

'Dunkirk 1940 and Dunkirk 1947' from the Luxemburger Wort (5 March 1947)

Caption: The day after the signing of the Treaty of Alliance and Mutual Assistance between France and the United Kingdom on 4 March 1947 in Dunkirk, the daily newspaper Luxemburger Wort describes the symbolic impact of the choice of the French martyr town of Dunkirk for the official signing. The British Foreign Secretary, on a visit to Brussels, declares that his country is ready to sign similar treaties with other European states.

Source: Luxemburger Wort. Für Wahrheit und Recht. 05.03.1947, n° 64; 100e année. Luxembourg: Imprimerie Saint-Paul. "Dunkerque 1940 und Dunkerque 1947", p. 1.

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Dunkirk 1940 and Dunkirk 1947!

Between these two dates were years of enormous distress, when the whole future of civilisation, with all the importance we attach to the true meaning of the word, was at stake. What the Germans at that time proudly called the 'Campaign in the West', had actually been the triumphal march of barbarism. Right up to Dunkirk, where the brute force of the Teutonic war-machine ran riot in such a way that it will live for ever as one of the blackest days, if not the blackest day, in British history. In spite of the appalling sacrifice, however, Dunkirk became a success for the British Expeditionary Force which, despite the German dive bombers and tanks, was able to escape across the Channel to form the nucleus of that army which, four years later, was to set foot on the French coast once again – this time victoriously – alongside American troops. Over a period of four years, British tenacity had never once become discouraged, and meticulous preparations resulted in the sacrificial way of Dunkirk being turned into the high road to victory.

Just as it had been in 1940, Dunkirk was yesterday put at the forefront of the drive to safeguard peace. As the 'Daily Mail' remarked so aptly this morning, the Franco-British Treaty signed yesterday became the first kernel of stability in a Europe that had reaped such a terrible material and spiritual harvest. Dunkirk has vivid reminders of the war, 90 per cent of the town having been destroyed. It was only with great difficulty that a room large enough to hold fifty people could be found for the signing of the treaty of alliance. This event should remain in the collective memory of the whole world so that, when the name of Dunkirk is spoken, it is connected with the treaty signed yesterday, a treaty that should protect us all against new aggression. Immediately after Bidault and Bevin had signed the document that was so significant for the future, they set off for the beach, which still bears the traces of that June day in 1940. That walk was not only in grateful memory of the men who underwent such hellish experiences there and yet did not despair of final success but was also a symbol pointing towards the future.

Just as it took the whole world four years of enormous effort, working closely together, to move forward from that day at Dunkirk and achieve victory over Nazi Germany, so also it will require a great amount of effort before the world can finally breathe easily and in peace. This time, too, Dunkirk is just a beginning, a beginning that can only lead to the final goal if the Great Powers, united and in harmony, are prepared to pull in the same direction. Great Britain and France have committed themselves for 50 years to mutual assistance against any possible German attack. When passing through Brussels yesterday evening, Bevin declared that Great Britain was ready to conclude similar treaties with Belgium, Holland, Poland and Czechoslovakia, which would put a security cordon around Germany. Bearing in mind the obvious imperialist adventures of yesterday's Third Reich – and we do not know yet what the future will bring – this would automatically trigger the joint action that Germany's neighbours were unable to undertake in the autumn of 1939.

Great Britain and France yesterday committed themselves to mutual assistance. So far, however, America and the Soviet Union have kept silent on the subject of this new alliance. All eyes are on the Soviet Union in particular. How will the Kremlin react to yesterday's events in Dunkirk? Last night Radio Moscow reported the news of the signing of the Franco-British Alliance without, however, taking a position on the matter. For days now, commentators in the West have been trying hard to come up with a reasonable explanation for the Soviet Government's silence. The forthcoming days at the Moscow Conference will show whether this optimism is justified.