

Brussels, 20 July 1967

Project for the foundation
of a
EUROPEAN PUBLIC OPINION RESEARCH INSTITUTE

I. INTRODUCTION

Experience in the United States and Europe has indicated the growing importance of public opinion research, whether this takes the form of representative sample surveys or more detailed research by means of long interviews with informants specially selected for the purpose in hand (motivation surveys).

Most of this research is financed by private enterprise, where there is a demand for better knowledge of the market and in particular for better guidance in its publicity; some of it, especially in Germany, France and Italy, is financed by the government or its information services, by public departments or by political parties, in order to ascertain the attitudes of users, consumers and electors.

Work carried out in this way, however important it may be from the scientific research point of view, reveals certain deficiencies:

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1. It is not always published. In particular, the work done for industrial or commercial firms or for political parties is virtually never published.
2. The most fundamental subjects, particularly in politics, sociology and social psychology, are those least covered.
3. Most surveys are carried out on a national scale and thus completely ignore the simultaneous and co-ordinated examination in different countries of European and international problems, in particular the study of nations' attitudes to one another, the public's attitudes to European institutions and the problems raised by European unification.

Three large-scale international socio-economic or socio-political surveys have, it appears, been carried out in the last few years, besides the current - unpublished - surveys of the US Information Agency: one was for the European Communities (1962), in six countries; another was for Readers Digest (1963), in seven countries; the third, which has not been published, was for a leading German publisher (1963), in nine countries.

There are however excellent institutes specialising in opinion research which are often in fairly close collaboration. What is lacking is a coherent plan of work, continuity of research and, more especially, funds to finance their work.

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As Professor Stéphane Bernard, Director of the Political Theory Centre in the University of Brussels Institute of Sociology, has stated in a recent article in the newspaper "Le Monde" (supplement for Belgium, 14 July 1967):

"Europe will only really be able to know itself when it has created a large-scale European public opinion institute endowed with a permanent team of first-rate psychologists, sociologists and statisticians (...). At a time when hundreds of millions a year are being spent on market research, it should be possible to find the necessary capital for research into the European "political market". The sociology and psychology of European integration will develop only when we have the means of studying them and these means will be effective only when the money, the tools and the brains are gathered together to their mutual benefit in a special institution".

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II. THE PROJECT

The conclusions drawn by Professor Bernard have led us to propose the following project.

A European Public Opinion Research Institute would be created, for instance in Brussels, with the following tasks:

1. A five-year plan of work on European socio-political and socio-economic programmes considered to be fundamental and of prime importance should be drawn up by all the universities of the Six working together (and possibly in liaison with universities of other countries), or by professors from the Six, or by existing university associations concerned with science, politics, social psychology, etc.

2. To collect public and private funds from all sources to finance the research. The source of funds would be made public when the Institute was founded. The accounts would be published annually, with a short report on the work.

3. To commission work from specialized institutes, preferably those equipped to ensure that work can be done concurrently and co-ordinated in different countries.

4. To publish or at least provide free access for research workers to all the work done for the Institute.

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The permanent staff should be as small as possible, since the Institute would not have to conduct the surveys itself. The staff might consist of a director (possibly part-time), an assistant and a secretary.

The budget should be of the order of Bfrs. 10 million (\$200 000) per year. It would obviously be preferable to ensure the financing of the first five years from the outset.

The legal form to be adopted would be that best suited to an international foundation of the kind: for instance in Belgium it would be a non-profit-making international association.

III. IMPLEMENTATION

The first task would be to collect views from various sources on whether the project is opportune and feasible.

Depending on the reactions obtained, a preparatory Committee of three to four persons should call a meeting of twelve to fifteen competent personalities to discuss a more detailed project and determine how it is to be carried out.

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