

'Euratom and Europe' from Combat (25 January 1956)

Caption: On 25 January 1956, against the background of the Cold War, the Gaullist daily newspaper Combat warns against the risks of an atomic Community in which the European countries would voluntarily abandon the military use of the atom.

Source: Combat. 25.01.1956. [s.l.]. "L'Euratom et l'Europe".

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Euratom and Europe

It was undoubtedly an interesting idea for Europe to create an atomic community and to promote the development of this new energy source. It is typical, however, that the 'Europeans' undermine every opportunity they have. The example of the EDC was not enough. Their guiding principle seems to be to sacrifice French interests to supranational organisations where Germany, because of its size, always has the last word. With the Federal Republic already bound by restrictions, our 'Europeans' are dying to sacrifice our own freedoms. The dangers of Euratom, if current plans go ahead, are made all the more obvious by a high profile personality whose functions and responsibilities oblige him to sign as XXX.

The Action Committee for the United States of Europe adopted a document that has to be put before the six Parliaments concerned, relating to the creation of a European atomic pool.

According to this document, the European States would agree to renounce the possibility of ever manufacturing atomic weapons and accept the establishment of a permanent and binding system of control.

This constraint seems at first surprising. To date, only West Germany has given such a commitment, and countries as traditionally peaceful as Switzerland and Sweden are in no hurry to follow suit.

Could one reasonably hope that the whole world would follow the six countries of Europe if they did adopt this document? Obviously not, as long as the Soviet Government refuses to submit its weapons and armed forces to international inspection, the starting point for any serious programme of disarmament.

When he announced on the very day that the Monnet Committee published its findings that Britain would manufacture the H-bomb, Anthony Eden showed conclusively how little faith his government had in a reversal of the Soviet position.

For Europe, abandoning atomic weapons is only possible if one accepts a priori one or other of the following hypotheses:

— the first presupposes that the Soviet Union is already sufficiently imbued with the spirit of Geneva that its peaceful intentions may be guaranteed, together with its abandonment of any politics of force;

— the second is based on the assumption that the atomic shield that America provides for Western Europe is both desirable and permanent.

Since none of the governments or parliaments that have been asked to sign this declaration and apply its conclusions have, to date, shown any intention of renouncing the line of argument taken by NATO that the use of atomic weapons is legitimate and necessary to ensure their common defence, it must be supposed that only the second hypothesis is correct.

It remains to be seen, therefore, whether the solution that relies for the defence of Europe on the atomic arsenal of the Americans, is desirable and permanent.

With regard to the first point, it must be noted that this protection does not come for free. Relying on the Americans means that Europe would have only limited independence and would remain bound to support the American viewpoint in all major international disputes, whether it liked it or not.

To date, such ties have seemed easy to bear, but would that be true in a general economic crisis with the subsequent reawakening of national and continental interests? To answer yes is probably to leave oneself open to severe disillusion.

As to the second point, even more vital, it seems crucial, before coming to any decision, to consider the repercussions of the inevitable reduction in the superiority of the Americans as regards atomic weapons and

air transport facilities, as well as the rapid development, in both the Soviet Union and the United States, of the by-product of the 'H-bomb' — the intercontinental missile.

The relative ease with which American administrations have, in the recent past, promised Western Europe their atomic protection in the event of Soviet aggression, and the firmness with which they coped with the Berlin crisis in 1947, have stemmed from a feeling of invulnerability. This resulted in part from their as yet unequalled technological expertise and in part from their geographical position.

Given renewed tension in the area, would their devotion to the European cause remain as steadfast if, as is daily more likely, such a conflict were to result in United States' citizens being subject to a thermonuclear war, as the country lost its geographical immunity? It is highly doubtful, and it is possible that, under pressure from public opinion, the American Administration might withdraw its guarantee of total protection from all but its own frontiers.

It is but a small step from the peripheral strategy, with which European governments are threatened every time their efforts at defence appear to slacken, to the total abandonment of Europe.

Under this hypothesis, supposing that the European nations followed Jean Monnet's advice, what would be the use of the armies that they had so expensively nurtured? None whatsoever.

It is not the handful of Western divisions facing the Soviet forces, five or six times larger, that has maintained the balance of power in this region over the past ten years. It is the atomic bomb and the proven willingness of the Americans to use it in the event of any deliberate act of aggression.

Conventional forces remain indispensable to prevent a potential aggressor from making small but repeated inroads, to force him to reveal, by the size of his forces, the extent of his ambition, to make an atomic riposte appear legitimate, understandable and appropriate. However, without the backing of atomic force, and against an enemy who possesses it, conventional forces are meaningless.

If free Europe is to give up the military use of atomic energy, it will mean handing over for ever its destiny to a nation which is, to be sure, friendly, although distant and occupied with other problems. It means that Europe will blindly entrust its fate to a people not involved physically or directly in the European debate, a people whose foresight has not always been faultless and whose judgement, in a few years' time, may well be affected by the fervent desire to avoid at any cost the dreadful threat of atomic bombardments.

The act of faith that Mr Monnet is inviting us to make would be justifiable only on the assumption that American superiority is such as to ensure permanent invulnerability. Unfortunately, the scientific progress made by the USSR prevents such an affirmation. If, under these conditions, the six countries concerned agree to follow the path currently under consideration, one must expect regrets and recriminations, as faith in American superiority declines. It is probable that such feelings will be strongest in the country under the most pressure from the Communists: the Federal Republic of Germany.

The government of that country cannot ignore the fate of the 2 million inhabitants of the Western zones of Berlin. Nor can it deny the fact that the smallest crack in the system of defence which underpins the existence of this outpost of the free world, would, given its vulnerability, lead unquestionably and rapidly to its own downfall.

Should the day come when the Germans feel that the guarantee given by the Atlantic Alliance is no longer 100 %, they will be forced either to change sides, or renounce, either officially or secretly, their commitment not to manufacture atomic weapons.

Whichever decision is taken, its consequences may well cause lasting damage to the cohesion of Europe. If Europe wants to avoid the painful choice of either giving in to Communist domination because of the weakness of its defences or of witnessing the uncontrolled rearmament of Germany, there is only one solution: atomic weapons.

It therefore seems fair to ask the six countries involved to give up a certain amount of sovereignty so that the manufacture and use of such weapons may be controlled. Such controls would make it possible to respect the restrictive clauses imposed on Germany by the Paris Treaties, while at the same time satisfying their security concerns, as it is undoubtedly the country the most directly exposed.