

## ***The Copenhagen European Summit of 1973*** **Messy but ultimately productive?**

‘On most counts the European Community summit meeting in Copenhagen must be regarded as a serious disappointment.’<sup>1</sup> The *Financial Times* assessment of the meeting, published the day after it had finished, was perhaps a little harsh. Other portions of the press were less critical.<sup>2</sup> But the FT piece did capture a widespread sense that the meeting had been chaotic and poorly organised. This chapter will hence begin by seeking to understand why the Copenhagen summit has come to be seen as test-case of how *not* to organise a top-level meeting in Europe. This section will highlight the hurry in which it was convened, the very serious disagreements about the purpose, composition and organisation of the summit, and the way in which it was partially overtaken by events, whether the unplanned arrival of a high-level Arab delegation or the domestic political crisis to afflict Denmark, the host country. The piece will then go on to suggest, however, that despite its ramshackle organisation and uncertain planning, the summit was actually rather more constructive and useful than might have been expected. In particular, it probably deserves to be seen as an important step in the Community’s somewhat uncertain progress towards institutionalising and regularising high-level meetings – a process which would culminate the following year with agreement to accept Valéry Giscard d’Estaing’s proposal to establish the European Council. Indeed, some of the very weaknesses of the Copenhagen encounter, may well have fed through into the design of the French European Council proposal.

The first problem with the Copenhagen summit was that it was convened at very short notice. French President Georges Pompidou’s suggestion that the leaders of the Nine should meet ‘before the end of the year’ had been made after the French cabinet meeting on October 31, 1973. Letters setting out his views had immediately been sent to his counterparts in all Community capitals.<sup>3</sup> But given the inadvisability of meeting too close to Christmas or the New Year, this left only about six weeks for the Danish government,

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<sup>1</sup> ‘Disappointing Summit’, *Financial Times*, 17.12.1973, p.12

<sup>2</sup> See for instance ‘Europe passes a test’, *The Guardian*, 17.12.1973, p.10

<sup>3</sup> United Kingdom National Archives (henceforward UKNA), PREM 15/1385, Pompidou to Heath, 31.10.1973. The French president also announced his intention to the press: ‘Pompidou proposes summit to plan joint EEC front’, *The Guardian*, 1.11.1973, p.2.

which held the European Economic Community (EEC)'s rotating Council presidency, to organise a major international encounter. The timing alone was thus far from propitious.

Even more serious than the haste with which the summit had to be organised were the very serious divisions amongst the participating governments about what the purpose of the top-level encounter should be and who exactly should take part. Pompidou's invitation made very clear that for the French this meeting was primarily – maybe exclusively – to centre on foreign affairs, and especially the ongoing crisis in the Middle East. His statement following the French Council of Ministers, relayed verbatim to his European counterparts and to the press, lamented the way in which the ceasefire and attempts to start peace negotiations following the Yom Kippur war 'have been prepared and put into effect without any participation by Europe.' The proposed summit would hence serve to 'demonstrate the solidity of the construction of Europe, as well as its capacity to contribute to the solution of world problems.'<sup>4</sup> Many of his European counterparts, however, while in most cases ready to talk about Europe's collective approach to the Middle East crisis, also wanted to use the occasion to discuss the strategy and direction of the European Community.<sup>5</sup> This should be an EEC affair, not just a European Political Cooperation (EPC) one, to use the jargon of the time.<sup>6</sup> As such it would return to many of the issues discussed amongst the six founding members and the three new member states, at the previous major European summit meeting, held in Paris in October 1972.<sup>7</sup>

Interconnected to this disagreement about the purpose of the summit, were divided views on who should be invited to take part. For Pompidou this should be a meeting of European leaders only, reserved exclusively for the nine heads of government representing

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<sup>4</sup> UKNA, PREM 15/1385, Pompidou to Heath, 31.10.1973. For the wider context, see Aurélie Elisa Gfeller, *Building a European Identity: France, the United States, and the Oil Shock, 1973-1974* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2012) esp. chapter 3.

<sup>5</sup> UKNA, PREM 15/1385, Jørgensen to Pompidou, 2.11.1973

<sup>6</sup> The 'European Political Cooperation' mechanism had been launched in 1970 with the intention of allowing the members of the European Community to coordinate their foreign policies on a primarily intergovernmental basis. Daniel Möckli, *European Foreign Policy during the Cold War: Heath, Brandt, Pompidou and the Dream of Political Unity* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2008); Maria Gainar, *Aux origines de la diplomatie européenne: les neuf et la coopération politique européenne de 1973 à 1980* (Brussels: P.I.E. Peter Lang, 2012).

<sup>7</sup> For the statement which had been issued by the Community leaders after the Paris summit, see [https://www.cvce.eu/content/publication/1999/1/1/b1dd3d57-5f31-4796-85c3-cfd2210d6901/publishable\\_en.pdf](https://www.cvce.eu/content/publication/1999/1/1/b1dd3d57-5f31-4796-85c3-cfd2210d6901/publishable_en.pdf) (last accessed March 10, 2025)

each of the nine member states.<sup>8</sup> Once diplomats and ministers from the countries invited began to meet to discuss practical arrangements, it immediately became clear that several member states were deeply unhappy with this highly restricted format and wanted foreign ministers to participate also.<sup>9</sup> To some extent this reflected constitutional niceties and the problems of balance in coalition governments. In the Netherlands, as its representatives made clear, the Foreign Minister bore prime responsibility for foreign policy matters, and it was hence inappropriate that the Prime Minister should participate alone in a high-level discussion of foreign affairs. In Belgium, Italy and Germany meanwhile, the tendency to give the foreign affairs post to the junior partner in a coalition, made it deeply problematic for only the Prime Minister or Chancellor to attend. But as British diplomats made clear in their messages back to London, lying behind many of these legalistic objections, was also a significant level of nervousness on the part of the leaders of some of the smaller European countries at their ability to hold their own in a leaders-only discussion of foreign policy questions. In such circumstances, many feared, it would be the big beasts of the jungle, notably the French President, the British Prime Minister and the German Chancellor who were likely to dominate proceedings in a way that was unacceptable to the smaller European member states.<sup>10</sup> The involvement of Foreign Ministers also would therefore serve to level the playing field.

Equal controversy surrounded the participation of the European Commission President. For Pompidou, once more, the situation was clear. This was to be a discussion of foreign policy matters – a policy area over which the French did not believe that the European Commission held any responsibility – and as such it would not be appropriate for François-Xavier Ortoli to take part.<sup>11</sup> But once it became apparent that multiple other governments were eager to use the occasion to discuss Community affairs, as well as foreign policy, the case for Ortoli to be invited became indisputable to many. Here too the

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<sup>8</sup> UKNA, PREM 15/1385, Pompidou to Heath, 31.10.1973.

<sup>9</sup> UKNA, PREM 15/1385, Tel. 478, Wright to FCO, 14.11.1973

<sup>10</sup> UKNA, PREM 15/1385, Tel. 1559, Tomkins to FCO, 13.11.1973

<sup>11</sup> For a discussion of the controversy over Commission participation in the EPC process, see Gairar, *Aux origines de la diplomatie européenne*, 70–71. See also John Young, “The Summit Is Dead. Long Live the European Council”: Britain and the Question of Regular Leaders’ Meetings in the European Community, 1973–1975’, *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy* 4, no. 3 (1 January 2009): 327, <https://doi.org/10.1163/187119109X455937>.

French quickly found their original conception of the occasion strongly contested by their partners and were eventually obliged to yield ground, accepting that the Commission president should be involved in those sessions devoted to EEC business.<sup>12</sup>

Underpinning these rows around who should be there was a deeper disagreement about the type of occasion that the summit should be. In French eyes – supported to a very large extent by the British and German leaders also<sup>13</sup> – the summit meeting should be an intimate and restricted affair, an informal gathering where Europe's senior leaders should meet together, talk freely, and establish whether or not there was scope to forge a common European policy, especially with regard to the Middle East. In order to maximise the chances of the chemistry proving effective, participation should be highly restricted, and the informality boosted by a very light-touch level of preparation. Leaders would thus be at liberty to speak their mind – and in the process perhaps discover unexpected levels of agreement. But this fashionable belief in the potential benefits of a 'fire-side chat' – or a family meeting as the French President styled it in his conversations with Edward Heath, the British Prime Minister<sup>14</sup> – rang very serious alarm bells for some European leaders.<sup>15</sup> Instead, they would prefer a much more conscientiously choreographed occasion, with the agenda, the likely outcomes, even the press communiqué discussed extensively in advance, and the leaders flanked by not just their foreign ministers but also by other senior aides. This would minimise the chances of their being stampeded into a position that they did not want to take, or that was contrary to longstanding national stances.<sup>16</sup> Similarly, the involvement of the Commission President would act as a reassuring guarantee that Community conventions would be respected and that positions were not adopted that were

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<sup>12</sup> By mid-November the French had more or less yielded to pressure from their partners over this. See UKNA, PREM 15/2093, Heath to Brandt, 21.11.1973.

<sup>13</sup> For Heath's ideas, see UKNA, PREM 15/1385, tel. 243, FCO to EC capitals, 3.11.1973. This guidance telegram drew a specific contrast between the type of occasion envisaged and the large-scale Paris summit of October 1972: 'What the Prime Minister had in mind is a series of more intimate and informal meetings.'

<sup>14</sup> UKNA, PREM 15/2093, 'Record of a Conversation between the Prime Minister and the President of the French Republic at Chequers at 11.45 A.M. on Friday 16 November 1973.'

<sup>15</sup> A similar belief in the merits of allowing senior leaders to meet in as informal a fashion as possible, underpinned the original vision of G7 summitry, although here too the process quickly lost much of its informality and became more 'bureaucratized'. Robert D. Putnam and Nicholas Bayne, *Hanging Together: The Seven-Power Summits* (Harvard University Press, 1984); Emmanuel Mourlon-Druol and Federico Romero, *International Summitry and Global Governance: The Rise of the G7 and the European Council, 1974-1991* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014).

<sup>16</sup> UKNA, PREM 15/1385, Alexander to Bridges, 16.11.1973

ran contrary to *Communautaire* norms or that contradicted other European agreements.<sup>17</sup> To draw a musical comparison, the French wanted an improvised jam session, with a restricted group of jazz soloists riffing in ways that might surprise all involved but could, if the magic worked, lead to a remarkable outcome; many of their small country counterparts by contrast wanted a full symphony orchestra playing a piece that was composed in advance and conducted in restrained and careful manner, even if this limited the scope for either surprise or creativity. The stakes were too high for spontaneous improvisation.<sup>18</sup>

Eventually, the intensive intergovernmental and Community level discussions of these various open questions resulted in agreement, albeit a somewhat fragile one. It was hence fairly quickly decided that both foreign policy matters and Community issues ought to be covered.<sup>19</sup> Similarly, the French soon realised it would be impossible to prevent the foreign ministers from also attending, but did succeed in persuading the Danish organisers to ensure that for a significant part of the summit's duration, the leaders and their foreign ministers would meet separately, only coming together for a plenary in the final hours of the conference.<sup>20</sup> Grudgingly the French also gave ground on the Commission president's involvement, conceding that Ortolí should be in Copenhagen and able to participate, albeit only when Community affairs were being discussed.<sup>21</sup> He would dine with the foreign ministers, however, and not with the leaders themselves. Some degree of preparation of the agenda and the substance of discussion was also allowed, although quite a lot of this happened bilaterally between the Danes and some of their partners, rather than multilaterally through COREPER or the assembled political directors.<sup>22</sup> The British thus sent the Danes significant portions of a would-be communiqué, at least some of which seems to have found itself more or less verbatim into the text used by the hosts in their

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<sup>17</sup> UKNA, PREM 15/1385, Wright to FCO, 14.11.1973. The summary of the views about summitry expressed at the Political Directors' dinner, ended 'Tide seems to be running against the fireside chat approach in favour of a more structured meeting, though not, of course, on the scale of the Paris summit.'

<sup>18</sup> For a very acute assessment of the smaller countries' apprehensions, set in the context not just of summitry but also disagreements over the best response to the OPEC boycott, see UKNA, FCO 59/1087, tel. 5479, 'Oil, the summit and the end-of-year package', 12.11.1973.

<sup>19</sup> Pompidou had more or less conceded this point by the second week of November: UKNA, PREM 15/1385, Tel. 1559, Tomkins to FCO, 13.11.1973.

<sup>20</sup> See undated annex to UKNA, PREM 15/1385, Alexander to Bridges, 16.11.1973

<sup>21</sup> UKNA, PREM 15/2093, Heath to Brandt, 21.11.1973.

<sup>22</sup> The British remained wary of French complaints about too much preparation. UKNA, PREM 15/1385, tel. 1651, Tomkins to FCO, 30.11.1973.

meetings with the press; other member states may have done something similar.<sup>23</sup> And there was an intensive trilateral set of preparatory meetings, letters and telephone conversations amongst the big three, Pompidou, Heath and Willy Brandt, the German Chancellor.<sup>24</sup> So deep were the differences between the underlying philosophies, though, that almost all of these compromises were likely to be fragile, and liable to be upset by last minute rows or unexpected developments.<sup>25</sup>

Summit preparations were also buffeted by a series of outside events. The first of these was the collapse of the Danish government, which was due to serve as host of the event. On November 8, just six days after accepting the French call to organise the summit, the Social Democratic government of Anker Jørgensen was forced to call a general election, after a right-wing member of the government resigned.<sup>26</sup> This inevitably distracted many of the key Danish decision-makers at precisely the time when they most needed to be focusing on their European responsibilities. Rather than preparing the agenda, smoothing out practical difficulties, or sounding out their EEC partners before they assembled at the Summit, the leading Danish politicians were out on the campaign trail, seeking to woo voters. And the outcome of the elections held on December 4 only made matters worse, with both the Social Democrats and the Conservatives losing ground to a populist, Poujadist party. This made the formation of a new government a challenging and almost certainly slow affair. Jørgensen remained in office as a care-taker Prime Minister, admittedly, but his ability act as a forceful or creative host which was probably always open to doubt, was decisively undermined. Instead, there would be a real question mark over whether a

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<sup>23</sup> See e.g., UKNA, PREM 15/2041, Tel. 374, Douglas-Home to Copenhagen, 'Summit Conclusions', 13.12.1973

<sup>24</sup> UKNA, PREM 15/1385, Heath to Brandt, 3.11.1973; Heath to Pompidou, 3.11.1973; Brandt to Heath, 7.11.1973; 'Extract from PM's talk with Herr Brandt on 12.11.1973 at 10 Downing St.'; Heath to Brandt, 21.11.1973; Brandt to Heath, 29.11.1973; Draft messages (undated but clearly in early December) to Brandt and Pompidou. PREM 15/2041, 'Record of a telephone conversation between the Prime Minister and the Federal German Chancellor, Herr Willy Brandt, at 6.45 PM on Thursday, 13 December 1973'. PREM 15/2093, 'Record of a Conversation between the Prime Minister and the President of the French Republic at Chequers at 11.45 A.M. on Friday 16 November 1973'. See also *Akten zur Auswärtigen Politik der Bundesrepublik Deutschland 1973*, vol. III, docs. 371 & 393.

<sup>25</sup> UKNA, PREM 15/2041, Butler to Wright, 'Summit Arrangements', 6.12.1973.

<sup>26</sup> For the timing of the Danish reply to the French invitation, UKNA, PREM 15/1385, 'Free Translation of a letter dated November 2, from the Danish Prime Minister to President Pompidou.'

government without a parliamentary majority would be able to enter into any binding European commitments at all.<sup>27</sup>

A second outside distraction soon arrived in the form of Henry Kissinger's Pilgrim Speech made in London on December 12 – launching new ideas for a concerted Western response to the OPEC oil embargo.<sup>28</sup> This went to the heart of one of the main issues that the European Community leaders were due to discuss at Copenhagen. But while this did at one level add further significance to the discussions amongst the Nine, it also made it harder for the European leaders to reach consensus, since the French in particular were very wary of meekly falling in behind an American lead.<sup>29</sup> And the very fact that the Nine were meeting so soon after the American Secretary of State had outlined his views, created the sense, not just amongst the press covering the summit, but also amongst some of the participants themselves, that the Nine ought to use their meeting to formulate a joint response. Expectations had thus been raised still further, while the likelihood of easy agreement being reached had diminished significantly.

Third and most notoriously, the summit meeting would also be visited by a delegation of Arab ministers seeking to place further pressure on the Nine.<sup>30</sup> The origins of this visit appear to lie in a decision taken by the Arab nations at their own summit in Algiers to send delegations to a number of important countries, seeking to explain their views of the ongoing crisis in the Middle East. Europe was a particularly important target of this lobbying effort. It was hence decided that six Arab Foreign Ministers would invite themselves to Copenhagen at the same time as the European leaders were meeting.<sup>31</sup> This sudden development, news of which only broke three days before the European leaders were due to assemble, added further procedural and organisational uncertainty to the whole event, since it was entirely unclear who should meet the Arab delegation, whether substantive negotiations with them should be conducted, and if so by whom. The proper

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<sup>27</sup> UKNA, PREM 15/2041, 'Denmark Internal Situation', British Embassy, Copenhagen, 13.12.1973. See also Thorsten Boring Olsen's chapter in this volume for the wider context.

<sup>28</sup> The text of the speech itself is available at: <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v38p1/d24> (last accessed March 11, 2025). For an FCO analysis of the speech, see UKNA, PREM 15/2041, PM/73/93, 'Copenhagen Summit: Kissinger's Proposal on Energy', 13.12.1973

<sup>29</sup> Gfeller, *Building a European Identity*, 120–22.

<sup>30</sup> 'Arabs to lobby EEC', *The Guardian*, 13.12.1973, p.1.

<sup>31</sup> UKNA, PREM 15/2041, Tel. No. 371, Douglas-Home to UKREP, 12.12.1973

response had still not been decided when the leaders themselves assembled. As the British record of the summit recorded laconically, 'An interminable procedural discussion then followed', which was only finally resolved when the Nine leaders agreed to leave it to their foreign ministers to receive the Arab delegation, and then report back accordingly.<sup>32</sup> The Arab visit also made even harder Europe's delicate political balancing act on Middle Eastern affairs, since at least one member state demanded that the Israeli government also be allowed to present their views directly to Europe's assembled leaders, so as to counterbalance the Arab pleas.<sup>33</sup> An event that had been launched by Pompidou in the hope of allowing Europe collectively to regain control of events that had been happening without its involvement, was in great danger of being disrupted by that same rush of global developments.

### **Mixed outcomes**

All of these rather unpropitious circumstances need to be borne in mind when seeking to make any form of assessment of the Copenhagen summit outcomes. Indeed, Heath's account of the meeting sent to President Richard Nixon a few weeks after the event felt obliged to start with a couple of paragraphs outlining many of the various problems mentioned in the preceding section. 'In spite of this, the summit did some useful work', the British PM suggested.<sup>34</sup> But the accuracy of Heath's resolutely upbeat assessment depends to a very large extent on which aspect of the summit's outcomes is focused upon.<sup>35</sup>

The Declaration on European Identity upon which this volume mainly focuses was, of course, one such outcome, or at least seemingly so. I will leave it to the many other contributors to this volume who have zeroed in on the text of the declaration itself and on the various national assessments of what had been agreed, to judge its utility or wider significance. But it is probably worth underlining that it was not really something produced at the Copenhagen Summit itself, but rather a text that had been in preparation amongst

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<sup>32</sup> UKNA, PREM 15/2041, 'Note for the Record', 14.12.1973.

<sup>33</sup> Brandt took this line at Copenhagen itself. UKNA, PREM 15/2041, 'Note for the Record', 14.12.1973

<sup>34</sup> UKNA, PREM 15/2041, Cabinet Office to White House, 'Message from the Prime Minister to President Nixon', 30.12.1973.

<sup>35</sup> In his memoirs, Heath felt less need to emphasise the positive, describing the Copenhagen gathering as 'the worst summit that I ever experienced.' Edward Heath, *The Course of My Life : My Autobiography* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1998), 393.



the Nine since the summer of 1973 as part of the Community's wider response to Kissinger's 'Year of Europe' initiative, and which just happened to be ready to be signed off by the assembled European leaders when they met in the Danish capital. It appears to have been the Belgians who first suggested that the summit might be an opportune moment to 'launch' the document, raising the possibility in a letter that the Belgian PM addressed to Pompidou in early November.<sup>36</sup> But its discussion long pre-dated the summit preparations, and it would have been 'issued' by the Nine, almost certainly in exactly the same form and pretty much at the same moment, even had Pompidou not suggested a European summit in late 1973.<sup>37</sup> It is hence questionable whether it really belongs in any more general assessment of the Copenhagen meeting.

Both the heads of government and the foreign ministers did, by contrast, discuss the crisis in the Middle East and its knock-on effects in terms of Europe's energy dependency. Substantial portions of the communiqué issued at the summit's end are hence devoted to the subject.<sup>38</sup> But in neither case was a breakthrough achieved. On the contrary, the summit meeting did little more than confirm pre-existing European divisions on both subjects. It thus proved impossible, for example, to devise the immediate European response to Kissinger's call for an 'Energy Action Group' that some, including the UK government, had looked for.<sup>39</sup> Similarly British hopes of using the encounter to rally support for a sizeable regional development fund – designed to channel money towards poorer regions of the Community and in the process potentially compensate a country like the UK for the rather meagre receipts it was likely to receive from the Community's main existing form of expenditure, namely the Common Agricultural Policy – were largely frustrated. The conference communiqué did refer to an agreement to establish the fund by the start of 1974.<sup>40</sup> But the exchanges that Heath and his foreign secretary, Alec Douglas-Home had had with their counterparts about the likely sums that regional fund would

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<sup>36</sup> UKNA, PREM 15/1385, Leburton to Pompidou, 10.11.1973.

<sup>37</sup> Prior to this volume, the two most authoritative accounts of the Declaration's emergence were Möckli, *European Foreign Policy during the Cold War*, 163–83 & 219–24; Gfeller, *Building a European Identity*, 58–72.

<sup>38</sup> For the text of the communiqué, see [https://aei.pitt.edu/56742/1/BN\\_29.73.pdf](https://aei.pitt.edu/56742/1/BN_29.73.pdf) (last accessed March 11, 2025).

<sup>39</sup> For British hopes along these lines, see UKNA, PREM 15/2041, PM/73/93, 'Copenhagen Summit: Kissinger's Proposal on Energy', 13.12.1973

<sup>40</sup> [https://aei.pitt.edu/1439/1/copenhagen\\_1973.pdf](https://aei.pitt.edu/1439/1/copenhagen_1973.pdf) (last accessed March 11, 2025)

dispose of strongly suggested that the money available was likely to be far less than the British had hoped for. The German government in particular were not prepared to consider anything like the size of fund that the British had had in mind.<sup>41</sup> It was hence unsurprising that within days of the summit ending a major Anglo-German spat had erupted over the Regional Development Fund, with the British retaliating to Bonn's refusal provide sufficient funds for regional aid by wielding its veto over a series of procedural decisions intended to aid discussion of a common energy policy.<sup>42</sup> Far from accomplishing a breakthrough, the summit exchanges seemed, if anything, to have deepened European discord over both energy policy and regional assistance.<sup>43</sup>

Indeed, Declaration on European identity apart, the only real grounds for viewing Copenhagen as anything other than a disappointment, if not outright failure, would be the manner in which the conference marked an important milestone on the road to regularising European summitry. There had been some momentum already in this direction, admittedly. Pompidou had talked about the greater use of European summitry in both his October 31 comments and his earlier press conference of September 27.<sup>44</sup> Heath too had called for twice yearly meetings when addressing the Conservative Party Conference in September.<sup>45</sup> And Brandt had expressed his willingness to move in this direction to both the British and French leaders.<sup>46</sup> But as had become very clear during the testing preparatory discussions prior to the Copenhagen summit, there was still a great deal of disagreement about the precise modalities of summitry. And there were also signs of a lingering suspicion, especially amongst the Benelux states and perhaps the Dutch in particular, that more frequent encounters amongst the Community's leaders would reinforce the position of the larger and stronger member states at the expense of the weaker and smaller countries.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> 'Germany blocks UK hope on regional aid policy', *Financial Times*, 17.12.1973

<sup>42</sup> 'UK uses veto after row over regions', *Financial Times*, 19.12.1973

<sup>43</sup> Both policy areas would go on proving consistently sterile ground for Community cooperation for much of the rest of the 1970s.

<sup>44</sup> For the September 27 press conference, see <https://www.georges-pompidou.org/portail-archives/conference-presse-27-septembre-1973> (last accessed March 11, 2025).

<sup>45</sup> Young, "The Summit Is Dead. Long Live the European Council", 326.

<sup>46</sup> UKNA, PREM 15/1385, Brandt to Heath, 7.11.1973; *AAPD 1973*, vol. III, doc. 393.

<sup>47</sup> The contrast between British enthusiasm for institutionalised summitry and Belgian doubts comes through clearly from UKNA, PREM 15/1385, 'Record of a conversation between the Prime Minister and the Belgian Prime Minister in Brussels on Monday, 3 December 1973, at 5.00 PM'.

The nervousness about Pompidou's preferred fireside chat approach to summitry was directly connected to such fears. It was therefore a not inconsiderable achievement for the Nine to have successfully agreed at Copenhagen to move in the direction of more frequent top-level meetings. Paragraph 3 of the final communiqué read:

They [the Heads of State and Government] agreed to meet more frequently. These meetings will be held whenever justified by the circumstances and when it appears necessary to provide a stimulus or lay down further guidelines for the construction of a united Europe. They also agreed to meet whenever the international situation so requires.<sup>48</sup>

In spite of all of the frustrations involved in convening of the meeting – and the relatively meagre results of the encounter itself – the basic volition to regularise summitry did therefore seem to have been strengthened at Copenhagen.

It is also, I think, possible to argue that some of the very flaws of the Copenhagen process influenced the direction of European summitry once momentum in this direction began to pick up following the surprise death of Georges Pompidou in April 1974 and the falls from power of both Heath and Brandt, in March and May 1974 respectively.<sup>49</sup> Valéry Giscard d'Estaing's proposal to establish the European Council, after all, addressed front-on a number of the core uncertainties that had complicated the preparations for the Copenhagen summit. This applied to the subject matter of the conference, where the European Council proposal made quite clear that the Community leaders could and should address both EEC and EPC matters in all of their meetings. There would hence no longer be a need to choose whether what was sought was a discussion of foreign affairs or a Community-centred encounter. Equally clear was the approach to the question of who should take part, with the European Council proposal stipulating that both Heads of State and Government and their foreign ministers would normally attend, as would the President of the European Commission.<sup>50</sup> And the provision of at least two summits a year, plus

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<sup>48</sup> [https://aei.pitt.edu/1439/1/copenhagen\\_1973.pdf](https://aei.pitt.edu/1439/1/copenhagen_1973.pdf)

<sup>49</sup> For the birth of the European Council, see Emmanuel Mourlon-Druol, 'Filling the EEC Leadership Vacuum? The Creation of the European Council in 1974', *Cold War History* 10, no. 3 (August 2010): 315–39, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14682741003765430>.

<sup>50</sup> A feature of European summitry which would endure until the Lisbon Treaty of 2008, after which European Council meetings became the exclusive preserve of the Heads of State and Government, the President of the Commission, and the new permanent President of the European Council.

others if necessary, created a regular procedure for organising European Council meetings that would sidestep some of the uncertainties that had beset the 1973 meeting. The degree of improvisation that the Danes had been faced with once Pompidou had issued his last-minute call for a summit would not have to be confronted by any more Council presidencies. Instead, each holder of the post would know that they would be expected to convene and host at least one top level meeting during the course of their six months at the helm of the Council of Ministers. Well-established procedures would also make it easier to arrange more ad hoc summits, should circumstances, whether in the Community or further afield, make an additional meeting necessary. The negative lessons of Copenhagen were hence as important to the Community's future advance as were its more positive outcomes.

## **Conclusion**

Copenhagen was a messy and chaotic summit – but one with surprisingly enduring consequences. In many respects the encounter was an object lesson in how not to organise a high-level meeting, convened in a hurry, beset by deep divisions amongst the protagonists about what sort of meeting it should be, and buffeted by serious outside disturbances. Little wonder then that in many respects its outcomes were meagre. It thus did not head off serious disagreements about the Community's future direction whether in terms of the foreign policy stance to adopt towards the Middle East or the best European-level responses to the economic consequences of the oil shock. The Declaration on European Identity, meanwhile, although frequently alluded to, was not really a product of the meeting at all. But for all this messy disappointment, it did significantly boost the Community's path towards regularising summitry, both through the agreement reached to press ahead with more regular high-level encounters and through the 'negative lessons' that it offered to the subsequent French European Council plans. Given the centrality of the European Council to almost everything that would happen at European Community and later European Union level in the decades ahead, and in particular to a series of key moments when Europe collectively has sought to develop its identity, this was a remarkably fruitful achievement for a decidedly unsatisfactory meeting.