

'Mr Churchill's ideas' from Le Monde (21 September 1946)

Caption: On 21 September 1946, the French daily newspaper Le Monde comments on the address given two days earlier by Winston Churchill at the University of Zurich in support of Franco–German reconciliation and European unity.

Source: Le Monde. dir. de publ. BEUVE-MERY, Hubert. 21.09.1946, n° 544; 13e année. Paris: Le Monde. "Les idées de M. Churchill", p. 1.

Copyright: (c) Translation CVCE.EU by UNI.LU

All rights of reproduction, of public communication, of adaptation, of distribution or of dissemination via Internet, internal network or any other means are strictly reserved in all countries.

Consult the legal notice and the terms and conditions of use regarding this site.

URL:

http://www.cvce.eu/obj/mr_churchill_s_ideas_from_le_monde_21_september_1946-en-460557cf-7207-4b5d-bcff-f93d2ccc94c3.html

Last updated: 06/07/2016



Mr Churchill's ideas

Mr Churchill's present status allows him to speak freely and from a standpoint that may be unrelated to the current political situation.

If he chose Zurich, the great Swiss city, to address France and recommend her reconciliation with Germany, was this not because Switzerland shares the languages and cultures of both France and Germany and he could, therefore, hope to be met with a positive response?

Mr Churchill does not hesitate to shake up the elements making up the current European peace problem.

Since the end of the hostilities, it has no longer been dominated by Franco-German relations but by the relations between the Soviet Union, on the one hand, and Britain and the United States on the other. Their rivalry, evident in numerous places around the world, has now extended to Germany. If they succeed in reaching an understanding on this point, peace can be ensured. However, if they continue arguing over Germany, trying to draw it into their respective camps, it will be hard to foresee how the division of Europe can be avoided.

Affecting to ignore this situation, Mr Churchill places the future of Europe squarely on a Franco-German agreement that, in his view, would make the creation of a federation of States possible on our continent. He rules out neither Britain nor Russia as members, although he does grant them both a special status. Were his concept to be realised, the United Nations would be divided into regional groupings with Europe forming one, America another and the British Commonwealth and the Soviet Union heading other groups. These last three groups, given that they already exist, would be the friends and, as it were, sponsors of the new Europe.

Such a plan is based on the dual hypothesis that a Franco-German agreement could be both possible and successful.

Mr Churchill apparently sees no serious obstacle to this, except on sentimental grounds. He admits without a doubt that the Ruhr affair is settled, the 'Big Three' having exercised their veto against the French demands; that the Saar question is of minor importance and unlikely to cause a Franco-German conflict, since France claims only its economic annexation; that French worries concerning the rearmament of Germany can be allayed by means of an extended occupation; that this occupation, in which France participates, is a sufficient guarantee of security whilst awaiting this agreement, which would provide a more certain foundation.

But the psychological conditions for such a rapprochement are presently lacking. Disappointed by the failure of the efforts undertaken during the inter-war years, current French opinion is warier than ever. National socialism, the occupation and its sufferings, together with the horror of the deportations, have further estranged it from Germany. Are the Germans any better disposed towards us? Whilst being no more hostile towards France than towards the other occupiers, they do not seem to have a particular fondness for us, either. At all events, they have other things to worry about.

Their material circumstances are very difficult and will continue to be so for a long time. As long as the military occupation continues, they will have no real political independence, even if a central government is reinstated. How could Germany, under these conditions, be expected to make a gesture, which at all events would be meaningful only if it were free and spontaneous? Mr Churchill's proposals for Germany also include a federal constitution that is not at all sure to please her.

He assumes that such a gesture would crystallise Europe around France and Germany and would therefore receive the blessing of the other nations. He hints, however, that they might not all be in agreement: a justified doubt, as Radio Moscow's immediate answer to this is: 'Reference is made to the United States of Europe only in order to divide the democratic camp and to prevent the eminently necessary fusion of those forces capable of resisting the warmongers that belong to the international reactionary camp.'

Does not this reply indicate that the Franco-German agreement, even if it were actually possible, would not have the impact expected by Mr Churchill? The world's destiny depends on those who hold power rather than on those who have lost it. The latter cannot take on the responsibilities of the former. But circumstances can change, and perhaps Mr Churchill has spoken for the future.