



# European Elections and National Politics

by Carol Edler Baumann



## GENERAL

Controversies within the nine member states concerning direct elections for the European Parliament of the European Communities (EC), scheduled for June 1978, reveal significant insights into political opinion on the EC itself.

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## EUROPEAN ELECTIONS AND NATIONAL POLITICS

by Carol Edler Baumann

### Direct Elections as an Issue

October 1977

Direct elections for the European Parliament of the European Communities (EC),<sup>1</sup> scheduled for June 1978, briefly surfaced to the forefront of European attention this past summer, not so much as of crucial concern in their own right, but as a controversial issue—and weapon—within the internal politics of the nine member states. As their governments attempted to cope with the economic malaise which has permeated most of Western Europe since 1973, such Community goals as economic and monetary union have been relegated to the far back-burner of European politics. Even the widely publicized Tindemans Report on European Union has been virtually ignored, and although “political cooperation” has emerged as a viable, but unwieldy process of policy coordination among the nine, it has operated primarily alongside, and not within, the institutions of the EC. Recognizing that the Community itself is dangerously close to a state of atrophy, therefore, its supporters have seized upon the issue of European popular elections as a means of revitalizing it. Equating support for such elections with pro-European attitudes, the Eurocrats have perhaps endowed the direct elections of the European Parliament with greater significance than they intrinsically merit.

In July 1976, the Heads of State or Government of the nine member states agreed that direct elections should be held throughout the Community with a target date of May or June 1978. Each state would be free to choose its own polling day within a four-day period and its own system of voting during this first election, although a uniform system is to be adopted for future elections. The current Parliament of 198 members will be increased to 410 members, with 81 seats each for France, Germany, Italy, and the United Kingdom, 25 for the Netherlands, 24 for Belgium, 16 for Denmark, 15 for Ireland, and 6 for Luxembourg.

The negotiations over this formula were in themselves complex enough to beguile the mind of a Machiavelli, complicated, as they were, both by the distribution of seats between member states and by their distribution within certain states; as in the United Kingdom between England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland and in Belgium between Brussels, Flanders, and Wallony, as well as by the insistence of Luxembourg on the retention of at least the six seats she currently has.

Before turning to the specific ways in which the issue of direct elections has impinged upon the domestic politics of member states, it might be useful to survey briefly some of the more general questions surrounding that issue on a European-wide basis. Two of these dominated the discussions which I held this past summer with Community civil servants, academics, government officials, party representatives, and interest group members. One question concerns the current and future powers of the European Parliament and its relationship to the Commission and to the Council of Ministers. The other concerns the “democratizing” effect which a directly elected Parliament might have—both on the other institutions of the Community and on the relations between European political parties and public opinion.

The institutions of the European Community are unique and their interrelationships cannot be usefully compared with traditional governmental bodies. The Commission, which along with the Parliament and the Court speaks for Europe as a whole, consists of 13 members who are appointed by national governments, but act independently of them. It proposes legislation to be enacted by the Council of Ministers and then supervises the application and execution of the laws and policies once adopted. The Council of Ministers, consisting

of ministerial representatives (depending on subject matter) from each member state, takes final decisions on Commission proposals and, by approval or amendment, enacts them into law. The Council is regarded as the voice of the national governments on Community matters. The Court of Justice of the European Community has jurisdiction over all matters of Community law (the treaties, laws, and regulations) and its decisions are final and cannot be appealed. As such, it has pioneered in the development of an entirely new body of European law.

The powers of the current Parliament are more consultative than legislative, more indirect than direct. The Parliament does possess the right to be consulted on all major items of Community legislation. It may attempt to affect that legislation through its formal power to give opinions on proposals submitted by the Commission to the Council of Ministers before the Council takes any final decision on them. For its part, the Commission must report regularly to the Parliament and answer questions submitted to it or its members by that body; the Council of Ministers has also accepted this obligation and the Parliament has recently instituted a similar practice with the Conference of Foreign Ministers, through which political cooperation on nontreaty matters takes place. Informally, the various committees of the Parliament work closely with the appropriate directorates general of the Commission in Brussels and thereby they frequently have an early input into Commission initiatives. Although the Parliament also has the formal power to dismiss the Commission by a vote of censure, such a motion was introduced only once and then withdrawn when a new Commission took office the following month. The European Parliament also possesses some budgetary powers, particularly over what are termed the "nonobligatory" expenditures of the Community, but these powers are marginal at best.<sup>2</sup>

Despite this relative weakness of the current Parliament,<sup>3</sup> many Europeans have cited the tendency of elected parliamentary bodies to attempt to expand their authority at the expense of the executive as an argument either for or against direct elections, depending on their own particular points of view. For example, Mr. Hans Nord (the incumbent Secretary General of the Parliament) has maintained that although direct elections are in no way tied to any automatic increase in the Parliament's formal powers, they could have a profound

psychological impact on it. Members of the European Parliament who are now appointed by their own national assemblies and who serve in the EC Parliament as a "part-time" job, will in the future be selected directly by an actual popular constituency on the basis of their positions on European issues as such. The Christian Democrats, Socialists, and Liberals have already begun to organize across national lines as European-wide parties or coalitions of national parties for the development of common European platforms. Among the major national parties in Western Europe, only the Gaullists and British Conservatives have remained aloof from this development, although the French and Italian Communist Parties have been unable to agree on any common program.

The hope or fear that a directly elected Parliament might increase its powers—legislative or budgetary, formal or informal—at the expense of other institutions of the Community or of the national parliaments of the member states has been a key motivating factor in the attitudes of both EC and national bureaucrats and of national political leaders toward the direct elections issue. Some EC officials have argued that even should the Parliament assume no additional powers, it could become the new focal point for a European voice to counter the growing clamor sounded by the purely national interests of the member states. Thus, the Parliament could put pressure on the Commission to present stronger European positions on behalf of the Community as a whole and on the Council of Ministers to take the Parliament seriously as the legitimate voice of public opinion. Others regret the coupling of direct elections with the idea of increased powers—one, they say, because it will be years before such powers will be attained, if at all, and two, because it has created unnecessary fear and opposition among the more nationalistic parties and forces within the member states, particularly in France and Britain.

The second general question which direct elections have raised is the degree to which a popularly elected Parliament can and will democratize the other institutions and processes of the European Community. Several of the Eurocrats in Brussels and even some of the more European-minded national representatives with whom I spoke regarded the new Parliament as a catalyst needed to "get things moving" once again in the EC. There

has been a "blockage" of progress, they said, in such areas as economic and monetary policy and energy through which only a new moral suasion or impetus can break. Although the media can help provide this impetus, public pressure is ultimately necessary to overcome the growing influence of narrow national interests. In addition, the increased use of the "European Council" (summit meetings of Heads of State) outside the formal institutions of the EC has been regarded by some—but not all—EC officials as having created an imbalance within the Community which only a stronger Parliament can counter. Others point out that even within the institutions of the Community, neither the Commission nor the Council are currently accountable to any European public as such. This is the legitimate role of the European Parliament which, once elected, it should be able to play more effectively.

Several public opinion polls,<sup>4</sup> taken throughout the Community between 1973 and late 1976, indicate a relatively stable degree of interest in the European Community from year to year. Somewhat more than 20 percent of those interviewed responded that they were "very" interested in the EC, 50 percent were "a little" interested, and approximately 30 percent were "not at all" interested or did not reply. Popular attitudes varied only slightly from one member state to another except for the United Kingdom where the 1975 referendum had increased the interest above the EC average and in Belgium where it is surprisingly below the Community average (only 10 percent "very" interested and some 48 percent "not at all" interested). In a 1976 survey of attitudes toward the Community, the polls show that taking the Community as a whole, 65 percent of those polled would vote in favor of their country's continued membership in the EC if a referendum were taken. In Britain, however, the vote was 45 percent for, 44 percent against, and 11 percent don't know (as contrasted to the 79 percent in favor of membership in the 1975 referendum). In Denmark there was a majority of 52 percent *against* membership, with only 33 percent in favor.

Specifically on the question of direct elections of the European Parliament, 69 percent of the respondents favored such elections and only 14 percent were against them. When a breakdown was made on this question as between opinion leaders

and nonleaders, a larger percentage of the opinion leaders (79 percent) were in favor of the direct elections than the nonleaders (only 53 percent). Yet even among the nonleaders, the percentage in favor increased substantially from 1973 to 1976, by which time the plans for the elections had become more definite and they had also received more publicity. When asked whether they regarded such elections as important or unimportant, not quite half (47 percent) considered them important, but less than a third (28 percent) considered them unimportant. Based on this data, one could agree with the Eurocrats who argued that European "public opinion" is already generally in favor of the Community and might become even more involved and supportive through the process of popular direct elections.

Opposing this view, some argue that the serious economic problems of inflation and unemployment facing most of Western Europe, the resultant stultification of economic progress within the EC, and the rather boring and uninspiring image the Community has projected in recent years, have caused European public opinion either to become more absorbed in domestic matters or simply to "turn off" the EC as an item of political concern. Thus, some EC officials submit, there has been no deep public interest in or debate about real European issues on a European-wide basis. Recent and future debates concerning direct elections might remedy this, however, and could serve to mobilize European support for the Parliament as a new and democratic force on the European scene. The crucial need for such a development was made abundantly clear in the pervasive mood of pessimism and low morale that prevailed throughout the Community this past summer. Regardless of whether direct elections were considered important per se, they were generally conceded to be significant symbolically as an indication of whether the EC (which appeared to many to have "failed" in so many areas) could in fact move forward at all. It was largely this symbolic weight, as a measure of the movement of European integration, which gave to this issue its irritating and controversial nature in the national political debates over ratification which took place throughout the Community, but particularly in France and Britain.

#### The "Other" Seven

In the other seven members of the EC, the principle of direct elections was either regarded as

a natural concomitant of membership in and support for the European Community, as in Germany, or it became controversial only in the details of implementation (such as those concerning regional representation), as in Belgium. At the Community level the final agreement of the Foreign Ministers had specified very little in the way of details. It provided for the distribution of seats as between member states, a five-year term of office, and the decision to hold the elections simultaneously within a four-day period. Although a target date of May or June 1978 had been mentioned in several summit conferences, the Council of Ministers agreed that the actual date of the first elections would be fixed by the Council later. The question of "dual mandate" (whether an individual could serve both as a member of the European Parliament and as a member of a national parliament) was left to the member governments to decide.<sup>5</sup> Each country could also decide for itself its own method of voting, though a common system is to be developed for later elections.

Within the three Benelux countries there was uniform support for systems of proportional representation. The only controversy arose in Belgium over the regional representation of the Flemish- and French-speaking populations in that country. A solution providing for separate constituencies for Flanders, Wallony, and Brussels was finally agreed upon, with 13 seats allocated to Dutch-speaking representatives and 11 to French-speaking representatives. In Denmark there was early agreement on a voting system of proportional representation and two constituencies, one for Denmark and one for Greenland. The only ratification problem has involved a sizable and articulate public dissatisfaction with the European Community itself which was translated into some political opposition toward direct elections of the Parliament. A potential problem may arise from the general apathy of Danish voters toward the EC and the resultant expectation of a very low turnout for the European elections unless they are coupled with local elections, which might stimulate greater interest. Danish national elections were last held in February 1977.

In Ireland, Italy, and Germany there has been near unanimity among the major parties of each state in favor of direct elections, with only minor differences over the actual electoral systems to be

implemented. Since her admission to the European Community, Ireland has been a strong supporter of the EC through whose Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) Irish farmers have benefited greatly. The Irish media have given both serious and extensive coverage to European issues in general and to the question of direct elections in particular. Moreover, the popular former Foreign Minister and now leader of the opposition, Garrett Fitzgerald, served an especially successful term as Chairman of the EC Council of Ministers when the matter of direct elections was first introduced at the December 1974 summit meeting and subsequently acted upon and supported by the Parliament and by the Council of Ministers. Since then both parties have favored direct elections as a way of strengthening the Parliament and of democratizing EC institutions.

Some uncertainty remains, however, as to the degree of interest the average Irishman has either in the Community itself or in the issue of direct elections. Some Irish academic observers have expressed concern that, as in Denmark, there might be a low turnout at the polls unless the election is coupled with local elections or popular referenda issues. Though there might be some interest and a respectable vote in the first election, due to EC, Irish government, and party publicity about it, it is questionable whether such interest can be maintained for subsequent elections. The Irish government's election bill<sup>6</sup> of April 1977, proposed a system of Single Transferable Votes in four multimember constituencies. This would mean that each Irish voter would vote for an individual candidate and that vote would also be counted (transferred) toward that candidate's party. The final composition of parliamentary members from any constituency would depend both upon the votes the candidates received as individuals within their party and the number of votes each party received within that constituency. It was believed that such a system would foster competition between candidates of the same party within each constituency and also would emphasize a localized electoral system.

The Italian political scene has presented a different and even unique background for the direct elections issue. Italy, like Ireland, has benefited from membership in the Community both in its agricultural exporting sector<sup>7</sup> and from the EC's regional policy. Moreover, though not a "small"



country like the Benelux or Ireland, Italy has similarly regarded the Community as a vehicle for an expanded international role both in Europe and overseas which she could not play as an independent nation state. On the direct elections issue, there was widespread agreement on a system of proportional representation with regional constituencies. In general, all the Italian parties have formally supported the EC and even the strengthening of its institutions. Moreover, unlike parties in France or Britain, they have not regarded such a growth in its powers as any abdication of national sovereignty, but rather as a realistic recognition that certain economic policies can no longer be dealt with on a purely national basis.

Admittedly, there are at least two caveats to this wholehearted political "support" which should be mentioned. First, it is a support of political parties and their leadership who are aware of European issues and of how Italy benefits from the EC; at the popular or grassroots level, however, there is far less knowledge of and interest in "Europe" than in the crucial issues of inflation and unemployment in Italy. Second, current support for the European Community is partly a function of the fact that in such controversial areas as industrial policy the Community has made little progress. If this should change, and if not only the Commission but also a directly elected Parliament should begin to grapple with these bread and butter issues, then some striking divergencies on the policy level could arise between the parties, and especially within the uneasy alliance between the Christian Democrats and the Italian Communist Party.

The role of the Communist Party in Italy is, of course, a matter of European conjecture and concern, as is the phenomenon of Eurocommunism. Though such a major foreign policy spokesman for the party as Sergio Segre<sup>8</sup> has repeatedly insisted that the Italian Communist Party has accepted "Socialism based on Democracy" (democratic pluralism and the peaceful electoral change of parties) and Enrico Berlinguer himself has voiced his support both for the European Community and for NATO, critics remain skeptical. The major criticism is leveled not so much at the sincerity of Berlinguer or Segre, but at the ability of the "reformist," democratic, and European-oriented faction which they represent to continue in ascendancy over the more doctrinaire, traditional, and

Moscow-linked faction of Pajetta and other old-line communists. Once the Communist Party assumes a formal position of power in the government, will its current leadership be able to remain in control and to withstand any pressures which might arise from the Soviet Union? Interestingly, those who fear the Communist Party's growing status in Italy favor both direct elections to the European Parliament and an increase in its powers as a means of submerging the communists within a larger and more influential body on the continent. Of equal relevance for direct elections is how the Italian Communist Party members who are elected to the European Parliament will align themselves within that body—with other communists, with the socialists, or (as in Italy itself) with the Christian Democrats.

In the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) the direct elections ratification law was carried unanimously, the only dispute arising over its implementation. Germany has been a full participant in all three of the European Communities since their creation, although she has begun to play an active role in them only recently. German Foreign Minister Genscher has referred to the three phases of postwar German history as encompassing first, integration into the EC and NATO; second, support for the processes of détente between East and West; and third, a more active participation in world affairs. Within the Foreign Office, Germany's current role in the EC is viewed as part of this third, more active, phase. Although the EC continues to serve as an essential mechanism for integrating Germany into the fabric of West European economic and political life, the Federal Republic has concluded that the Community has not developed as she had originally hoped and does not provide all the answers to Europe's problems, even in the strictly economic sphere. Several of these problems, they submit, can only be addressed within a worldwide framework and at least require coordination with the United States and Japan through a trilateral approach.

Within this broader context, however, the Federal Republic regards the European Community and Germany's membership in it as politically crucial to her role both in Europe and in the world at large. Thus, unlike the situations prevailing in both France and Britain, there was little controversy in Germany over the issue of direct elections

which, as in all nine of the member states, has been closely tied to the question of support for the EC. In the discussions over implementing an electoral law, however, the government proposed proportional representation on the basis of a single national constituency, whereas the opposition Christian Democratic Union/Christian Socialist Union (CDU/CSU) coalition favored regional constituencies based on the *Länder*. In addition, the CSU, while operating with the CDU as one parliamentary party in the Bundestag, wanted to be listed as a separate party for the purposes of the European elections.

Finally, the issue of West Berlin and its representation in the European Parliament should also be mentioned. Of the 81 seats accorded to the Federal Republic of Germany, three seats were designated for West Berlin. Although the FRG and the West Berlin Constitutions regard West Berlin as part of the FRG, the 1971 Quadripartite Agreement (signed by France, the Soviet Union, the United Kingdom, and the United States) specifies that West Berlin is not part of the Federal Republic but that ties between the two shall be maintained and developed. With the support of the United States, the FRG represents West Berlin internationally and has extended all its treaties to that area. West Berlin, therefore, is currently represented—through the Community treaties of 1951 and 1957—in the European Community and in its Parliament by those Berlin representatives in the Bundestag who have been appointed to the EC Parliament. This representation will be continued, but not by direct elections in West Berlin. (Such a process would be regarded as highly provocative by the Soviet Union, which has frequently protested any Berlin representation in the EC whatsoever.) As a compromise solution, the United States has proposed that the three West Berlin representatives to the European Parliament should be chosen by the lower house in West Berlin's government. This has been agreed to by the FRG, and the entire electoral law, including the system of representation, is expected to be adopted in fall 1977.

### **The French Finesse**

The debate in France concerning direct elections to the European Parliament revolved around the question of French ratification of the principle of such elections as embodied in the final agreement

of the EC Council of Ministers reached in September 1977. As in Britain, however, the substance of that debate focused on the European Community itself and on the role and power of the Parliament within it. Moreover, the issue inevitably became deeply embroiled in French party politics and, in a political sense, was viewed as a preliminary but important skirmish in anticipation of the general elections widely projected for March 1978. Within the government, itself a coalition of the small Republican Party (PR) of Giscard d'Estaing, the Centrists, and the Gaullists (RPR) led by Jacques Chirac (newly named Rally for the Republic which replaced the former Union of Democrats for the Republic), the Republican Party has consistently followed a pro-European policy, as have the centrist Social Democrats, who fall largely within the tradition of the Christian Democrats. In line with that position, the majority of the parliamentarians of these two parties also favored direct elections, though not all of them enthusiastically. The Gaullists, however, were divided in their attitudes toward the European elections (with about 80 percent in favor, but at least 20 percent opposed), the opposition based on a traditional and overriding concern for preserving French sovereignty.

In an early effort to deal with this opposition inside its own coalition, as well as with the growing nationalist pressures emerging at the fringes of the other parties, the government clarified its support for direct elections by insisting that such elections "must" not result in an increase in the powers of the European Parliament. In late 1976, French Foreign Minister de Guiringaud publicly stated that at the present time France was not ready to envisage any extension of the powers of the European assembly. In his view, that assembly was not and could not be a parliament and the European Council was not and could not be responsible to it. Rather, the nine member governments of the EC were and would remain responsible only to their own national parliaments, which could not be divested of their prerogatives by an assembly whose powers were confined "to formulating recommendations" and ruling on certain aspects of budgetary procedure.

Within the opposition coalition of socialists, communists, and radical left, there were equal divisions in principle and equally complex questions on matters of policy. The Socialist Party in



France has long been pro-European in its outlook, and its members have tended to favor both the European Community and its Parliament. As early as December 1973, the Socialist Party had agreed in principle on direct elections to the Parliament and officially repeated this position in January 1976. As a party in opposition, however, they found themselves in the extremely uncomfortable position of favoring direct elections in principle, but not wanting to support the government by voting for them in practice. Members of the French Communist Party, unlike their colleagues of the same name in Italy, have been notably anti-European in their ideology and rhetoric and originally opposed direct elections as a threat to the national independence of France. In early 1976, however, they assumed a more nationalist position vis-à-vis the Soviet Union and were finally willing to accept the principle of direct elections—if adequate restrictions were placed on any increase in the powers of the Parliament. This vaunted concern for national sovereignty which was voiced by both the Gaullists on the far right and the French Communists on the left was largely irrelevant to the issue since the only way to increase the powers of the European Parliament significantly would be to secure the agreement of all the member states to change their own constitutions and the powers of their own governments and parliamentary bodies. This fact was largely ignored by the parties in question.

In addition to the demands imposed on it by these party alignments and policy positions, the French government also had to face and deal with the results of recent public opinion polls and the municipal elections of March 1977. These projected that in future national elections the Socialist and Communist Parties taken together might secure as much as 56 percent of the popular vote and perhaps a resultant 60 percent of the total French Assembly seats. This contrasted sharply to the 57 percent majority of the Assembly seats then held by the government coalition. Disillusionment with the government was largely ascribed to the economic crises of the past three to four years, the resentment toward the economic reorganization and belt-tightening policies imposed by the Barre Plan, and the continuing, still unsolved, and potentially explosive problem of 5 percent unemployment, which for France was unacceptably high. In its own defense, government spokesmen argued that the Barre Plan was just beginning to have an

impact in its attempt to control the economy, that the policies of a Socialist Party in power could only result in increased inflation and a move toward protectionism, and that the French Communist Party, unlike the Italian, had been until recently a largely Stalinist party which had entered the alliance with the socialists for tactical reasons only and could not be trusted to support democratic procedures or European policies once in power.

Within the government coalition itself, of course, the Gaullist party led by Jacques Chirac presented a particularly difficult problem for President Giscard d'Estaing. A foreign policy spokesman for the Gaullists summarized their position toward Europe, paraphrased as follows:

It would be neither disaster, nor salvation, if the direct elections were not held. The French people simply don't care about a European Parliament and although the Gaullists support Europe, it must be a Europe with a real political personality which stands *for* something. France does not want just a free trade zone as the British, but a true common market with a common industrial policy, a common energy policy, and a common research policy in addition to the CAP. When there have been failures in EC progress, it has been blamed on the institutions, but such is not the case. Political will creates institutions, but institutions cannot create political will. Europe cannot be made by declarations which simply proclaim that "Europe speaks with one voice," when in fact Europe speaks with no voice at all. This is the European problem facing France—not the question of direct elections.<sup>9</sup>

Despite this articulated self-view of the Gaullist leadership, others even within the coalition are openly skeptical of the RPR's supposed interest in a "real" Europe and regard the recent machinations of the Gaullists concerning the direct elections issue as clear evidence to the contrary. Chirac himself, RPR's current leader, has stated that he personally opposed the European Community when he served in the French Cabinet at the time of its creation. As recently elected Mayor of Paris, Chirac has manipulated his position for maximum publicity and as a challenge to Giscard

d'Estaing's leadership.<sup>10</sup> Recognizing that the Gaullists were themselves divided on the direct elections issue, however, Chirac worked for a delay in the debate, with the hope that no action would be taken at all. Since the elections were to be held throughout Europe at the same time this would have prevented the elections from taking place as scheduled.

Such a tactic presented a dilemma for President Giscard d'Estaing. In a very public way, France's reputation throughout Europe was on the line. The French "situation" was the center of European attention, particularly in Brussels and Strasbourg in early June 1977. If a vote were taken and direct elections "lost," France would be branded once again as the nationalistic block to further progress in European integration. Yet in domestic politics, if the government "won" it could only be a marginal victory at best, with a probable split both in the government's coalition and in that of the opposition. From the government's political point of view, therefore, the best possible solution appeared to be to avoid any vote on the issue at all—and this was finally accomplished. To the Europeans outside France, however, such a tactic was regarded as a "back door" approach to Europe that could easily result in even more serious future problems which could be raised whenever those who "never voted" on the issue chose to exploit that fact.

The specific constitutional sequence of events began when President Giscard d'Estaing submitted the question of the constitutionality of the ratification legislation to the French Constitutional Council, whose advice is not binding but cannot be appealed. The President sought this advice as a way of avoiding the necessity and dangers of making a unilateral political decision, and he apparently welcomed their finding that the direct elections of the EC Parliament were not unconstitutional under the French Constitution. Following this decision, M. d'Estaing introduced the ratification legislation to the French Assembly, but with the amendment that the EC Parliament could not in any way overrule French competence. This helped to undercut the arguments concerning French sovereignty which had been advanced both by the Communist Party's spokesmen and by the anti-European Gaullists led by Chirac. (It should be noted that

such an amendment, appended to national legislation, cannot have any valid limiting effect on international treaties.) The question of direct elections itself was finally "resolved" by avoiding an actual vote on it. When the debate took place, M. Barre, an avowed supporter of Europe and of direct elections, introduced a motion of confidence in the government. With such a motion (Article 49 of the Constitution) the vote takes place on the motion itself and not on the substance of the issue. The vote passed and with it the ratification of direct elections. The details of the electoral system were to be introduced in future legislation, but there was general agreement on proportional representation with a national list of party candidates.

As noted, the significance of the French debate on European direct elections extended beyond that somewhat narrow focus to the wider issue of European integration and to France's role within the European Community. In this respect, it was eerily reminiscent of the rhetoric of the late 1950s and the '60s when the French government under then-President Charles de Gaulle temporarily halted further supranational progress in the Community by its refusal to accept majority voting in the Council of Ministers and when it also twice prevented the United Kingdom's entry into the EC. Even now the Gaullists argue that this double French veto "saved" the Community from the British who would have operated to stultify the development of common policies or would have served as the Trojan horse for American infiltration and influence. Then, as now, the French Assembly resounded with proclamations of national sovereignty and the press was filled with Gaullist warnings of French submergence in a Europe dominated by American political and economic influence.

Such expressions of growing nationalism were evident not only in the statements of Gaullists and the Communist Party, however, but even in the pronouncements of the historically pro-European Socialist Party. Socialist spokesmen made it clear that although they favored a stronger European Parliament as a democratic counterbalance to the political and budgetary powers of the EC Commission and Council of Ministers, they did *not* favor an increase in the powers of the European Community vis-à-vis the nation state. This phenomenon has not been peculiar to France alone. Throughout

Western Europe, governments have floundered as they have been progressively inundated by the very real domestic crises of economic stagnation, political weakness, and social unrest. However, with the European Community itself at a virtual standstill—unwilling or unable to cope with these realities—the member states have increasingly sought alternative approaches to deal with them. Some governments have desperately attempted to find national remedies, if only partial, for the problems which they themselves recognize as European-wide or even worldwide in nature. At the same time, however, they have turned to the trilateral meetings (Western Europe, Japan, and the United States) in Rambouillet and London and the forthcoming General Agreement on Tariff and Trade (GATT) negotiations in Tokyo as wider and more appropriate forums for the discussion of the international trade and monetary dilemmas faced by all the advanced industrial democracies. Finally, on a European-wide basis they have attempted to revitalize political cooperation among the nine through the Conference of Foreign Ministers and the European Council of Heads of State. France, as Germany and Britain, has pursued all three of these policies simultaneously.

### Britain and Europe

Despite the heightened drama lent to the direct elections debate in France by the personalities and political infighting of Jacques Chirac and Giscard d'Estaing, the British scene presented an equally complex and frustrating problem for both government and opposition, for the advocates of European unification and Britain's continued participation in that process, and for the public at large. Britain's recent policies both toward and in the European Community can only be understood in the context of her past relations with the continent of Europe. Throughout the nineteenth century and the early years of the twentieth, Britain played the classic role of "holding" the balance of power on the continent of Europe,<sup>11</sup> seeking thereby to prevent the domination of any one state or any combination of powers which might threaten the United Kingdom herself or her imperial ties and economic interests overseas. Even World War I did not suffice to draw Britain much closer into continental affairs and it was not until the aftermath of World War II that Britain's role came to

be viewed as one to be played at the center of three interlocking circles of interest—the European continent, the Commonwealth, and her "special" relationship with the United States.<sup>12</sup>

The British refusal to participate in the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSS) or in the ill-fated European Defense Community (aborted by the French Assembly after it became clear that the United Kingdom would not join) was predicated as much on her belief in the overriding importance of those last two circles (the Commonwealth and trans-Atlantic ties) as on her concern for the preservation of British sovereignty. In addition, her people's strong psychological feelings of ethnocentrism<sup>13</sup> and their dislike for continental constitutional practices and political institutions cannot be dismissed as irrelevant. It can be persuasively argued, in fact, that such attitudes served to delay Britain's ultimate application for admission to the European Economic Community long after the economic and political realities of the declining importance of Commonwealth trade and the one-sided nature of the "special relationship" with the United States had been widely recognized outside Britain and even by many within. It was not until the United Kingdom's alternative proposal for a European Free Trade Association (EFTA) had been rebuffed by the Common Market six, and the truncated EFTA then created failed to provide the dynamism so desperately needed by a lagging British economy, that her first application for admission to the EEC was finally and reluctantly made.

The recent history of Britain's subsequent application to the Community, the two-time refusals led by French vetoes, and the long and tortuous negotiations which led to full membership in 1973 should be kept in mind as one attempts to understand the nuances and analyze the motivations behind the direct elections debate of June and July 1977. As with the French government, the ability of the British Labour government to take a strong and unambiguous stand in favor of direct elections was seriously impaired by its own weakness. Not only was there a split on the issue itself within the Labour Parliamentary Party, but recent public opinion polls and by-election results had made it clear that in the country as a whole support for the Labour Party was on the wane. In addition, the government was dependent for its majority on the

votes of the Liberal Party and the "Lib-Lab" coalition was also split over the issue of the method of representation—"first past the post" (simple majority system) in single member constituencies or proportional representation (PR) on a regional basis. The Labour Party was not alone, however, in its dilemma for each of the three major parties had to deal with at least three issues: support for the European Community itself and British membership in it, the principle of direct elections to the European Parliament, and the electoral method of representation.

The Liberal Party was perhaps the least divided on all three issues. From the early 1950s to the present the British Liberals have been in the forefront of the movement for European unification and as a party had been the sole supporters for British membership both in the European Coal and Steel Community and, from the beginning, in the European Economic Community. They therefore favored continued British participation in the Communities and British acceptance of the principle of direct elections. Because of their party's minority position on a national basis, the Liberals were strongly in favor of an electoral system of proportional representation which alone could grant them some representation in the European Parliament. As a condition of their continued support for the Lib-Lab coalition, therefore, the Liberal Party demanded and secured assurances from the Labour government that a European elections bill would be introduced to the Parliament before autumn. They also continued to pressure the government for a proportional representation system.

The Conservative Party was beset by several internal differences as well as by a quandary over the tactics to be followed in the actual Parliamentary vote. On two of the basic issues, a large majority of the Tories favored Britain's continued participation in the European Community and direct elections for the Parliament. Both the 1975 and the 1976 Conservative Party Conferences went on record publicly as in favor of the European elections. The leadership's enthusiasm was slightly restrained, however, by their partial dependence on the extreme right-wing nationalist segment of the party which had recently gained influence in the country at large and whose supporters were both anti-Europe and anti-direct elections. Politically,

moreover, support for the EC was not likely to win popular accolades for any party at a time when the Common Agricultural Policy was regarded by many in Britain as the major cause of high food prices and general inflation. On the method of representation, the Tories strongly favored "first past the post" for two reasons. First, voting estimates based on the polls and by-elections indicated that if the European Parliamentary elections were held in 81 single-member constituencies with simple majority voting, Conservative candidates would probably win some 70-75 percent of the seats, or approximately 60. Under proportional representation, in contrast, the Tories feared that the Liberals would gain both votes and seats at their expense. Second, many Conservatives also argued that adopting a proportional representation system for the EC elections might later be viewed as a precedent for the introduction of a proportional electoral system for United Kingdom elections. Conservative representatives thus faced the dilemma of support for the principle of direct elections, but opposition to the proportional representation method finally introduced by the Labour government.

The Labour government and Labour representatives in the House of Commons were even more divided than their Conservative opposition. Historically, Labour Party attitudes toward the European Community have varied from lukewarm to hostile. Although Britain's second application for EEC membership was actually made by a Labour government in 1967, the terms of admission were negotiated by a Conservative government and have been sniped at by Labour ever since. Their opposition has been based both upon ideological grounds (the EC being regarded as a capitalist organization based on a market economy) and upon economic arguments (the CAP has increased food prices and the supposed "long-term benefits" have not yet accrued to British labor).<sup>14</sup> Prior to entry in 1973 the Labour left effectively used opposition to the EC as a means of increasing its support among the people and its influence within the party—and it felt that the issue would serve equally well in 1977. Even the right wing of the party had not been terribly supportive of the EC and, in fact, the Labour Party Conference of September 1976 had rejected the principle of direct elections by a vote of almost two to one. This, however, was insufficient to make the rejection official as party policy. On behalf of the government, Prime Minister

Callaghan argued that the Labour government was committed to direct elections by the referendum of 1975 in favor of continued British membership in the EC.

Prior to the introduction of the government's bill, valid arguments were raised on behalf of both "first past the post" and proportional representation. In its report, the House of Commons Select Committee recommended the traditional parliamentary voting system of simple majority in single-member constituencies ("first past the post") for several reasons:

1. If the United Kingdom changed its system to PR, the later introduction of a uniform Community system which might be different could mean two changes in a relatively short time.
2. It might be difficult to reach agreement on any particular new system by 1978.
3. The "first past the post" system was familiar to voters who could identify more easily with their existing Parliamentary constituencies.
4. It would be easier for the existing constituency organizations of the political parties to operate.

The report did, however, also list several arguments in favor of PR:

1. It could be introduced relatively easily (by using the ten economic planning regions, plus London, as the regional constituencies for England) and it avoided the advantages of simple majority voting which tends to exaggerate minor swings in party popularity and underrepresent minority parties (the Liberals' argument).
2. It would insure that United Kingdom representatives would reflect more accurately both regional and national patterns of opinion.
3. It would be particularly suitable for a multinational assembly from which no executive body had to be formed.
4. It would bring the British system into line with the continent where some form of PR is already generally used.

In April the government issued a White Paper on "Direct Elections to the European Assembly,"<sup>15</sup> which first examined the pros and cons of single member constituencies and then set forth several alternative systems of proportional representation. The White Paper suggested that PR might be suitable for the election of a European Parliament since such a body "does not constitute a legislature or provide a government." The alternative PR systems included a single national list, separate lists for the four national constituencies of England, Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland, regional lists based on the existing economic planning regions, and multimember constituencies with the single transferable vote (the system adopted in Ireland). Although the White Paper did not make any recommendation on the electoral system, it did favor the regional list of all the PR list systems mentioned and it recommended that whatever system was used in the rest of the United Kingdom, PR would be best for the "special circumstances" of Northern Ireland. On the practical problems imposed by any timetable which would meet the elections target date of May or June 1978, the White Paper indicated that the Select Committee's recommendation of single member constituencies would entail considerable work by the Boundary Commission (to determine the boundaries of 81 constituencies of roughly equal electorates), while a single national list system would require no Boundary Commission work and a regional list system would also require none, or very little.

In the preliminary debate on the White Paper which was held in the House of Commons in late April two sets of divisions emerged: one between the government and the anti-election group on whether any elections should be held at all (a matter which the government argued had been settled in 1975 by the referendum), and a second one between those who favored PR and those who favored "first past the post." Although there appeared to be a sizable majority in the House in favor of the principle of direct elections, serious disagreement over the electoral method raised the possibility at least that the anti-election group might combine with the opponents of either system to defeat whatever bill the government might propose. That bill, as finally published in June and introduced to the House of Commons in early July, proposed a system of proportional representation

in regional multimember constituencies. As suggested in the White Paper, the English constituencies would be based on the economic planning regions, plus London. Each party would submit a list of candidates for each constituency, and electors would vote for the candidates of their choice. Seats would be distributed between parties by counting the candidates' votes as votes for their respective parties. Each party's allotted number of seats would then be filled according to the number of votes received by each of the candidates of that party.

The bill accepted the Select Committee's recommendation that of the 81 representatives accorded to the United Kingdom, 66 should be elected in England, 8 in Scotland, 4 in Wales, and 3 in Northern Ireland, with Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland each constituting a single electoral region. Although the Select Committee had also recommended that the nationals of other EC countries resident in the United Kingdom should be allowed to vote in the U.K. elections for the European Parliament, the government bill did not include this provision. Nor were provisions made for some 270,000 U.K. nationals living in other EC member states. A "dual mandate" for U.K. candidates for election to the European Parliament was allowed, but not required. Thus, a member of the House of Commons could also serve, if elected, as a member of the European Parliament. An interesting facet of the bill whereby the government sought to avoid defeat on the electoral method, despite support for the principle, was its inclusion of the provision that if PR were defeated, then elections would automatically be held under the "first past the post" system appended to the bill as Schedule 2.

The House of Commons debates on July 6 and 7 repeated most of the concerns and arguments mentioned above both on the principle of direct elections and on the electoral system to be used. Moreover, they clearly reflected the fact that the anti-electioneers were also for the most part the same anti-Marketeers who had attempted to secure either renegotiation of the EC Treaty or British withdrawal therefrom at the time of the referendum in 1975. Whereas the other members of the European Community and many in Britain as well had regarded that referendum as final, it was

obvious that the left wing of the Labour parliamentarians and the national executive committee of the Labour Party did not regard the issue as settled. In fact, the hidden agenda of the direct elections debate was as much a discussion and vote once again on Britain's role in Europe as it was on the more narrow question of representation in the European Parliament.

The final vote of 394 in favor of direct elections (via PR) with 147 against did not reflect the actual party divisions, however, since the Labour government had allowed a free vote on the issue and six Labour Cabinet Ministers (referred to by a Tory MP as "the gang of six"), plus several junior ministers, voted against the bill. It was finally passed only with the support of a majority of Conservative Party members in the House of Commons and, of course, with the full backing of the Liberal Party. As leader of the Conservative delegation in the House, Mr. John Davies had indicated that although it was the will of the party that it should vote as unanimously as it could (in favor of direct elections), he would make reasonable provision for those who for a long time had consistently held a different point of view. In effect, this meant that party discipline would not be invoked and a free vote would be allowed. Despite the temporary success of the Labour government in fulfilling its commitment to Europe—and to the Liberal Party—over serious opposition within its own party ranks, however, the future of the European Community and Britain's role in it appeared to be a matter doomed to continued controversy. During the summer a working group of the Labour Party's national executive committee had produced a policy document highly critical of the EC which, if adopted by the full party conference in October, could present another serious challenge to the government in the future. After three and a half years of membership in the European Community the question of Britain and Europe remains an open one.

### **The European Community—1977**

The national debates on direct elections to the European Parliament of the EC which took place during the spring and summer of 1977 provide several significant insights into European political opinion on the EC itself. First, the issue of direct



elections was not regarded as an extremely important one, except perhaps in Brussels; it assumed a secondary, if not tertiary, place to such pressing national problems as inflation and unemployment. Second, what significance it did possess was clearly tied to the broader question of the future of the Parliament and to national attitudes toward the EC as an institution. Many—supporters and opponents alike—regarded the elections as a catalyst for mobilizing European public opinion and for injecting some new impetus into the movement for European unification. Third, the need for the Parliament to become a European-wide democratic counterweight to the bureaucratized Commission and nationally oriented Council of Ministers was widely recognized and articulated as an argument in favor of direct elections. In addition, the question of direct elections of the European Parliament became a political issue within the domestic politics of the EC member states. The national debates, therefore, set the stage for domestic political contests and became the vehicle for internal political maneuvering. In several of the EC states minority governments faced the prospect of national elections in the near future and thus viewed the European elections debate primarily as it impinged on the strength of their own party or coalition and on that of the opposition. This was particularly the case in Britain, France, and Italy.

The direct elections issue was also raised and used by EC members in their relations with one another and within the institutions of the Community. The Council's decision to hold European-wide elections during the same four-day period, and its projected target date of May or June 1978, put pressure on both France and Britain to reach a decision in ample time for national implementation of an electoral system prior to that date. Once the French had finessed their own dilemma by avoiding an actual decision directly on the issue, the United Kingdom was placed in the unenviable position of moving ahead quickly or delaying the elections for the Community as a whole. Britain was already regarded with suspicion (or hostility) in Brussels where the difficulties of absorbing her into EC institutions, her insistence on special exemptions and the "green pound," and irritation over the 1975 referendum had combined to create a continental impression of British obstructionism which even her strongest supporters in the Benelux could not condone. As noted, these pressures for action

ultimately resulted in British approval of direct elections, but at some cost both to the government and to the unity of the Labour Party.

Finally, regarding the general "state of the Community," the entire tone of the national debates, discussions about them at Community headquarters in Brussels, and media publicity surrounding them left the observer with an impression of widespread malaise and a prevalent mood of gloom. The European Coal and Steel Community of the 1950s had provided a model of success, later emulated by the European Economic Community in the 1960s. But whereas the ECSC had thrived in an era of economic recovery and the EEC had continued in an era of growth and expansion, the European Communities of the 1970s faced an economic recession combined with high inflation, unemployment, and energy shortages. Disappointing to many, the initial creation of a customs union and the subsequent development and achievements of a common tariff and common agricultural policy had not been followed by similar success in the development of a common industrial policy or a common energy policy.

Politically, the spillover theories envisaging an automatic link between economic and political integration had not worked in practice to increase the powers of either the Parliament or the Commission, and even the mechanism of political cooperation has operated largely outside the confines of Community institutions. Nationalism appears to be once again on the ascendancy, with the rhetoric of the French Assembly reminiscent of the years of Charles de Gaulle and the British arguments for and against the European Community of today sounding as if they were lifted from the early debates on the Coal and Steel Community. Unfortunately, the horizon is not much brighter. A *Guardian* editorial of early July, entitled "The Federal Dream is Dying," concluded as follows: "The enlargement of the Community... will inevitably prevent the EEC from becoming the federation of its founders' dreams. It will be de Gaulle's *Europe des Patries* which will survive rather than Jean Monnet's United States of Europe. Mr. Callaghan has done nothing to sabotage the federal concept. It is simply fading away."<sup>16</sup> For any supporter of European unification—for whatever reasons—1977 was not a vintage year.



## NOTES

1. The European Coal and Steel Community (1951), the European Economic Community (1957), and the European Atomic Energy Community (1957) combined their institutions in July 1967, and since that time have operated with one European Parliament.

2. The treaty defines obligatory expenditures as those "necessarily resulting from this treaty or from acts adopted in accordance therewith." These are controlled by the Council, whereas all other nonobligatory expenditures are controlled by the Parliament.

3. Although EC literature states that "Parliament exercises to an increasing extent the power of the purse—historically the foundation of parliamentary power," this would appear to be more a hope for the future than a reality of the present. In fact, the EC's budgetary power is not wielded by the Parliament alone but is shared both with the Council and with the Commission. In procedure, the Commission draws up a preliminary draft budget for the Council; after modifications, the Council presents its own draft version to the Parliament, which may propose amendments to both obligatory and nonobligatory items. This is returned to the Council which has the final decision on all obligatory expenditures; it may then re-amend nonobligatory items but the Parliament does possess the final word on these. It should be noted, however, that the nonobligatory expenditures constitute only approximately 25 percent of the budget as a whole. Secretariat of the European Parliament (Directorate-General for Information and Public Relations), "The European Parliament" (1976), pp. 7, 16-17.

4. Commission of the European Communities, *Euro-Barometre* (Public Opinion in the European Community), No. 6, January 1977.

5. This presented a common problem for all member governments. On the one hand, the dual mandate would be one way to insure that EC issues and policies could be introduced, explained, and debated within the national parliamentary bodies of the member states. On the other, the pressures and time constraints imposed by membership in both bodies would be almost beyond the physical and mental capabilities of most individuals.

6. Published April 19 by the Fine Gael which lost to the Fianna Fail in the June 1977 national election. It was surmised that the new government would propose and support a similar system, though probably with five instead of four constituencies.

7. There is fear, however, that this sector will face increasing competition if and when such EC applicants as Greece, Spain, and Portugal are admitted to full membership. Italian spokesmen have made it clear that at that juncture the entire Common Agricultural Policy should be renegotiated.

8. Interviewed by the author on June 28, 1977. See also his article, "The 'Communist Question' in Italy," in *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 54, No. 4 (July 1976). For a critical view of Eurocommunism, see Henry A. Kissinger, "Communist Parties in Western Europe: Challenge to the West" (American Enterprise Institute, Reprint No. 70, June 1977).

9. M. Jean Lipkowski, national delegate for international affairs of the RPR. Interviewed by the author on June 21, 1977.

10. Chirac's challenge was widely regarded as based on the assumption that the government would lose in the March election, that the Socialist-Communist Party coalition would succeed to power but not in solving the French economic crisis, and that in a subsequent election a popular backlash would bring the conservatives (RPR) to power, with Chirac at their head.

11. Best defined by Sir Eyre Crowe in "Memorandum on the Present State of British Relations with France and Germany" (Foreign Office, January 1, 1907) as follows: "The only check on the abuse of political predominance... has always consisted in the opposition of an equally formidable rival, or of a combination of several countries forming leagues of defense. The equilibrium established by such a grouping of forces is technically known as the balance of power, and it has become almost an historical truism to identify England's secular policy with the maintenance of this balance by throwing her weight now in this scale and now in that, but ever on the side opposed to the political dictatorship of the strongest single state or group at a given time." In Alan Bullock and F.W. Deakin (eds.), *Britain and Europe: Pitt to Churchill*, pp. 204-206 (Book Three of *The British Political Tradition*, Nicholas Kaye, Ltd., London, 1950).

12. See Sir Oliver S. Franks, *Britain and the Tide of World Affairs*, Oxford University Press, London, 1955.

13. Following an extremely heavy, thick fog which had settled over the British Isles and the Low Countries, a headline in the *Daily Telegraph* stated: "Fog in Channel: Continent Isolated."

14. For a direct contradiction to this argument, see *The Economist* (June 11, 1977) editorial on "Britain Against the Breeze" and the article on "The Unmitigated Disaster That Wasn't" (pp. 62-66).

15. "Direct Elections to the European Assembly," Cmnd. 6768 (April 1977).

16. *Guardian*, July 1, 1977.