

'The European army' from Le Figaro (24 August 1951)

Caption: On 24 August 1951, the French daily newspaper Le Figaro publishes an address given by General Marie-Émile Béthouart in which he argues in favour of the integration of French forces into a European army.

Source: Le Figaro. dir. de publ. BRISSON, Pierre. 24.08.1951, n° 2164; 125e année. Paris: Le Figaro. "L'armée européenne", auteur:Général Béthouart , p. 1; 8.

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The French army and its destiny

V. – The European army

by General Béthouart

The plan to create a European army surprises some people who fear and worry over it. The pessimists even go so far as to say that it would spell the death of the French army. While it is only natural to hesitate before such a reform that would mean relinquishing some of our national sovereignty in such a sensitive area, one must face the facts. Confronted by the dangers that threaten our continent, the complete independence of our nations and of their armies is no longer possible and, if truth be told, no longer exists.

We need outside help and support, and we must pool our resources. These are the goals pursued by the Marshall Plan and the North Atlantic Treaty. We have signed the Treaty, we benefit from it and, consequently, have agreed to the interdependence of its participant states. But the system will become fully effective only when we have created a supranational authority, which is a prerequisite for a European army. Consequently, we should harbour no illusions about our absolute national sovereignty that, were it to persist, might even be dangerous.

The incorporation of the French army into a European army would mean a new lease of life, not death. To live is to know how to adapt, and the worst danger for an army, a man or a nation is to fail to keep up with the times.

But, although our times call for unity, there is, as yet, no patriotism or a real European spirit, nor have nationalistic sensitivities been placated. They are still influenced by unpleasant memories and hatred generated by the war. That is why the project is so difficult.

In his treatise, *De l'instinct à l'esprit*, Charles Baudouin says that a psychologist always runs the risk of treating a subject like a laboratory animal, failing to treat the person with respect, which is a prerequisite that must be maintained. He adds that a science worthy of the name has never tried to trim down its subject so as to make it fit more easily into narrow scientific categories.

These observations are perfectly applicable to the creation of a European army, which will certainly be an undertaking of higher psychology. Nothing could be more perilous than to try and remove their distinct attributes from national contingents in order to create an anonymous army without a soul. Europe's civilisation is founded on self-reliance and respect for the individual. It cannot therefore entrust its defence to robots, and its army must be a federation of national contingents, just as its spirit will be a federation of their patriotic feelings.

As Europe stands today, its peoples would lose interest in an army with which they could not identify. People will relate to a European army only if it is able to preserve the national traits to which they are traditionally attached and that must be safeguarded in so far as they are compatible with the aims pursued.

The creation of a European army would meet the twin objectives of coordinating the armed forces and stepping up the efficiency of national armies via the establishment of a single command, joint administration and budget, and standardised weaponry, and the formation of a European spirit.

That does not in the least imply the systematic pursuit of uniformity. Quite the reverse.

A soldier is driven by two motives – teamwork, or an *esprit de corps*, and patriotism.

We must not undermine those motives. We must preserve the originality and traditions of the national contingents that will make up a European army. A sensible command will strive not only to respect them but to strengthen them as well.

Exchanges of officers and training courses and manoeuvres conducted jointly would help the European army to sustain a spirit, inherited from the spirit of international youth meetings, to rally hearts and minds, thereby creating a cohesive unit. Time will do the rest.

Understood in that light, the European army will be the reflection of all its member nations. It will be stimulated by emulation, which in turn will enhance its unity and worth.

The French army will join on an equal footing, with its traditions, flags, regiments, schools and customs. And although the European army should have only one combat uniform, in daily life the features that are most cherished by the armed forces and the public alike should be safeguarded.

The French army would not disappear if it were elevated to European level. It would have a new mission in which, even more than in the past, it would need the full support of the nation. I even believe that the success of the European army will depend on how close the relationship is between the various contingents and their home populations. It is therefore imperative for the French to understand that the European army will be their army and for every effort to be made to that end. Those efforts would include regional recruitment, sponsorship of units by cities, associations, factories, etc., in addition to close ties between regiments and their veterans' associations, reminders of national military glory, reminders of the debt owed to those who sacrificed their lives for their country and who, disabled or crippled, *have claims on us* that are too often forgotten.

The destiny of the French army and that of France itself are linked in the building of a united Europe, whose initial and decisive achievement will be the creation of a European army. The success of this French initiative depends on the French army itself. The French have never had more reasons to turn with devotion and concern to their army that, while continuing to be the guardian of their security, will become the cornerstone of their future.

Général Béthouart

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