

'On the subject of rearmament' from Die Welt (18. August 1950)

Caption: On 18 August 1950, the German newspaper Die Welt comments on the difficult debate on the rearmament of the Federal Republic of Germany, and defends the idea of a purely defensive German army.

Source: Die Welt. Unabhängige Tageszeitung. Hrsg. SCHULTE, Heinrich ; Herausgeber BOURDIN, Paul. 18.08.1950, n° 192; 5. Jg. Hamburg: Die Welt. "Thema Wiederbewaffnung", p. 2.

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On the subject of rearmament

Elk. — When, in the not too distant past, Federal Chancellor Adenauer raised the subject of German rearmament, he was emphatically reprimanded by Washington and London. The reaction in Germany was not encouraging either.

It was still unclear at that time whether the Federal Chancellor's comments were prompted by a statesman's foresight or by the desire to throw off certain shackles. At present, after the Korean War, the subject is being discussed everywhere and the initiators, this time, are the Western Powers. And once again they are not satisfied with us. They had manifestly expected us to receive their suggestions with enthusiasm. Instead, the reception has been appraising, reserved and noticeably cool, not to say negative. This leaves the Western Powers with the trying task of revising their judgement that Germans are crazed militarists and reassessing what they took to be an established quantity.

If the Western Powers are now considering German rearmament, this is solely because of the threat to the West that so clearly became apparent in the Korean Conflict. Faced with this danger, they feel compelled to gather all available forces in defence. The realisation that Germany is part of the West is slowly reasserting itself, however much attitudes and actions towards us may have indicated the contrary in the first years after the unconditional surrender. And the mountains of resentment that have grown up between the Western Powers and ourselves should not prevent us from recognising the fact that we are part of the West and of everything that this word stands for in today's divided world.

This undoubtedly creates certain obligations for us, including that of participating in the defence of the West. But there is for us another aspect too: an attack from the East would, without a doubt, be launched in the first instance by the Volkspolizei [the East German People's Police]. This would mean nothing more or less than a fratricidal war for us, a prospect so terrible that many people would be unable to make a clear decision one way or the other. And this is a fact that should be ignored neither in Strasbourg nor in Washington.

Our delegates in Strasbourg will not have overlooked this prospect when they expressed Germany's fundamental willingness to actively participate in the defence of the West — which, to make the point once more, is also our defence. But our consent is also subject to certain restrictions resulting from our special situation.

It may be a commonplace that only a free man can carry arms but that does not make it any less true. A partnership must, if it is to satisfy all parties, be based on full equality, and this equality must already be in place before a treaty can be concluded or a commitment made. And finally, we have to know what we are fighting for. It seems hardly worth risking our lives just to maintain our present status. The first and dispensable prerequisite for our active participation in the defence of the West therefore remains the restitution of our full sovereignty. Only then will we have the indispensable ability to influence a policy whose risks we are asked to share.

Compared to this, it is only of secondary importance on what basis German troops are deployed, whether as an independent German contingent or as a part of a future European Army, whether before or after the creation of the European Union, though it should be considered that the European Army, like the Schuman Plan, could be one of the roads to the European Union.

But no matter in what form and at what time German rearmament takes place, its purpose is purely defensive. Its mission is to oppose the impending danger. German politics can only ever be directed at helping to prevent war, not provoking it.