romantic or ideological. The globalization of the economy and the growing interdependence between national economies made European integration inevitable. Acting as a (and within a) community should allow national Member States to solve problems and to take some actions that they would, otherwise, not be able to do on their own. Together, European countries could also compete with other superpowers, ensuring therefore the individual and collective "Selbstbehauptung".<sup>31</sup> As stated by the Irish Council of the European Movement:

"The most powerful reason for favouring integration is that it enables us to do as a community things that we cannot do for ourselves or for others at the level of the community [...] the benefits of the European Union derive from the ability actually to achieve things by joint-action".<sup>32</sup>

In the wake of the economic crisis of the 1970s, many argued that a future European Union, as the concrete expression of European integration, should mainly be focused on the fight against those problems made more acute by the crisis that Member States could not handle alone: unemployment, inflation, energy, etc. Those narratives strongly echo the thesis of Alan S. Milward that European integration was first and foremost a way for nation-states to survive.<sup>33</sup>

For some, this focus on the EEC (or a potential European Union) as a group of countries acting together to tackle important problems was politically motivated. In Denmark or in the UK, for instance, there was a strong preference to think of the EEC/European Union as an open community of countries joining together to tackle the major issues of the time, and focusing on this sole task. This was a clear way to define European integration as an economic project and not a political one and therefore to oppose those who called for a European federal state or for a European confederation.

In the narratives on European integration, the perception that this had so far been an economic process is predominant. Ironically, the economic and monetary crisis of the mid 1970s seemed to have put a stop to the model of integration that had been in place since 1958. The integration through the economy or the Customs Union is perceived to have been successful in bringing economic prosperity to the Member States. But the crisis revealed its inadequacy to cope successfully with the new challenges of the 1970s.

31. G. THIEMEYER, *Europäische Integration*, Böhlau Verlag, Köln et al., 2010, pp.112-145.

32. KADOC, Archief Léo Tindemans, n° 601, Submission by the Irish Council of the European movement, 12.04.1975, p.1.

33. A.S. MILWARD, op.cit., pp.427-428.

## The EEC in 1975: a world in crisis

Europe in 1975, and more specifically the EEC, appeared to its contemporaries as a world in crisis. All those people met by Léo Tindemans narrated the story of a Europe which found itself in the midst of a deep and total crisis, a Europe at the crossroad between integration and disintegration. Some, in the literature, depict the 1970s as a period of “Eurosclerosis”, regarding the (non) progress made towards European integration. Others insist on the existence of concrete breakthroughs in this decade, such as the activity of the European Court of Justice, the institutionalization of the European Council, the direct election of the EP, etc.<sup>34</sup> We do not aim to assess the reality (or not) of possible breakthroughs of the 1970s, but, instead, consider the different aspects of this crisis, as narrated in 1975.

### *A divided Europe*

If the testimonies of the people met by Tindemans are to be believed, the EEC was then a divided and non-homogeneous whole. The nine Member States conducted different economic and fiscal policies. Moreover, the oil, economic and monetary crisis had woken up old nationalist practices. Instead of acting together to cope with transnational challenges, each Member State tried its own recipe, leading to, when one takes a European perspective, confusion and divergence.

As a consequence, the Community was far from being homogeneous. Social, cultural and economic characteristics differed greatly from one country to another. In the eyes of the German Chancellor, Helmut Schmidt, those divergences within the Community were reinforced by the lack of fighting spirit from some countries to tackle the crisis. Schmidt denounced the “resignation” of some of its European partners, such as Italy or the United Kingdom, which had “lost all control over their economy, trade and currency”, and did not have the “political courage to manage their own business at the time of the peril”. In turn, this absence of action widened the gap among the countries of the EEC.<sup>35</sup> Besides those socio-economic differences, there was a lack of a common political vision on the EEC. The Nine were unable either to set a common goal for Europe or to agree on common policies. In short, the EEC appeared as divided, cruelly lacking in homogeneity.

The conclusions drawn from these differences, however, depended from country to country, reminding us the political and programmatic aspects of the narratives developed. According to the Danish trade union (Landsorganisationen i Danmark,

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34. R. GRIFFITHS, *A dismal Decade? European integration in the 1970s*, in: D. DINAN (ed), *Origins and evolutions of the European Union*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2006, pp.170-190; M. WAECHTER, *Eurosclerosis or Europeanisation? Introduction*, in: *L'Europe en formation*, 353-354(2009), pp.7-11.

35. KADOC, Archief Léo Tindemans, n° 603, Schmidt et l'économie mondiale, 13.06.1975, pp.4-5.

more commonly known under the acronym LO) or the Irish Fine Gael, for instance, the fundamental differences between Member States made it extremely difficult, and in fact not desirable, to transform Europe in a “full-fledged Federation” in a near future, or even to conduct a common monetary policy or to conclude European collective agreements for the social partners.<sup>36</sup> For others on the contrary, such as the UNICE or political leaders in Italy or Germany (probably for different reasons), this growing gap between Member States had to be filled in. It was precisely because of those divergences between countries that the Community had to act more voluntarily and more proactively in order to solve the problem. Narrations on the present state of European integration were thus not always innocent. They are also, in a second phase, helped to justify the necessity of future political evolutions. However, despite possible instrumentalization of those narratives for political reasons, it remains that the EEC was then perceived as being divided, lacking in coherence and without any leadership.

### ***The failure of institutions and political leadership***

The perception of the European institutions, and more especially of the Commission and the Council, was catastrophic, if not appalling. The system, based on a collaboration between those two institutions, was said not to be working efficiently anymore. European bureaucracy was deemed to be paralyzed. There existed, as a whole, this impression that the Community was a ship without a captain, without any authority to lead it. As Tindemans put it: “Die Gemeinschaft ist gegenwärtig ohne Führung”.<sup>37</sup>

During his consultation, Tindemans heard harsh assessments of the Commission’s work. The Commission was seen as a weak executive, with no clearly-defined power and no real autonomy, being heavily dependent on the national governments. It had lost all its agenda-setting power and was incapable of giving political impulsion in order to make progress in a particular field. Becoming progressively the secretariat of the Council, the Commission was, according to the words of the British Prime Minister, Harold Wilson, “the fifth wheel on the wagon”.<sup>38</sup> Even, Tindemans, “Mr. Europe”, considered that the Commission had lost its prestige, authority and influence.<sup>39</sup> If the weakness of the Commission was acknowledged by everyone, not all regretted this evolution. For James Callaghan, the British Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, the Commission should be more and more an “international secretariat”, at the service of the Council and “looking for guidance” from the Council. That is, a

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36. KADOC, Archief Léo Tindemans, n° 601, Comments of LO Denmark on the Tindemans Report on the European Union, s.d.; Note on Fine Gael policy ..., op.cit., p.1.
37. KADOC, Archief Léo Tindemans, n° 603, Vorbereitung Gespräch mit Bundeskanzler H. Schmidt, s.d., p.1.
38. Europese Unie. Consultaties Groot-Brittannie, op.cit., p.3.
39. Réunion commune du Conseil central de l’économie ..., op.cit., p.20.

civil service responsible for preparing several alternative solutions on a particular file, the Council then making the political decision.<sup>40</sup> The French president, Giscard, also argued for the reduction of the role of the Commission to a Secretariat, with little political power.<sup>41</sup>

The Council was not exempt from criticisms either. It was described as an institution which did not decide anymore, with more and more lengthy working methods which should be improved. Particularly paralyzed by its non-use of majority voting, the meetings of the Council were assimilated to “eindeloze marathonzittingen”.<sup>42</sup> The Secretariat of the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) also reproached the Council for taking two types of decisions: some serious and others imaginary (“pour la galerie”). The first were effectively applied on the ground (mostly concerning agriculture). The second were purely fictive, as they were indeed formally voted but “never taken seriously by the governments”.<sup>43</sup> This lack of credibility of the European institutions benefited the newly established European Council which was perceived as the real authority of the Community. Schmidt and Valéry Giscard d’Estaing even dreamed of a *directoire*, led by France and Germany, to run the Community.<sup>44</sup>

When speaking of the failures of the European institutions, one also has to keep in mind that the lack of political will from national political leaders to achieve European integration was very often pointed. Heads of state and government, particularly, were seen as incapable of taking the difficult but necessary decisions to improve the EEC’s working. This lack of political will was particularly pregnant regarding the poor application of the Treaty of Rome. According to the Irish Permanent Representative, there was “a crisis of the Treaty of Rome”.<sup>45</sup> He meant, and, in that, he is joined by many others in different countries, that the Treaty was not fully applied, which is

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40. Europese Unie. Consultaties Groot-Brittannie, op.cit., p.2. This tension, within supranational organizations, regarding the role of a strictly supranational and endogenous, actor *vis-à-vis* the institution gathering the Member States, is far from being original. Already in the League of Nations, debates emerged regarding the role of the Secretariat: should it just be a strict bureaucracy, or more of a “International ministry”. The following quotation is striking in this respect : “M. Hymans a exagéré lorsque, à la tribune de l’Assemblée [de la SdN] il a qualifié le secrétariat de ministère international. S’il y a un ministère international dans l’affaire, c’est le Conseil. Le secrétariat n’est et ne doit être qu’une bureaucratie. Il n’a pas d’initiative; il n’a aucune décision; toute l’autorité appartient au Conseil de l’Assemblée”. J. BARTHÉLÉMY, *Chronique de politique étrangère*, in: *Revue politique et parlementaire*, CXVI(1923), pp.135-136. We would like to thank Professor Michel Dumoulin for this quotation.
41. B. HALLING, *Der Tindemansbericht. Entstehung – Inhalt – Bedeutung*, Magisterarbeit, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, 1996, p.50.
42. KADOC, Archief Léo Tindemans, n° 597, Notulen van de buitengewone vergadering gehouden ter gelegenheid van het bezoek van de Belgische eerste Minister Tindemans, 08.07.1975, p.6.
43. Ibid, n° 611, Theo Rasschaert, Union Européenne: quelques considérations générales, 25.04.1975, p.3.
44. L. TINDEMANS, *De Memoires*, op.cit., pp.314-316. Later on, in 1976, Schmidt will advise Giscard to abandon his idea of directorate. W. LOTH, *Building Europe. A history of European unification*, Berlin, De Gruyter, 2015, p.222.
45. KADOC, Archief Léo Tindemans, n° 591, Consultations du Premier ministre avec les Représentants permanents auprès des Communautés européennes, 27.05.1975, p.5.

one of the reasons that can explain the crisis. As a consequence, there existed an overwhelming majority considering that the ratification of a new treaty was neither necessary nor urgent for the time being. There were, of course, huge differences between those who wanted, at some distant point in the future, a new treaty to progress towards a federal Europe, and those who preferred the status quo in terms of European integration. But almost all people met by Tindemans shared the belief that there was no need for a new treaty to be signed at that moment. Rather, important improvements could be achieved only by (better) using the whole potential and many possibilities offered by the Treaty of Rome. So far, of course, as the youngest political leaders of the Member States, the third generation since 1958, had ever read the Treaty of Rome and knew its provisions. At the end of the year 1975, Tindemans seriously doubted it.<sup>46</sup>

### *A technocratic Europe, far from its citizens*

One sentence often came to the forefront when considering the relationship between the Community and its citizens: a loss of enthusiasm. The fervour was gone. European integration was, to many citizens, an economic and technocratic process from which they feel completely disconnected. Others, especially among the less educated and the youth, were poorly informed and ignorant, at worst they were indifferent. There existed a need, therefore, to launch a broad information campaign, which would directly target the citizens. It would also fight the image of Europe as a steamroller destroying local specificities, as well as the tendency among national political leaders to scapegoat “Brussels’ institutions” all the time. Indeed, if “Man ist Europa müde” it is also because politicians spoke much of Europe “in their weekend talks” but did not act in this regard.<sup>47</sup>

Another of the main reasons explaining this indifference among the citizens was the technocratic nature of European integration. When confronted with the EEC, the European citizen often had to face the “tracasseries d’une bureaucratie envahissante”, which was then one of the most visible and tangible signs of “Europe”.<sup>48</sup> European civil servants, however, got a bad press and were even seen by industrials as a “caste de privilégiés”.<sup>49</sup> EEC institutions seemed far away from the citizens, and the institutional dynamics and workings of “Brussels” were difficult to understand, even for professional politicians. The technocratic nature of the European institutions was,

46. Réunion commune du Conseil central de l’économie ..., op.cit., p.19.

47. Ibid., p.18.

48. KADOC, Archief Léo Tindemans, n° 604, UNICE, Union Européenne – premier rapport, 10.07.1975, p.13.

49. KADOC, Archief Léo Tindemans, n° 596, Réponses communes de la Chambre de Commerce du Grand-Duché de Luxembourg, du Groupement des Industries Sidérurgiques luxembourgeoises et de la Fédération des Industriels luxembourgeois aux questions posées par son Excellence Monsieur le Premier ministre Tindemans, 13.05.1975, p.6.

moreover, reinforced by the perception of European integration as a strictly economic, rather than political, process. At this point, it is useful to quote, *in extenso*, a remark which illustrates perfectly this perception of Europe. This narrative of a technocratic Europe remoted from its citizens was relatively widespread and certainly not confined to actors on the left of the political spectrum:

“Sans doute, les problèmes à résoudre étaient complexes et la présence de techniciens était indispensable. Mais un technicien devient vite un technocrate, c'est-à-dire un homme qui, dans l'ombre, prend des décisions qui ne relèvent pas de sa compétence. C'est une espèce qui est devenue aujourd'hui redoutable. Et au Marché commun, elle s'est faite envahissante. Avec bien entendu un résultat inévitable: l'indifférence générale de l'opinion publique. Ce que le technocrate d'ailleurs apprécie par-dessus tout”.<sup>50</sup>

Even though this narrative was shared by all actors, the political conclusions derived from it diverged. Those divergences were clearly expressed by the Permanent Representatives of the Member States that Tindemans met on 27 May 1975 to discuss his report.<sup>51</sup> For the French Permanent Representative, for one, citizens were not interested in the setting of a broad, political, ideological and encompassing vision of the nature and goal of European integration, but rather in concrete deeds and particular policies. Therefore, in order to regain their trust, common actions, and not common policies, should be developed. In other words, “progress [should be] realized independently of the European institutions”.<sup>52</sup> A debate followed between the Italian and Danish Permanent Representatives. The former argued that a reform of the European Parliament would be the best way to interest public opinion on European affairs. The Danish answer was brutal: “one should not speak too much of the Parliament, but rather underline that governments should take their responsibilities”. As electors, citizens had voted for their national Parliament (which as a consequence influenced the composition of their government). As a natural consequence, it seemed logical that “if governments do something, electors will trust them and follow”.<sup>53</sup> Not all people and organizations met by Tindemans shared this conclusion. At the opposite end, the Luxembourgian trade union Confédération générale du travail, for instance, considered that a supranational political union was necessary for the workers to be interested in Europe.<sup>54</sup> The lesson to be learnt here is that despite a consensus (conscious or not) on a similar narrative, the way of instrumenting this narrative can vary considerably depending on the political goal behind.

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50. This comment is from J. Stassart, then Chairman of the Belgian Conseil central de l'économie. Réunion commune du Conseil central de l'économie ..., op.cit., p.3.

51. See the proceedings of this meeting in KADOC, Archief Léo Tindemans, n° 591.

52. Consultations du Premier ministre avec les représentants permanents ..., op.cit., p.3.

53. Ibid.

54. KADOC, Archief Léo Tindemans, n° 596, Union européenne. Consultation au Luxembourg les 12 et 13 mai 1975- résumé, s.d., p.2.

### Europe at the crossroad

Entangled in the midst of a multifaceted crisis, the EEC was at a turning point. For many, and especially here in pro-European integration circles, if nothing was done at this point, it would soon be too late. At the beginning, the Treaty of Rome was built by six states with a relatively homogeneous situation. The initial goal was to suppress the barriers impeding the constitution of a Customs Union. The achievement of this Customs Union, the enlargement and the economic crisis had changed the situation. In 1975, the time came, according to Emmanuel Gazzo, for an active integration, with the setup of common European policies.<sup>55</sup> This ‘qualitative jump’ (“saut qualitatif” in French, “spong naar voren” in Dutch)<sup>56</sup> had to happen then. If not, there was a risk that “the political Union of Europe will probably never be achieved”<sup>57</sup> There was, among many of the people interrogated by Tindemans, not really a sense of emergency but rather a perception that it was now time to act and to move on to a new chapter of European integration history. Europe was, in this perspective, in watershed. Or, to paraphrase Tindemans : “La ‘Maison européenne’ est à moitié construite. Il faut un plan pour l’achever”<sup>58</sup> This perception is not an originality of the 1970s, and rather seems to be a constant in European integration history. In 1950, Belgian students protested in the streets of Brussels, asking for a European political authority. They walked under the cry “s’unir ou périr”, a phrase which became, one year later, the title of a book by Paul Reynaud.<sup>59</sup> In 1953, the poet and diplomat Paul Claudel, speaking of the Franco-German reconciliation, considered a united Europe as “our last chance”<sup>60</sup> This narrative still exists today, and has been in a way reactivated by the economic and financial crisis. A few months ago, for instance, Pierre Moscovici, European Commissioner for Economic and Financial Affairs, stated: “we are the Commission of the last chance for Europe”<sup>61</sup> Paul Collowald, a former high-ranking European civil servant, concluded his memoirs under the title “Il n'est pas trop tard mais il est temps”<sup>62</sup>

Let's go back to 1975. This perception of Europe as being at the crossroads was essentially shared by those who wanted to go deeper into European integration. In other countries, such as Denmark, there was a wish for a more pro-active Europe to tackle the economic problems of the time. But this had to be limited to the creation of an efficient “open community of states”, with no “ambitious goal” defined be-

55. Ibid., n° 602, Note de E. Gazzo, Directeur Agence Europe, 10.07.1975, pp.2-3.

56. Ibid., n° 604, UNICE, Union Européenne – premier rapport, 10.07.1975, p.3; Notulen van de buitengewone vergadering ..., op.cit., p.4.

57. Union Européenne. Consultations au Luxembourg ..., op.cit., p.2.

58. Consultations du Premier ministre avec les représentants permanents ..., op.cit., p.5.

59. T. GALLER, “S’unir ou périr!”. *Fédéralistes en lutte pour une Communauté politique européenne (octobre 1950-août 1954)*, Master thesis in history, Université catholique de Louvain-la-Neuve, 2009, p.19.

60. P. COLLOWALD, op.cit., p.36.

61. Trends Tendance, 19.02.2015, p.24.

62. P. COLLOWALD, op.cit., p.123.

forehand.<sup>63</sup> And, in any cases, the narrative of Europe as a house to be built through an evolving process, within which it would be time to move from one step of this process to a new one, was definitively not shared unanimously.

## On the importance of the European Parliament

When considering the future evolution of the EEC, the direct election of the European Parliament was presented as a major factor of change. There was a relatively broad consensus on the idea that a democratic (and therefore elected) parliament is a key element of legitimacy in a political system. In the European case, considering the prior existence of a political system, the establishment of an elected parliament was perceived to be a decisive factor of change. It would, first, be a good way to instill more democracy in the European political system, therefore giving more legitimacy to the Community. An elected parliament would bridge this growing gap between the EEC and its citizens as well as to fight the opacity surrounding the work in Brussels. If elected, the parliament would more easily win the support of the population while softening the austere image of the Commission (and behind, the EEC), “tending to rule by bureaucracy”.<sup>64</sup> Moreover, as a political institution, an elected parliament would be more able to effectively channel the positions of interest groups (such as trade unions, youth or women’s organizations) within the European political system, as well as to exert political pressure in this regard, which would *de facto* give a more prominent place to various societal actors, thus breaking with the technocratic and purely economic Europe. The importance given to an elected parliament – fundamentally a strong faith in the virtue of parliamentary democracy – is a good example of Berthold Rittberger’s claim that Member States continuously employed the model of national parliamentary democracy as a blueprint for institutional reform since the early days of supranational integration.<sup>65</sup>

The democratic election of MEPs would also trigger and legitimate a virtuous circle of institutional reforms. It has been explained how the Commission was perceived as a weak actor which had lost its prestige. An elected parliament, which would have strong ties with the Commission, would reinforce the legitimacy, the power and the functioning of the Commission. As the parliament would draw its legitimacy from the people, it would indeed benefit the Commission as a collateral effect, on the condition, of course, that the Commission was submitted to a certain form of minimal control from the EP. The support and control of an elected parliament would also

63. KADOC, Archief Léo Tindemans, n° 599, Annexe au rapport d’ordre 261, 16.05.1975, p.19.

64. KADOC, Archief Léo Tindemans, n° 600, Association of British Chambers of Commerce, *The future of European Union*, 25.06.1975, p.4.; Notulen van de buitengewone vergadering ..., op.cit., pp.9-10.

65. B. RITTBERGER, *Constructing parliamentary democracy in the European Union. How did it happen?*, in: B. KOHLER-KOCH, B. RITTBERGER (eds), *Debating the democratic legitimacy of the European Union*, Rowman & Littlefield, Lanham, 2007, p.112.

force the Commission to be more independent of the national governments, therefore “deepening the existing – [but] seriously threatened – tradition of international impartiality in the exercise of their functions by Commissioners”.<sup>66</sup> Thinking ahead of contemporary discussions, a Belgian industry representative and the Dutch Minister-President remarked that the politicization of the European polity was necessary.<sup>67</sup> A European Parliament, elected by the citizens of the Nine, would help to create political debates in and about Europe through “tensions et des oppositions allant jusqu’ à des états de crise suscitant actions et reactions”.<sup>68</sup>

The belief in the importance of a democratic parliament as a lever for a more assertive and legitimate political system was a widely shared narrative. However, once more, the political conclusions built on this belief diverged. The more federalist agents saw an elected EP as a first step towards the construction of a federal state. The Commission could then be transformed in a European government, whose composition would be partly or entirely determined by the Parliament, mirroring national polities. In this perspective, the newly elected European Parliament would play a key role in the transformation of the EEC. As a future matrix of the European Union, it would be a constituent assembly, defining the Constitution of a European Federal state and leading the Community towards a new period of its history.<sup>69</sup> There is no need to specify that this was far from being a shared objective. At the other end of the spectrum, the very same belief in the power that an elected parliament could bear led to other conclusions. In Denmark and Great-Britain, the message was that there was no need to give power to the Parliament.<sup>70</sup> For LO, it would even be dangerous to elect a European Parliament. It would, indeed, let people think that this parliament, as other parliaments in a parliamentary democracy, has real possibilities to act, which the EP should not have. It would therefore give people false perceptions of “the real signification of the cooperation” between the European states within the EEC, which had to stay loose.<sup>71</sup> For the Danish and British politicians, this parliament had to remain weak.<sup>72</sup> The parliaments truly representing Danish and British citizens were the national parliaments. They were the ones which had the legitimacy and the mission

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66. Association of British Chambers of Commerce, *The future of European Union*, op.cit., p.4; KADOC, Archief Léo Tindemans, n° 598, Pierre Uri, *Projet de rapport sur l’Union européenne*, September 1975, p.15.

67. For instance, S. HIX, *The political system of the European Union*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2011, p.129.

68. Réunion commune du Conseil central de l’économie ..., op.cit., p.8.

69. KADOC, Archief Léo Tindemans, n° 602, Document du Conseil italien du Mouvement européen, s.d., p.4.

70. This is, at least, the position of the British government and notably of its Secretary of state for Foreign affairs, Callaghan. Interest groups, as the Association of Chamber of Commerce or the National Farmer Union have a more positive view on a directly elected European Parliament.

71. KADOC, Archief Léo Tindemans, n° 599, Annexe au rapport d’ordre 251, s.d., p.2.

72. Fundamentally, those divergences concerning the role of the European Parliament reveal antagonist perceptions on the nature of the Community, see H. SCHNEIDER, *Leitbilder der Europapolitik*, vol.1: *Der Weg zur Integration*, Bonn, Europa Union Verlag, 1977, pp.24-25.

to control Community policies and to be responsible in this regard.<sup>73</sup> Moreover, their citizens seemed to be on the same page.<sup>74</sup>

To conclude, despite these differences in terms of political project, many among opinion leaders in the Member States were convinced than an elected European Parliament would transform an excessively technocratic Community, and therefore would help to solve what we would call today the democratic deficit. Nowadays, and despite the democratic election of a European Parliament since 1979, many are still looking to bridge this gap between European institutions and its citizens. If the empowerment of the European Parliament is still thought of as a possible means to achieve this goal, it is not seen as the principal way through which change will arrive. Rather, many point out the necessity to set up a European public sphere in order to give more legitimacy to the EU.<sup>75</sup> The wish for a democratized European polity remains, but there has been a shift in the narratives regarding the way of achieving this reconciliation between Europe and its people: the goal is similar, the means are different.<sup>76</sup> This reminds us clearly that the question of the legitimacy of European integration, and what is seen as necessary to ensure it, is historically constructed and evolves over time. It would gain much, therefore, to be studied from an historical perspective.<sup>77</sup>

## Conclusion

Over the course of the year 1975, various political and socio-economic elites in the nine Member States of the EEC were asked to give their opinion about the concept of a European Union. Their reflections often revealed powerful narratives on European integration. Europe, in their view, had been mostly an economic project, which had not led, as originally expected by some, to political integration. Despite evident success in the 1960s from an economic point of view, the EEC was, in 1975, fundamentally in crisis. Considered as a bureaucracy run by technocrats, it was presented as a divided and non-homogenous group of countries, which were unable to react in

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73. Ibid., n° 599, Europese Unie. Consultaties Groot-Brittannie, op.cit., p.3; Rapport 562, 31.10.1975, p.4.
74. The third Euro-barometer is enlightening in this regard. When asked to share their opinion on a possible direct election of a European Parliament by universal suffrage, 64% of those interviewed in the six original Member States of the Community were in favor of this solution. In Great-Britain, they were only 41%, in Denmark 35%. *Euro-barometer. Public opinion in the European Community*, 3(1975), p.23.
75. See J. HABERMAS, *The Lure of technocracy*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2015, pp.11 and 35-39; T. VAN DE PUTTE, *De constructie van een Europese publieke sfeer als 'oplossing' voor het democratisch deficit*, Master thesis in History, Gent, 2013.
76. Let's recall here that the goal of this paper is not to establish if EEC/EU, were/is "a technocratic monster" but to present the narratives at play in 1975 in this regard.
77. See, in this regard, the doctoral research of Koen van Zon (Radboud Universiteit Nijmegen), for the period 1947-1960.

a coherent way to the economic crisis. Its institutions, in the meantime, were deemed to be inefficient and, especially the Commission, particularly weak and unable to push the Community forward. After a first successful period, it was time to launch a new phase of European integration. In a Europe which aroused no enthusiasm from its citizens (anymore), the direct election of European Members of Parliament would represent a factor of change, empowering and giving more legitimacy to the Community while bringing Europe closer to its people.

In the three different narratives we have identified in the words of the people met by Léo Tindemans during his consultations, there is, broadly speaking, a more or less similar vision. However, there are great divergences with regard to the significations and the implications of these narratives. They were politically instrumentalized in service of the different political projects, diverging between partisans of a more integrated Europe and those who wished Europe to be a loose Community. Narratives were in many aspects similar; the consequences derived from them very often differed.

For the sake of his mission, Léo Tindemans gathered a multitude of documents, conserved for the main part in his archives. We have suggested here one possible reading of the narratives on European integration revealed by those archives. However, this is not, in any case, an exhaustive list but rather a first orientation. Others narratives could be studied with care. Discourses on the future of the Economic and Monetary Union and its importance for the Community were relatively frequent as well. One could also investigate the (lack of) pregnancy of history and of theoretical reflection on what is Europe. Tindemans purposely built his questionnaire in order to encourage people to speak of the past of Europe, and to share their thoughts on what Europe is on a more philosophical level. But very few people were interested in these kinds of questions. We have, furthermore, focused our study on the socio-economic elites of the Member States. It would be interesting to put those narratives in perspective with the perceptions of the citizens. The latter could, for instance, be approached through national polls and Euro-barometers, whose goal is precisely to voice the “public opinion in the European Community”. The British and Danish positions on the European Parliament were a promising example. Finally, a promising project would be to compare the evolution of those narratives over time. The recent economic and financial crisis has also given birth to a mass of discourses and projects on the future of the European Union, while the critics of “Brussels”, its technocrats and its lack of democracy were never far away. The discourses propagated by some that the EU has to make a qualitative leap forward now if it wants to survive was, also, already voiced by many in 1975... We have quoted earlier the phrase of Pierre Moscovici presenting the Juncker Commission as the Commission “of the last chance”. He also added: “Europe must absolutely reconnect itself with its peoples”.<sup>78</sup> A man of 1975 could have written more or less the same thing.

As moments of questioning and uncertainty, crises open the door for a critical review of the past and attempts to shape a better future. As such, they are specifically

78. *Trends Tendance*, 19.02.2015, p.24.

prone to reveal to us particular narratives that illustrate the perceptions of men of their society at a given time. Through historical archives, this analysis reveals the vision of political and socio-economic elites of 1975 from across Europe, which appeared intrinsically to them as a world in profound crisis.