

Will Europe Accept Think Tank Transplant?

A proposal to create an American-style, public policy think tank in Europe appears to have passed the point of no return in the official bargaining process. The major question now seems less whether it will survive the process, than whether such a think tank will gain the independent status its advocates feel is necessary if it is to achieve its full potential as a European version of a Brookings Institution.

The idea for a "Euro-Brookings," as it has been called, has been fostered by the Ford Foundation. Ford officials did the original spadework for the project and the foundation has indicated that in the right circumstances it would offer substantial help with initial financing. Support for the proposal appears to be warm in European government and academic quarters, but establishment of an independent research institute would require Europeans to overcome strong inhibitions about putting government funds into any organization which governments would not control and with whose analyses they might not always be comfortable.

In November, the idea cleared its first major hurdle when the European Communities Commission—the Brussels-based executive of the nine-country EC—formally recommended that the EC Council of Ministers approve the idea and give the commission a mandate to negotiate establishment of a "European Economic and Social Policy Research Institute" with the eight non-EC countries which have expressed interest in the project.

Ford Foundation officers played a central part in the discussions which preceded the formal EC action. The foundation was earlier identified with the idea for a Brookings-like research institute in Britain (*Science*, 18 February 1977). The British government eventually backed away from underwriting the project for Britain alone, but is reportedly taking a positive attitude toward a more broadly based institution.

Persevering, foundation officials carried on conversations on the think tank idea with a large number of European officials and opinion-makers during 1977. Ford sponsored two meetings on the subject at Versailles, in November 1977 and March 1978. The result was confirmation from these representative gatherings from the 17 Western European nations that the matter should be pursued.

After the March meeting, a planning group was set up and Ford withdrew from active participation in the project. The group, however, asked that contact with the foundation be maintained and the foundation delegated Peter Ruof, who has since been serving as secretary of the planning group, although not in the capacity of a member of the Ford staff. Ruof worked for a time for the EC Commission and is a Ford program officer who deals with the foundation's European activities.

During the discussions, there was general agreement that the institute should be chartered through an international agreement among European governments. But there was initial uncertainty as to whether EC countries should participate as individual governments or collectively, through the EC. The EC member nations decided that making contributions through the EC budget would probably facilitate approval by the parliaments of individual nations and generally simplify the process. Membership through the EC

would also serve to get the EC Commission involved, which was regarded as essential.

Within the EC organization, the think tank idea came into conflict with a 1975 proposal for a medium-term economic research institute. This proposal had been blocked by the Germans because of its potential impact on other research centers, but the commission was viewed as still interested in the idea. By summer, however, the commission had dropped the older project although perhaps with the thought that some of its purposes might be accomplished through the new institute. And the recommendations on the new institute were prepared.

The matter is now in the hands of the committee of permanent representatives in Brussels—in effect, the ambassadors to the EC of the member nations. This group will advise their ministers on how to vote on the matter. If, as seems a good bet, the ministers approve, negotiations with the non-EC countries will begin promptly.

It is difficult to gauge the strength of the opposition to the think tank idea. The European press has reported some concern among non-EC countries about EC intentions to tie the new institution closely to the EC. If the draft which emerges specifies that the think tank should concentrate on EC issues then friction is likely. Also last autumn, there were reports of opposition from existing institutions which do policy studies. Plans call for part of the budget of the new institute to be devoted to joint research with other research organizations and this may defuse the opposition.

Backers of the think tank idea seem to count on the consensus built during the preliminary discussions to help during the negotiation process. As envisioned, the institute would do research and analysis on a broad range of social and economic issues as the Washington-based Brookings Institution now does. Subjects such as European integration, economic management, and social change have been mentioned as likely targets. Press reports suggest the institute would have a nucleus of 30 to 40 researchers with international reputations as public policy analysts. An annual budget of \$5 million to \$7 million has been mentioned, which puts it roughly in scale with Brookings.

The effort to get agreement among EC countries, then between EC and non-EC countries, and then to return to the EC for a final necessary OK by the European Parliament and the Economic and Social Committee is in itself something of an exercise in European integration. And if the proposal surmounts these hurdles, then the inevitable competition over location of the institute will probably occur. Only this time 17 countries could be vying to be host.

But the key question remains the degree of independence the institute would be allowed. Freedom to publish analyses and recommendations is regarded as essential. The makeup of the board of directors and the role of the president are other potential make-or-break issues. The way Europeans operate, their system of checks and balances, trades and vetoes, can be bewildering to Americans. But most of the time it seems to work to their satisfaction. However, in the case of the think tank, new departures are required since the Europeans in public policy matters have no tradition of chancing the occasional bite on the hand that feeds.—JOHN WALSH