

industry research and technology

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The Community's Scientific and Technical Research Policy

"We are approaching what I might call "the moment of truth": in the next few months the governments will have to state clearly whether they are willing to continue along the path opened up at The Hague or whether they admit defeat. To continue along the path opened up at The Hague means something specific: it means confirming that the Community constitutes the appropriate setting for the preparation and the implementation of a joint strategy for scientific, technological and industrial development."

It was in these terms that Mr Spinelli, member of the Commission of the European Communities with special responsibility for industrial affairs and research, delivered a solemn warning to the governments of the member countries of the Community during his important address to the European Parliament at Strasbourg on 21 April 1971.

Of course the Community must not henceforward do everything or finance everything in this sector. That is not the point. The point is to recognize the competence of the Community and its Institutions to secure the minimum coordination and cohesion and joint financing essential to efficiency in an operation which is inherently many-sided and diverse. In concrete terms, this is what should be done at Community level:

- a permanent schedule, as complete and accurate as possible, of

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The information and articles published in this Bulletin concern European scientific cooperation and industrial development in Europe. Hence they are not simply confined to reports on the decisions or views of the Commission of the European Communities, but cover the whole field of questions discussed in the different circles concerned.

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all the available data on the requirements to be met, the available resources and the projects undertaken at national level or in cooperation with non-Community countries;

- joint definition of medium- and long-term objectives, priority fields of activity and methods of implementation in order to remove the legal and financial obstacles which have hitherto prevented the fulfilment of the proposals formulated by the Committee on Scientific and Technical Research Policy (Aigrain Group);
- the initiation of joint projects wherever found to be necessary having regard to the nature of the problems to be resolved;
- the setting-up of appropriate decision-making structures, with a view in particular to ensuring that the proposals submitted to the Council are actually discussed by that body and not perpetually referred back to the panels of experts at a lower level than that of the senior officials who originated the proposals;
- a sufficiently wide interpretation of the joint commercial policy to enable the Community itself to negotiate with non-Community countries the technical and industrial cooperation agreements which are by way of becoming the essential instrument of any modern commercial policy.

Through various circumstances, the countries of Western Europe have never had so many reasons to pool their resources in the field of scientific research and technical development. First of all, the increasingly rapid advance of technology demands an ever-greater effort from our countries, which is not limited to certain major branches called "top" sectors.

Secondly, the age of spontaneous technological development is on its way out. During the last twenty years the major industrial states have backed projects according to the dictates of circumstances, proceeding on the assumption that any new technique, especially if spectacular, deserved to be supported. Today we find the richest state in the world engaged in heart-searching on the merits of such a policy. If the USA realizes that it cannot at one and the same time conquer space, make a supersonic aircraft, improve living conditions in the big cities and preserve their natural environment, is it not evident that Europeans must also be rigorously selective in their projects, eradicate duplications of effort, and as far as possible avoid doing with a time-lag of ten to fifteen years what others have done before them?

This is all the more evident in that it will be impossible to increase the proportion of public resources devoted to research and development at the same pace as in recent years. Research and development expenditure will meet increasingly direct competition from the needs of associated fields - for example, the financing of the tremendous nuclear investments required in order to ensure Europe a minimum of security as regards its energy supplies, or the expenditure entailed by the fight against pollution and all types of nuisance, or again the costs of improving traditional public services and works and the creation of new public services.

All these considerations point to the same conclusion: the most elementary common sense demands that the Member States pool their material and human resources in order to cope with these new exigencies in better conditions.

There are two main reasons for the existing disappointment at what has been done towards this end since 1967, namely:

- first, the method adopted, which consisted in planning in the name of pragmatism for a series of isolated operations, without

seeking to adumbrate at least the broad lines of a common development strategy;

- secondly, the absence of a clear reply to the question concerning the framework of cooperation and the responsibilities of the Community in the matter of research and development, which made it impossible to fashion the appropriate legal and financial instruments and led to the opening of discussions in a forum enlarged to comprise fifteen - and in the near future twenty - countries, without a common attitude having first been defined at Community level.

The development of a common scientific and technical research policy involves planning bodies, decision-taking procedures and resources for carrying the projects out. This is why the Commission has proposed the creation of a European Research and Development Committee (ERDC) and a European Research and Development Agency (see "Research and Technology" No. 75).

The work of the ERDC will relate to matters such as the comparison of resources and requirements, the priorities to be observed, and also specific questions arising from requests which may be addressed to it. The composition of the ERDC must offer the best guarantees as to the value of its opinions, and this will mean calling upon top-ranking personalities chosen because of their authority. The ERDC, which must possess an adequate administrative infrastructure, will also be able to put forward suggestions on its own initiative. Its opinions will be examined and converted into proposals by the Commission .

It will naturally be advisable to enlist the cooperation of those responsible for national research policies in the preparation of these proposals. The ERDC could therefore be

usefully supplemented by a committee of senior officials in the field of scientific policy having general powers, with which the Commission would discuss its proposals before forwarding them to the Council.

When the broad lines of policy have been laid down, the proposals formulated and the decisions taken, there will still be the question of implementation. Not wishing to develop a centralized management for its departments, the Commission suggests that there should be a special body for this purpose, the European Research and Development Agency, responsible for ensuring the financing of the Joint Research Centre and the management of participation contracts in operations falling within the objectives adopted and being of undeniable interest to the Community. The Agency would also have the task of organizing the participation of European countries outside the Community in certain programmes already approved at Community level.

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At a time when the Community is embarking on a ten-year plan for the achievement of economic and monetary union, the research and development policy cannot be limited to endless discussions with no concrete outcome on a few isolated intergovernmental cooperation programmes. The foremost experts in the Member States have participated in these discussions with the keenest desire to obtain results. Today they are disappointed and sometimes legitimately irritated to find that all their efforts run aground on the shoals of diplomacy.

Instead of debating questions of substance, our Governments have allowed the discussions to become completely sterile, with the most restrictive legal considerations prevailing over the scientific, technical and economic necessities. This situation is unworthy of the Community no less than of the Member States, particularly since in this apparently complex field, the basic questions to be solved are really very simple.