

“Europe in the World: A More Ambitious Agenda”

Speech by Tom Spencer, Chairman Counterpart Europe Advisory Council & Co-Chairman of the Steering Committee of the Commission on Globalisation to the “Europe in the World Workshop”, Brussels, 25th February 2002

Dear Mr Chairman

I am delighted to present my comments on the Commission’s document “Towards a Global Partnership for Sustainable Development” even if we are meeting immediately after lunch. Raymond van Ermen knows both that I have a tripartite personality and that I can be relied upon to keep you awake by being ‘politely offensive’ to almost everybody. We heard much this morning about the gap between discussion and delivery in the politics of sustainable development. I see a similar gap between the drab little document we are asked to comment on from the Commission and the stimulating sparkle of Pierre Defraigne’s analysis this morning. I think the best way to deal with the document is for me to don my professorial glasses and mark the Commission’s paper under the headings of Content, Understanding, Context and Courage. I will concentrate on questions as they are much more interesting and difficult than answers.

The Content of the paper is substantially composed of what advertising men call “boilerplate”, otherwise known as the repetition of safe and comforting formulations. A study of the paper reveals much about the process of Commission decision making. It shows the way in which internal Commission politics can drive ambitious and interesting ideas out of a final text, with a series of formulations designed to cover disagreement or lack of courage. I have long believed that we should have an annual award of Procrastination Oscars for European texts. My favourite nomination for such an Oscar in this document is on page 15 “The European Union will explore ways of strengthening the prevention and control of – and eventually terminating – illicit arms exports!”. To be fair however the document contains much good analysis and is a substantial improvement on what would have been presented last year. The key is to be found on page 4. The Commission is right to point out that “Humankind is increasingly aware that it shares a common and interlinked future”. It is the awareness that is new, not the nature of interdependence. I approve of the phrase a “global governance gap”. The Commission then goes on to helpfully define it “in order to make globalisation sustainable, there is a need for a much better balance between global market forces on the one hand and global governance and political institutions on the other”. However the Commission, having correctly identified the problem as political, institutional and aspirational, then proceeds to ignore it for the balance of the document. I therefore award the Commission 15 out of 25 for Content.

What understanding does the Commission demonstrate of the nature of the forces that have created this global governance gap? It offers thoughts towards a new synthesis on globalisation, but it is bloodless and unsatisfactory in identifying what fuels public disquiet about globalisation. I suggest that this public unease is fuelled by the Three Nos. These are No Logo, No one in charge and No future for a system based on a lie.

No Logo is a book that plays to the public sense that there are powerful forces pushing them around. It adds to the broader feeling that there is No one in charge, or at least No one who can be held responsible. Taken together these are old friends legitimacy, transparency and accountability. In addition the public are not stupid. They understand the unsustainability of a politics built on the promise of ever more economic growth. On Understanding I therefore award the Commission 12 out of 25.

What is the correct Context in which to see the Commission's document? The mandate for the document came from Gothenburg and feels as though it was written in the aftermath of the death of one demonstrator at Genoa. The delivery comes after the events of 11th September and the public execution of thousands in an act of precisely calibrated brutality, with the promise of more to come. The Context for much of the paper must therefore be the rape of the American psyche, the end of America's physical invulnerability and of its sense of "exceptionalism" and of being a republic uniquely favoured by God. The events of 11th September give us no excuse for retreating into a superior anti-Americanism, but we should not be surprised if Washington remains obsessed by these outrages. We should feel their pain, overlook the simplistic rhetoric and wait for them to once again find their balance. Above all we should not confuse the actions of one Administration with the whole future of America. If America was thinking clearly at this moment, it would take ten per cent of its proposed increase in the defence budget and devote it to development policy.

If Europe is to play its role as "a second front on the war on terrorism" it should be quietly beginning the medium term planning of a world that works. It should be constructing a coalition of the willing that regards Huntingdon's "Clash of Civilisations" as a disaster to be avoided, not an empowering justification for a military solution. Europe needs to recognise its strengths, both as a Union and as nearly thirty governments. Europeans should be laying the groundwork for such a global order, not just with the other members of the OECD but with what I would characterise as the "three crescents" and the "three giants". The Orthodox world of the Balkans and Russia is in danger of being excluded from Enlargement and it has its own historic reasons to be suspicious of the West in moralistic mood. We share with the Islamic crescent to our south centuries of experience of both confrontation and cohabitation, which we should put to good advantage at this critical moment. Beyond Islam lies the ACP world where we have contacts, experience and influence. Those of us in Counterpart who have been active in capacity building in all three of these crescents, know how important it is to take these societies with us in plans for a saner world. In addition we should be working quietly to establish common ground on the way towards global governance with India, China and Brazil. The European Union has huge advantages in such an endeavour. Its own experience leads it to understand the need for framework not guesswork in the management of partial sovereignty. A generation on from the dissolution of the European empires, we are less likely than America to be suspected of imperial ambitions of the kind reflected American aspirations to "full spectrum dominance". I see little evidence in the paper that the Commission seriously understands the nature of this opportunity. I therefore award them 10 out of 25 for Context.

Finally let me turn to question of Courage. The future of the Commission, as it emerges from its mid-life crisis, lies with the quality of its ideas, its creativity and its

courage in “taking risks for Europe”. A Council of Ministers that will soon contain 27 nations cannot even seriously discuss this challenge coherently, let alone implement it in external negotiations without a lead from the Commission. I forgive the Commission for their lack of a real plan for action in confronting the global governance gap that they have identified. I cannot forgive them for the absence of an action plan on thinking about action. You don’t stumble on answers, if you have not already identified the questions. What would Jean Monnet have made of this document? Where is the institutional creativity? Where is the realisation that you can’t create a functioning global governance issue by issue, sector by sector or institution by institution? It is clear that we need one global system not two. What would the Union look like today if it had two separately structured clusters of institutions like the Bretton Woods and the UN systems? How would it operate if each Directorate General was regarded as a separate entity and no one bothered to define the relationship between Parliament, Council, Commission or Court? It is this need for creativity in the area of globalisation and global governance that the newly launched Commission on Globalisation seeks to promote. The Commission, involving a hundred and fifty distinguished individuals from all points on the political spectrum and from around the globe, is devoted to encouraging the architecture of world that works. If there is a “democratic deficit” in Europe, how much greater is it in a globalising world that has side stepped even the partial parliamentary oversight achieved in the context of individual democratic nation states? I therefore award the Commission 5 out of 25 for Courage.

If my arithmetic is correct, the paper therefore receives 42 out of 100. This is a student who must do better. The Barcelona Summit should send this essay back to the Commission. It should invite each Commissioner to write out 100 times “I must not be gutless” and “I must have more ambition for Europe”. We should all ask the Commission to produce a beefed up and braver document for the next Summit.

