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The Werner Report Revisited

The Werner Report on the realisation by stages of economic and monetary union was drawn up against the background of the end of the transition period leading to the completion of the customs union, and the definition of the common agricultural policy. The Hanover Council has asked that renewed impetus should be given to the objective of economic and monetary union in the light of the adoption of the Single Act and the fact that completion of the internal market programme has now reached a point where it is irreversible.

This discussion paper first outlines the main features of the Werner Report, and its legislative follow-up. It then gives an assessment of the Report itself and its implementation. Finally it discusses some major developments during the post-Report period.

I. Main Features of the Report

The Werner Report gave a full definition of the final objective, which it said should be achieved by stages. A detailed description of the measures needed for the first stage was however not matched by an examination of the process by which one stage would lead to another and to the final objective. The second stage was essentially to have been a reinforced first stage. The Report also paid relatively little attention to institutional matters.

1. The Final Objective

Economic and monetary union, the Report said, would make it possible to "realise an area in which goods and services, people and capital will circulate freely and without competitive distortions, without thereby giving rise to structural or regional disequilibrium". Equilibrium within this area would be achieved, as in an individual national economy, by the mobility of factors of production and financial transfers by public and private sectors. Hence only the balance of payments of the Community as a whole would be of importance.

Monetary union would imply "the total and irreversible convertibility of currencies, the elimination of margins of fluctuation in exchange rates, the irrevocable fixing of parity rates and the complete liberation of movements of capital."

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The Report considered that many elements of economic policy-making in this union, would have to be centralised or transferred to the Community. "The creation of liquidity throughout the area and monetary and credit policy will be centralised; monetary policy in relation to the outside world will be within the jurisdiction of the Community; and policies as regards capital markets would have to be unified." Also "the essential features of the whole of the public budgets, and in particular variations in their volume, the size of balances and the methods of financing or utilizing them, will be decided at the Community level. Regional and structural policies will no longer be exclusively within the jurisdiction of the member countries; and a systematic and continuous consultation between the social partners will be ensured at the Community level."

The Report recognised that the above would require "the creation or the transformation of a certain number of Community organs to which powers until then exercised by the national authorities will have to be transferred." It did not however give detailed consideration to the institutional structure that would be necessary, but it considered that the following two Community organs would be "indispensable to the control of economic and monetary policy inside the union".

(i) A Centre of decision for economic policy, which would in itself exercise a decisive influence over Community economic policy, and especially national budgetary policies. It would also have responsibility for changes in the parity of the sole currency or the irrevocably linked currencies. The Centre would have to be politically responsible to a European Parliament.

(ii) A Community system for the central banks, which could be based on the structure of the Federal Reserve System. It would conduct the principal elements of internal monetary policy and be responsible for intervention on the foreign exchange markets.

## 2. The First and Second Stages

The primary aim of the first and second stages was to reinforce the co-ordination of economic policies so as to make it possible to decide on guidelines in common. The intention was that constraint on national policy making should be applied progressively. This was to be achieved by a strong interaction between decision-making at Community and national levels. National decisions were to be made progressively in the light of Community guidelines; and as well as there being a system for prior consultations for budgetary and monetary policy, performances would be closely monitored. A system of indicators would detect the emergence of potentially dangerous situations.

The co-ordination of general economic policy-making was to be principally the responsibility of the Council, which would fix medium-term objectives and annual programmes on the basis of a detailed procedure which was designed to lead to a permanent surveillance of the economic situation.

The Committee of Governors of the Central Banks was to play an increasingly important role in both internal and external monetary policy-making. So as to define the general guidelines of monetary and credit policy, the Committee was to have prepared the regular Council meetings which the Governors were to attend.

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The Governors would also manage the proposed system for Community exchange rate relations, which would progressively lead to a narrowing of the fluctuation bands.

"Progress in the convergence of economic and monetary policies should be such in the course of the second stage that Member States no longer have to resort on an autonomous basis to the instrument of parity adjustment."

The creation of a "European Fund for monetary co-operation" was necessary in the second stage, but it could be part of the first stage. The Fund would take over the short- and medium-term support mechanisms and would progressively manage Community reserves. In the final stage it would have been integrated into the system of Community central banks.

## II. Legislative Follow-up

The Werner Report considered that the first stage could last three years and begin at the start of 1971. In March that year the Council adopted a Decision on the strengthening of co-operation between Central Banks, and a Resolution on the attainment of economic and monetary union by stages. That Resolution accepted the definition of the final objective that had been given in the Report, and the necessity for a broadly based package of measures to strengthen the co-ordination of economic policy-making.

Over the following three years, other important measures were taken to implement the first two stages:

- 1972: the "Snake" was created, and the Council Directive on regulating international capital flows and neutralising their undesirable effects on domestic liquidity was adopted.
- 1973: the European Monetary Co-operation Fund (EMCF) was set up.
- 1974: the Council Decision on the attainment of a high degree of convergence of economic policies and the Directive on stability growth and full employment were adopted.

## III. An Assessment

The Werner Report had concluded that economic and monetary union could be achieved within a decade, provided that the political will to realise the objective was present. At first progress, at least over the legislative implementation, was rapid; but by the mid-1970's there had been an erosion of the all important political will. The final objective seemed to be unattainable for the following reasons:-

### 1. Change in the international environment

With the benefit of hindsight it can be seen that the Werner Report was written as the Bretton Woods system was collapsing, but at the time there were strong hopes that it could be preserved, and the Report assumes its framework. It could however not survive the oil and fiscal shocks and the great inflation of the 1970's. These also destroyed the policy consensus which so heavily permeates the Report's underlying philosophy and recommendations.

## 2. Intrinsic Weaknesses

The Werner Plan has a number of major intrinsic weaknesses, amongst which the following could be considered the most important:

A Lack of institutional change. Even in the first phase it was intended there would be an increasing degree of agreed constraint on national policy-making. This however was to be accomplished with no fundamental change in the institutional structure. The institutional insufficiency that would have resulted is illustrated by the fact that although the Council, prepared by the Governors and the Commission, would have been responsible for determining overall economic policy and for directing its implementation, it was not until the final stage and the creation of a center of decision of economic policy that there would have been political responsibility to the European Parliament.

A Lack of internal momentum. The first stages were self-contained and lacked a dynamic element. They set up a complete process rather than a framework within which there could be growing pressures for policy co-ordination. This led both to a lack of internal momentum within a given stage and insufficient impetus to move from stage to stage towards the final objective. Rather than trying to achieve progress through a process of dynamic disequilibrium, the method tended more towards stressing the need for parallel progress.

An inadequacy of policy conception. The procedures for policy co-ordination detailed in the Report assume a very high level of confidence in the ability of policy instruments to affect policy goals in a known and predictable way. On the budgetary policy side the procedures were dominated by medium-term plans and fine-tuning. For monetary policy, considerable weight was put on exchange rate rules. Furthermore the Report over-emphasised the importance of the harmonisation of policy instruments. Concentrating on the mechanics of how and when decisions should be made, allowed the all important question of who should make the decisions to be left somewhat unclear.

Monetary inadequacy. The Committee of Governors was to be given more power and was to have its competence extended. It would hold prior obligatory consultations to ensure the co-ordination of domestic monetary and credit policies. The scope of its powers relative to those of the Council was however ambiguous. The Report stated that it should lay down the guidelines for the conduct of monetary policy "having regard" for the conclusions of the Council, whose meetings it would help to prepare.

## 3. Incomplete Implementation

Given the changes in the international economic environment, and these intrinsic weaknesses, the first stage of the Werner Plan would have in any case had difficulty in leading to economic and monetary union. But also the implementation did not fully correspond to the letter or the spirit of the Report.

Lack of accompanying policies. The Werner Report and the 1971 Resolution stressed the need broadly-based programmes covering the further harmonisation of indirect and direct taxation, more developed regional and structural policies, better integration of financial markets and the liberalisation of capital movements as well as the further co-ordination of

budgetary and monetary policies. These other policies were however neglected. The initial actions only concerned limiting exchange rate fluctuations; and the 1974 Convergence Decision concentrated largely on the procedures for the co-ordination of budgetary policy.

Lack of interaction between the Community and the Member States over policy-making. The procedures laid down in the 1974 Decision for the co-ordination of policy are less interactive than those proposed in the Werner Report. Rather than seeing a continuous interaction between policy-making at the Community and national levels which could have led to a progressive constraint on national policy-making, the procedures of the 1974 Decision specify a process in which guidelines are determined at the Community level and then passed on to the national level. The all important prior consultation is absent, and there is no internal pressure on Members to follow the guidelines given at the Community level. Procedures were specified for ex-post monitoring and giving recommendations, but these were rarely used.

Lack of balance in the responsibilities for economic and monetary policies. The ambiguity in the Report over the responsibilities for the conduct of monetary policy were resolved by giving overall responsibilities clearly to the Council. Whereas the Report had said that monetary policies should be determined "having regard" for the guidelines for general economic policy, the 1971 Resolution said that monetary policy should be co-ordinated while "observing" these guidelines. Furthermore the EMCF was put firmly under the control of the Council, whereas the Report had said that it should be under the control of Governors of the Central Banks.

Lack of powers for the Committee Governors. In contrast the Committee of Governors was not given extended powers to play an increasingly important role in the co-ordination of monetary and credit policy as had been called for in the Report. Procedures were not put in place, as had been recommended, for obligatory prior consultations and to allow the Committee to lay down the general guidelines of monetary and credit policy for the Community.

#### IV. The Post-Werner Report Period

From the mid-1970's onwards the Werner Report ceased to be a major point of reference. Developments in the economic environment, the policy consensus and the Community increasingly changed the background against which progress towards economic and monetary union could be considered. Although the Community entered a difficult phase as it absorbed new Members within an unchanged framework and against a hostile economic environment there were also important developments. Amongst these, as well as enlargement itself, should be included:-

- in 1974 the European Council was born to supersede the earlier summit meetings held at irregular intervals;
- in 1975 the first European Regional Development Fund was set up and the first Lomé convention signed;
- in 1977 the sixth VAT Directive which established a uniform basis for collection was adopted; and

- in 1979 the first direct elections to the European Parliament were held.

### 1. The Economic Environment

Two features can be singled out as of primary importance. First inflation. The Werner report was written against the background of a relatively long period of price stability. By contrast the subsequent decade saw the average inflation rate in the Community rising well above 10 per cent. Over the 1980's, the average inflation rate in the Community has again been brought down to levels not seen since the 1960's. The experiences with high inflation and with the severity of the measures necessary to curb inflation once it has permeated an economic system have emphasised the need for monetary arrangements that promote and ensure stability.

Second, international monetary arrangements have also moved through a complete cycle. The Werner Report was written as the dollar-denominated Bretton Woods System was collapsing. There then followed a period of floating exchange rate in which policy co-ordination was at a minimum. More recently there has been an evolution towards a more managed and multi-polar system. Policy co-ordination has been strengthened through multi-lateral surveillance procedures, and currency arrangements have been developed.

### 2. Policy Consensus

Towards the end of the 1960's there was a remarkable consensus on policy making. The evidence seemed to strongly support the effectiveness of medium-term plans and fine-tuning. In the 1970's experiences with stagflation destroyed this consensus. Now a new consensus has developed in which attention has shifted towards medium-term financial stability, the supply-side of the economy and structural policies. Part of the legacy of the earlier consensus is however large budget deficits and a high level of government debt. When the Werner Report was drafted, budgets in the Community were in approximate balance. Deficits subsequently peaked at over 5 per cent of GDP and are still above 4 per cent. Government debt at the beginning of the 1970's averaged under 40% of GDP, whereas it now averages over 70%.

### 3. The Community

Recently a renewed dynamism has been returned to the Community.

The European Monetary System was created in 1979, with the primary objective of establishing a zone of monetary stability, involving both low inflation and stable exchange rates. The exchange rate constraint has acted as a focal point for improved policy co-ordination, and the EMS has provided a framework to enhance multilateral surveillance within the Community. During recent years, realignments have generally been accompanied by economic adjustment measures implemented by devaluing countries. More generally, participants have gradually opted for a strong currency policy stance, so putting most emphasis on domestic adjustment measures. The System has evolved in response to changes in the economic and financial environment, especially improved convergence and increased capital mobility. Most recently the Basle/Nyborg agreement of September 1987 made some important modifications to the mechanisms of the system which result in a more balanced implementation of the exchange rate commitment by all participants. The procedures for surveillance were also strengthened. The fundamental objectives of the EMS remain unaltered, but

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the Basle/Nyborg agreement marks the beginning of a new phase, and experience has shown that the strengthened system has been able to cope well with the new situation even in adverse external circumstances.

The use of the ECU within the System has been limited for a number of reasons, including a creation method relying on renewable swaps which makes the amount of ECU in the System dependent upon the dollar exchange rate and the price of gold. In contrast, the non-official use of the ECU has developed considerably. The financial sector treats the ECU in the same way as any national currency, and all the normal instruments are available in ECU, which has secured a significant place on the world bond markets. More recently the non-financial use has also been increasing. A growing number of companies and organisations use the ECU for denominating balance sheets and transactions. It can be expected that these developments will in turn further stimulate its financial use.

Full Capital Mobility. In May 1986 the Commission put forward a programme for the liberalisation of capital movements in the Community, the first part of which was adopted in November of that year. In November 1987 proposals for the creation of a European financial area, including the full liberalisation of capital movement, were tabled. These were adopted by the ECO/FIN Council of June 1988 and will be implemented by most Members States by 1990. Full capital mobility will entail further developments in other areas. For example, as it will increase the potential for exchange rate instability, it will be necessary to further reinforce the EMS. Also, as the Werner Report recognised, measures will have to be taken so that differences between tax regimes, especially for interest payments on fixed income securities, do not lead to distortions or increased fiscal evasion.

The Single European Act is the first significant modification to the Treaty of Rome. Its enactment was possible because the internal market programme laid out in the White Paper of 1988 had given a new and concrete objective to the Community, together with a more streamlined method based on mutual recognition rather than full harmonisation and a fixed time-table. The Single European Act also makes changes that are vital to ensuring that the internal market programme can be completed within the specified time scale. In particular it greatly expands the scope of majority voting, and gives an improved institutional balance within the Community with a strengthened role for the Parliament.

The Brussels European Council of February 1988 agreed on a package of measures which, as well as putting the Community budget on a solid basis and reinforcing the reforms of the common agricultural policy, will lead to a doubling in real terms of the Structural funds. By 1992 Portugal, Greece and Ireland will be receiving inflows of grants and loans from the Community amounting to between 3.1/2 and 6.1/2% of their GDP (and hence 15% to 30% of their gross investments). The transfers to Spain and Italy could amount to something in the order of 1% of GDP.

## V. Conclusions

The link between the free movement of goods, services and capital and the need to create an economic and monetary union was the point of departure of the Werner Report; and the mandate from the Hanover Council also comes at a time when significant progress is being made towards completing the

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internal market. The two processes are self-reinforcing, and the full potential of the large internal market will only be realised with satisfactory monetary arrangements.

Since the Werner Report was written many of its recommendations have been implemented and there have been significant developments going beyond those that the Report considered to be necessary for the first steps towards economic and monetary union. That ultimate goal however still remains unachieved. This is partly because of unfavourable external circumstances, but also because of intrinsic weaknesses in the approach and an inadequate implementation. A better understanding of these can only increase the chances of future success.