

'The limits of French policy on Europe are becoming clear' from the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (17 November 1967)

Caption: On 17 November 1967, the German daily newspaper Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung analyses General de Gaulle's European policy and outlines the limitations of De Gaulle's vision of Europe.

Source: Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung. Zeitung für Deutschland. Hrsg. Benckiser, Nikolas; Deschamps, Bruno; Eick, Jürgen; Welter, Erich; Korn, Karl; Tern, Jürgen. 17.11.1967, Nr. 268. Frankfurt/Main: FAZ Verlag GmbH. "Die Grenzen französisches Europa-Politik werden deutlich.", auteur:Reifenberg, Jan , p. 2.

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The limits of French policy on Europe are becoming clear

General de Gaulle fears a new Yalta

By Jan Reifenberg

Paris, 16 November

In Paris these days, a great deal of thought is being devoted to the future image of Europe. And Britain's application for full accession to the EEC is not the sole reason for this. As matters stand, the outcome from the French point of view looks rather bleak. Clear-sighted politicians will be under no illusion as to the limits of General de Gaulle's ambitious national expectations. Economic considerations are cited in response to the question why France believes it premature to construct a Europe extending beyond the framework of the current European Economic Community. Until the Member States of the EEC are able to agree on its aims, negotiations on British accession are premature. First and foremost, 'England must put its own house in order'. The EEC's existing achievements must not be jeopardised or undermined. According to French Foreign Minister Maurice Couve de Murville, carefully weighing his words in a television broadcast, France is not in principle opposed to the accession of new Member States to the EEC. But its five partners are being subjected to 'criticism and pressure' in this matter. In other words, to foreign or American pressure. In the same broadcast, Mr Couve de Murville rejected a supranational Europe, because majority political decision-taking could not protect French interests.

The French national interest counts for more than any economic or monetary argument. For General de Gaulle, it is the deciding factor. The General once remarked in conversation that: 'Europe is like a roast dinner. France and Germany provide the roast meat, and Italy, a little salad on the side. The Benelux countries add a touch of sauce.' That is the key. While the Community of Six remains as it is, France has a crucial role — including and specifically a political role. If Britain joins the EEC, its voice and political views will gain influence in Europe. General de Gaulle would then have to give Britain at least a third of what was 'on the plate'. When Mr Couve de Murville referred to the 1961 Fouchet Plan as the only plan for a political Europe to have existed and blamed the other EEC partners for its demise, he was also saying: either we have a political Europe that fits in with French thinking and General de Gaulle's demands, or we have none at all. His protestation that France was not seeking the leading role in Europe failed to convince the three journalists, whose volley of questions Mr Couve de Murville constantly and skilfully evaded.

The French approach is inherently contradictory. If General de Gaulle is really in favour of building a counterweight to the two 'hegemonies' in Moscow and Washington, he must be in favour of expanding Little Europe. To a greater extent than may be apparent to the foreign observer, French policy is shaped by the fear of another Yalta, a US-Soviet agreement on the back of Europe. That constantly emerges in discussions — including as a tacit admission of the limits placed on France. It is no coincidence that, currently, a book by Jean-Jacques Servan-Schreiber, Editor-in-Chief of the periodical *L'Express*, entitled 'The American Challenge' has become a best seller in France. If Europe is to have any hope of keeping pace with US technological and financial progress, it is high time, according to the author, that European countries started working together. Mr Couve de Murville dismissed that argument as 'so much froth'. In other quarters in Paris it is described as a 'new ploy' and barely credible. British Prime Minister Harold Wilson constantly cites British technical progress as the jewel that it could contribute to the EEC, but General de Gaulle will have none of this. The General cannot swallow the idea of British influence in Europe. However much France tries to use economic arguments to persuade its five partners to delay the negotiations which they believe necessary with London, the real background is political.

General de Gaulle is insisting on a 'European' solution from West to East. While the United States is unable to pursue its dialogue with the Soviet Union because of the Vietnam War, the General has scope for his *Ostpolitik*. It has, however, become clear to the French that the lesson of the nuclear armistice following the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962 still applies and was again illustrated during the Middle East crisis. General de Gaulle's visits to the Soviet Union and Poland clearly revealed the limits of French *Ostpolitik* in regard to the German question. Neither the Kremlin nor the Polish leadership is prepared to go along with the

General's historical approach to Germany. It is becoming clear to the French Government that making progress with and achieving the timetable for 'détente — agreement — cooperation' depend in part on Germany's *Ostpolitik*. The French take the view that recognition of the Oder-Neisse Line will push matters forward. It might be a turning-point.

There is, of course, a clear awareness of the difficulties facing the West German Government. The alarm sounded by the NPD Party Congress in Hanover has had a profound effect in Paris. Were the Grand Coalition in Bonn to succeed in scuppering the kind of *Ostpolitik* that Paris welcomes, French efforts, too, would come to nothing. General de Gaulle is aware that the Soviet Union fully supports the current *status quo* in Europe. But, in his view, to go along with that implies preparing the ground for a subsequent and perhaps definitive division of Europe into two blocs. That is why the French Government regrets any development that reinforces the stereotypical perception of 'German revanchism' among Eastern European states. What the General has long known was confirmed in both Moscow and Warsaw: the Russians, Poles and Czechs have a fear of Germany that logical argument can barely allay; only tenacious efforts towards détente will help.

Hence the constantly repeated message that the Americans and Russians should not determine Europe's fate, and that time is running out for Europe, if it does nothing. The question why America would need to seek an agreement with the Soviet Union on military security against Europe remains unanswered.

General de Gaulle took France out of NATO because he does not want to see it drawn into foreign conflicts against its will. The Vietnam War played an important part in that decision, but the main factor was aversion to any restriction on French national sovereignty. Mr Couve de Murville was unable to say whether the General will remain in the Atlantic Alliance after 1969: 'I am no prophet ...' But if we take the General's point of view that America today is too powerful and so believes it has the right to interfere wherever it wants, and then imagine the position once the Vietnam War is over, the answer has to be in the negative. As long as the French consider the Atlantic Pact to be an 'American machine', the General will mistrust it. If, come 1969, he concludes that the Atlantic Alliance is useful to him, he might change his mind.

It is hard 'to build Europe' against General de Gaulle — particularly for the German political leadership. The fact that it is Germany's neighbour gives France a significant right to a say on the German question. The 1963 Franco-German agreement on mutual cooperation has not developed as the General originally wished. The French now see it as an obvious working tool that does not need to be looked at further: a framework for discussion. Major proposals, such as a 'technological Europe', are greeted with scepticism in Paris. That scepticism is also evident in relation to the study on the strategy for the seventies. In Paris, the question is sometimes asked: what precisely does it mean? There is little inclination towards major European defence projects. Here, too, scepticism is evident. The underlying reason may be that, for the French, doing what can actually be done today always seems the most obvious. The General is unlikely to acknowledge that this implies an admission of his own political limitations, given that, in just ten days' time, he will be meeting the press for the papal-style audience for this year.