

## 'The Europeans at crisis point', from Die Welt (7 June 1955)

**Caption:** On 7 June 1955, commenting on the outcome of the Messina Conference attended by the Foreign Ministers of the six Member States of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC), the German daily newspaper Die Welt speculates on the future and on the form of European integration.

**Source:** Die Welt. Unabhängige Tageszeitung. Hrsg. Schulte, Heinrich ; R Herausgeber Zehres, Hans. 07.06.1955, Nr. 130; 10. Jg. Hamburg: Die Welt. "Krise der Europäer", auteur:Fried, Ferdinand , p. 2.

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## The Europeans at crisis point

by Ferdinand Fried

### From Messina to Paris

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#### Union or integration?

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#### The-idealists and the realists

Messina was supposed to mark the launching of the last great onslaught on Europe. There is something symbolic about that, because, 11 years ago, the landings in Sicily opened the way to the storming of 'Fortress Europe'. But the *idea* of Europe, which is the issue here, cannot be taken by storm; Mephistopheles' words, 'we must resign ourselves to trickery', may have passed through the minds of the Ministers in Messina when they were drafting their Final Communiqué. The 'trickery of the idea', as it were.

Recent weeks have seen considerable drama as events unfolded on this European front. After the ratification of the Paris treaties, the tireless Europeans gathered at the ECSC assembly building in Strasbourg to raise the standard of a new revolt. A clarion call for new forms of integration went out from Luxembourg, and Jean Monnet gave it to be understood that, in these changed circumstances, he would stand again for election as President of the ECSC. He had already become so deeply entangled in the thickets of French domestic politics, however, that nothing could be done to halt the candidacy of René Mayer as his successor. Not even by Bonn, which fought this losing battle to the end.

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It seems, though, that wires had become crossed in Bonn as well. While Walter Hallstein, State Secretary at the German Foreign Office, wanted to keep the great European Jean Monnet even before the Ministers left Messina, West Germany's Minister for Economic Affairs, Ludwig Erhard, was travelling around the country making frequent and very pointed speeches in which he declared that there were now no further plans for more partial integrations. In effect, then, we had adopted a position towards Europe similar to that taken by France, and to some extent Italy as well, while the three smaller members of the ECSC, Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg, under the skilful and resolute leadership of the Netherlands Foreign Minister, Johan Willem Beyen, confirmed in a memorandum their adherence to the old idea of European integration as it had sparked into life back in the days of the Schuman Plan. Now, that spark was smouldering only fitfully on the foothills of Mount Etna as it became buried under the lava flow of economic routine.

The issue, then, is the future shaping of Europe: and here the tricky Hegelian ideas are swinging from one extreme to the other, from thesis to antithesis, and will do so until eventually the pendulum comes to rest at the point of synthesis. Following the hopeless fragmentation of the old Europe into so many separate nation states, which then fought bitterly among themselves for hegemony, the recent catastrophe has resulted in the counter-concept of a united Europe, a European Union. No less a figure than Churchill endorsed it, in his famous speech at Fulton; the American Secretary of State, George Marshall, tried to enforce it with his Marshall Plan; and eventually Robert Schuman and Jean Monnet sought to make it a partial reality in the form of the European Coal and Steel Community.

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Ideas can coexist happily enough, but realities clash. And so the lofty ideal of a united Europe, too, drifted onto the rocks of the old national resentments and eventually, in Brussels, threatened to founder on —and with —the EDC. But the ECSC had already provided the possibility of a European escape route, whereby the common market in coal and steel would gradually come to serve as a nucleus for the formation of other common markets. Europe would grow, as it were, through the magnetic attraction exercised by its steel core. Coal would provide the power and, almost as a matter of course, bring in the energy industry; and the common transport system would be irresistibly drawn towards the nucleus. Originally, there were thoughts

of numerous other unions as well —the ‘Green Union’ being just one example —but these have already foundered on the reefs of harsh reality.

And yet the basic idea remained: the Europe of the future would be allowed to coalesce by way of a series of ‘partial integrations’, with the underlying thought that other forms of integration would in their turn be added until, eventually, a completely common European market would exist. But this idea has met with increasing resistance in all the participating states —resistance not just to European cooperation as such but to the way in which it was to be brought about.

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In fact, a terminological correction will immediately make matters clearer. We constantly hear today about ‘integration’ and ‘partial integration’. The word means bringing together individual parts to form a whole, to complement one another, and ‘partial integration’ is therefore a contradiction in terms. What we are really talking about here are unions like the Coal and Steel Community, the uniting of the same sectors of industry in different countries. A more appropriate term, then, would be technological unions or horizontal mergers.

There is certainly a trend in that direction in Europe today, and to some extent it is taking effect as a matter of course, simply because technological change in recent decades has overrun our little continent and swept aside the barriers that separated nations in the pre-technological age. In other words, we are experiencing the unifying power of technology, just as we did in Germany a century ago when the days of coach travel came to an end and Germany was forged into an economic entity by railways and highways. Today, it is aircraft that are the symbol of a shrinking and increasingly united Europe —but only a symbol, because, of course, there is much more to it than that!

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Individual sectors of Europe’s economies, then, would coalesce in any case, under their own impetus, as happened previously during the 1920s, if it were not for the cartel complex. So great is the fear of economic dominance by individual branches of industry that a supranational authority is felt to be preferable, even though all the lessons of experience tell us that an authority can exploit and abuse a position of dominance at least as effectively as an economic grouping. Here we have another important reason for resistance to additional technological unions or partial unions in Europe: they will simply result in new supranational organisations and authorities. But the individual states (except the smaller ones) are opposed to the supranational, which takes away their sovereignty without itself acquiring authority, while industry in each of the various countries is opposed to all forms of officialdom, which merely appropriates authority and feels the urge to interfere. And so the idea of partial unions had, in fact, run aground. Although the efforts of the Committee of Experts in Messina have managed to get a little water back under the keel, the vessel will not be returning to the high seas but groping its way cautiously along the shores of reality.

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In the meantime, however, the concept of European cooperation has continued to flourish on a quite different level, as exemplified by the European Economic Council (EEC) in Paris. Rather than bringing together various sectors of technology on a horizontal basis, the Council coordinated certain economic functions in every country, such as trade and monetary policy. This, then, is an instance of functional integration, genuine and natural integration, coalescence and mutual complementarity, the intended end product of which will therefore be the freest possible European common market, without any encroachment upon the sovereignty of the individual states. It will also be a market free from authorities and free from intervention; and it will be a much wider market, too, because all the states of Europe will belong to it. The more individual economies come together to form a whole, the more complete economic integration will be.

Yet the source of greater integration is not greater breadth alone; greater diversity and differentiation of the individual components also play their part. It is precisely that enigmatic variety that has always been typical of Europe and still shapes the character of the European economy today. It is for that reason that it may be

possible to form 'unions' only where the goods are uniform, as in the case of coal and steel, but such unions do not bring true integration or complement the participating economies. So it should be possible to retain the ECSC as Europe's steel core and still incorporate it into the growing functional integration of Europe. Whether the energy and transport industries will be included as well is a matter for the experts to consider.

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Thus a balance would be struck between the two long-term visions of the future shaping of Europe's economy. One is idealistic, not to say utopian; the other somewhat more realistic and practical. The two schools of thought agree on the need for Europe to become an economic entity. One side wants to organise that process, while the other prefers to let it happen organically. The idealists have now set out their stall in Messina; the realists meet this week in Paris, and for them this conference of Europe's economies will be the acid test in a critical period. The relationship between the two ideas is one of bipolar tension, the hope of a fruitful reality. And while tension exists in Europe, its vigorous survival is assured.