

Statement by René Pleven on the establishment of a European army (24 October 1950)


Caption: On 24 October 1950, René Pleven, President of the French Council of Ministers and former National Defence Minister, proposes to the French National Assembly the establishment of a European army in order to avoid German rearmament as sought by the United States.

Source: Journal officiel de la République française. Débats Parlementaires. Assemblée nationale. 10.1950. Paris: Imprimerie nationale. "Déclaration du Gouverneur français René Pleven le 24 octobre 1950", p. 7118-7119.

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[...]

Mr René Pleven, President of the Council. Ladies and gentlemen, the ideal of collective security has just won a victory in Korea that marks historic progress in the free nations' efforts to create security conditions in the world that will put paid to any aggressive intentions. (*Applause from the left, centre and right.*)

The nations that have concluded the Atlantic Pact wanted to forge this security instrument for the region covered by the Pact. The progress that they have achieved over the past few months in drawing up their concepts of common defence and in starting to put them into effect has been unprecedented.

At the recent meetings in New York, the co-signatories of the Atlantic Pact broadly endorsed the suggestions of the French Government, represented by Mr Robert Schuman, Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr Jules Moch, Minister for National Defence, and Mr Maurice Petsche, Minister for Finance.

The associated nations have recognised the need to protect the Atlantic Pact States from any form of aggression, along a line situated as far to the east as possible. To that end, they have decided to station more forces in Europe. They have agreed that all these forces, whatever their nationality, should be placed under a single command.

Finally, specific agreements were negotiated under which, as a result of the solidarity enshrined in the Atlantic Pact, France will receive substantial supplies of materials together with appreciable financial aid in order to carry out its re-armament programme.

In order to succeed with this programme, France and all the other nations will have to make major sacrifices, extending the length of military service and allocating more funds to defence.

Germany, albeit not a party to the Atlantic Pact, will nevertheless also benefit from the resulting security system. It is, therefore, only right for Germany to make its contribution to the defence of Western Europe. That is why the Government has decided to take the initiative and make the following declaration, in order to open up the discussion of this important issue in the National Assembly.

The solution to the problem of the German contribution must be uncompromising and sought without delay, looking both at the potential for immediate action and towards a future united Europe.

The states meeting in the Council of Europe established the very broad framework within which European issues are debated. Successive French Governments' initiatives were accompanied, however, by the hope that the ambitious plan accepted by all parties would soon be underpinned by obligations and institutions.

With that in mind, the French Government proposed, on 9 May 1950, that all the European countries should pool their coal and steel production. As it declared at the time: 'This will simply and speedily promote that fusion of interests which is indispensable if a common economic system is to be established; it may be the leaven from which a wider and deeper community between countries long opposed to one another by bloody divisions may grow.'

The inter-European talks that followed this proposal have made good progress and seem about to come to a successful conclusion. The French Plan provides for supranational institutions: a High Authority, a Council of Ministers, a Common Assembly and a Court of Justice, the key political bases of a European Community.

In the French Government's view, Europe will be created, firstly, by the accession or association of new states to these institutions and, secondly, by the rapid, step-by-step creation of analogous institutions in an increasing number of sectors of European activity, such as transport, agricultural production, price supervision, raw materials and energy distribution and compensation for social costs, all areas in which the process of unification would offer clear economic and social benefits.

The French Government believed that, if the coal and steel plan succeeded, people would become more used to the idea of a European Community before the extremely delicate issue of common defence was approached. World events leave it no option. Therefore, confident as it is that Europe's destiny lies in peace and convinced that all the peoples of Europe need a sense of collective security, the French Government proposes to resolve this issue by the same methods and in the same spirit.

Merely responding to events, however, is unlikely to provide a constructive solution. Any system that led, whether immediately or eventually, directly or not, with or without conditions, to the creation of a German army would give rise to renewed distrust and suspicion. (*Applause from the left, centre and right.*) The formation of German divisions, of a German Ministry of Defence, would sooner or later be bound to lead to the rebuilding of a national army and, by that token, to the revival of German militarism. (*Renewed applause from the same benches.*) This kind of outcome, which our allies have at all events unanimously condemned, would be a danger to Germany itself.

We hope that the signature of the coal and steel plan will very soon seal the agreement of the six participating countries, which will give all the peoples of Europe a guarantee that Western European coal and steel industries cannot be used for aggressive purposes.

As soon as the Plan has been signed, the French Government wants to see a solution to the question of Germany's contribution to the creation of a European force that takes heed of the cruel lessons of the past and looks forward to the kind of future that so many Europeans from all countries hope to see in Europe.

It proposes the creation, for the purposes of common defence, of a European army tied to the political institutions of a united Europe. (*Applause from many benches on the left, centre and right.*)

This proposal is directly inspired by the recommendation adopted by the Assembly of the Council of Europe on 11 August 1950, calling for the immediate creation of a unified European army with a view to cooperating with American and Canadian forces in the defence of peace.

A European army cannot be created simply placing national military units side by side, since, in practice, this would merely mask a coalition of the old sort. Tasks that can be tackled only in common must be matched by common institutions. A united European army, made up of forces from the various European nations must, as far as possible, pool all of its human and material components under a single political and military European authority.

The Member Governments would appoint a Minister for Defence who would be accountable, in a manner yet to be determined, to those appointing him and to a European Assembly. This assembly could be the Strasbourg Assembly, or an offshoot of it, or an assembly made up of specially elected delegates. He would have the same powers over the European army that a national Minister for Defence has over his country's national forces. He would be responsible in particular for implementing such general directives as he might receive from a Council made up of Ministers from the participant countries. He would serve as the official channel between the European Community and third countries or international bodies as regards all aspects involved in the performance of his task.

The contingents provided by the participating countries would be incorporated in the European army, at the level of the smallest possible unit.

The European army would be financed from a common budget. The European Minister for Defence would be tasked with implementing existing international undertakings and negotiating and implementing new international undertakings on the basis of directives from the Council of Ministers. The European armaments and equipment programme would be adopted and conducted under his authority.

Participant states that already have national forces would retain their authority over those of their existing forces that were not incorporated into the European army.

Conversely, the European Minister for Defence could, with the authorisation of the Council of Ministers, place back at the disposal of a member government a part of its national forces forming part of the European force in order to meet requirements other than those of common defence.

The European forces placed at the disposal of the unified Atlantic command would respect the obligations entered into under the Atlantic Pact, as regards both general strategy and organisation and equipment.

The European Minister for Defence would be responsible for ensuring that the member countries of the European Community furnish this common army with the contingents, equipment, materials and supplies that they are required to supply.

There will have to be a transitional period before this European army is set up. During this period, it would probably be impossible immediately to incorporate part of the existing national armies, although placed under the unified Atlantic command, into the European army. This army would have to be built up gradually, with each country furnishing its contribution of men, in proportions determined by the Council of Ministers and taking into account the general defensive plan drawn up by the Atlantic Council.

Finally, both during the initial stage and when it has finally been established, the European army must not be used as a pretext for delaying the implementation of programmes, planned or under way, within the Atlantic organisation to set up international forces under a unified command. Quite the reverse, the plan to create a European army should make it easier to carry out the Atlantic programmes.

It is on this basis that the French Government proposes to invite Great Britain and the free countries of continental Europe that agree to take part in creating the European army jointly to devise how the principles that we have set out can be put into practice. This work is to begin in Paris as soon as the coal and steel plan is signed.

The Government is fully aware of the technical and psychological difficulties that will have to be overcome in order to attain the goal that it is proposing to the European nations. But all the obstacles can be surmounted, provided that there is the will, imagination and faith to do so and provided that the American people, like the peoples of Europe, actively sympathise with and support this project.

The Government also believes that this Plan, the general principles of which are merely sketched out in this declaration, is another example of the spirit of peace that inspires the French people who have suffered so much from the increasing discord among peoples who were once united in the fight to destroy Hitler's regime.

The Government remains convinced that war is not inevitable. (*Loud applause from the left, centre and right.*)

France has joined forces with the nations that are expressing the wish, at the United Nations, for talks to begin between the major powers (*cries of 'Good! good!' from the centre*) in order to examine the reasons for the current tensions. (*Applause from various benches on the left and centre.*)

This United Nations recommendation actually reflects the French Government's profound conviction that, with particular regard to European issues, it would be useful to maintain direct contacts between the United States, Great Britain, the Soviet Union and France, which, if repeated periodically, would help gradually break down the sources of distrust and conflict.

If these contacts are to prove fruitful, there must be no doubt whatsoever about the Western democracies' unswerving determination to defend their territory against any aggression and the system of free peoples against any subversion. (*Applause from the left, the centre and many benches on the right.*)

The Atlantic Pact nations must, therefore, tirelessly continue to implement the defence programmes that they

have adopted.

France had already resolved to play a vigorous part in the common defence effort within the Atlantic Association. Today, it is taking the initiative and putting forward a constructive proposal for building a united Europe. This Europe must not forget the lessons of two world wars and, at a time when it is building up its forces again, it must ensure that they are never used for anything other than the defence of international security and peace. (*Loud applause from the left, the centre and many benches on the right.*)

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