

Note from Robert Silvercruys to Paul-Henri Spaak (Washington, 30 October 1954)

Caption: In this note sent to the Belgian Foreign Minister, Paul-Henri Spaak, on 30 October 1954, Robert Silvercruys, Belgian Ambassador to the United States, tells of the satisfaction in the United States that greeted the signing, on 23 October 1954, of the Paris Agreements establishing Western European Union (WEU).

Source: DE VOS, Luc; ROOMS, Etienne; DELOGE, Pascal; STERKENDRIES, Jean-Michel (sous la dir.). Documents diplomatiques belges 1941-1960, De l'indépendance à l'interdépendance. Tome II: Défense 1941-1960. Bruxelles: Académie royale de Belgique, 1998. 582 p. ISBN 90-6569-670-9. p. 276-278.

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Summary: Washington greeted the Paris Agreements as a resounding diplomatic success, as much for the decisions taken as for the constructive spirit in which the conference was held. These agreements must be quickly ratified so as to secure the full support of Congress and to impress the Russians, with whom more talks are scheduled.

On the eve of elections, the Republican Administration has shown its satisfaction ‘urbi et orbi’ on the subject of the signature of the Paris Agreements. For the President, ‘their importance goes far beyond a simple victory’, and they ‘represent a historic step towards European unity’. One evening, the Administration even made it the subject of a television programme, showing Mr Dulles briefing the whole government team on the event.

This enthusiasm is not only for the benefit of the general public. The Administration is pleased to have found, within a few weeks, a way to combine the independence and the rearming of West Germany which meets German expectations, eases the fears of the French and ensures that the West has a system of defence as efficient as the European Defence Community. The Paris Agreements set down these results in concise and unequivocal terms. France will release Germany without waiting for the verdict of the various parliaments on the rebuilding of its army. Great Britain, through an addendum to the Treaty of Brussels, may participate in the control of the rearmament process, which is of such concern to the general public. Finally, the decision on the powers of SACEUR (Supreme Allied Commander Europe) will prevent any independent German action by placing German armed forces under the control of NATO, with regard to both the command structure and their training and equipment.

Are these results more tangible and a better omen than those recorded in May 1952 by the signing of the contractual agreements and the European Defence Treaty? Will the National Assembly, whose membership has remained unchanged, be happy with the loss of the safeguards written into the Defence Community project? Mr Dulles is confident. He is not expecting a repetition of the disappointments that surrounded the EDC. Sir Anthony Eden has guaranteed the presence of British troops on the Continent. The agreements on Trieste and the Saar will help secure French and Italian support. The Secretary of State also believes, unless there are any surprises, that Mr Mendès France and Chancellor Adenauer will have the same parliamentary majority for the Paris Agreements as they had for the London decisions. In Germany especially, where the Saar arrangements are controversial, it is expected that the Government will win the arguments by drawing up a table of gains and losses.

In addition, Mr Adenauer, after his brief visit to the United States, has returned with enhanced prestige.

After the disappointments of August, Washington has welcomed the new defence arrangements as a miracle. The obvious optimism of the Secretary of State cannot help but influence the Senators who, in three months’ time, will decide whether the new defence arrangements justify continuing American aid to Europe. However, Congress will also need to be reassured as to the attitude of the French Parliament before then. Rapid success by Mr Mendès France in securing a solid majority for his programme will give him the sympathy and gratitude of the United States that was lost by his indifference — some go as far as to call it deceit — towards the European Defence Community.

The need to move quickly is also a result of the attitude of the Soviet Union. This has been demonstrated in just two declarations — one by Mr Molotov in Berlin and the other by Mr Vishinsky in New York — and by the handing over of a note. The recent proposals concerning Germany contain nothing new, but they are very important for the European nations which fear a renewal of German militarism. Since the Berlin Conference, the American attitude has been consistent as to resuming talks with the Russians. The President and Mr Dulles have just confirmed this by stating that ‘there is no new basis for negotiation as long as Western Europe is not united and in a position of strength’. In their opinion, this stage will not be reached until after the ratification of the Paris Agreements. Fortunately, Sir Winston Churchill is of the same

opinion, and Mr Mendès France seems to accept that the interests of the Western coalition should not be sacrificed for a hypothetical entente with the Russians.

The Pentagon obviously sees only advantages in the new military arrangements concerning Germany. Integration on the basis of the European Defence Community model never seemed the best solution from a military point of view. Having dropped that scheme, the idea of large national units re-emerged. Under the command of their own officers, and unified by the strategic and logistical support of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, they can, it is hoped, contribute more effectively to the common defence of the continent.

Will the new structure inspire the respect of the 'Streitkräfte' and convince Germany that the army's role is to be a shield protecting democracies and not an instrument of foreign expansion? The frequent anxieties of Europeans are less familiar to Americans. They consider the raising of divisions in Germany solely from the point of view of the defence of Europe. We almost forgot that when listening, month after month, to the State Department expounding the cause of integration for the benefit of Franco-German friendship and European federation.

If, after recent discussions, a sovereign, rearmed Germany emerges, no one will deny the role played by the great star-spangled republic. By both encouragement and by threats of a 'drastic change' in its policies, Uncle Sam has certainly contributed to directing European diplomacy towards its positive outcome. Perhaps the success was in proportion to its 'discretion' — a thought that cannot escape the attention of the American Administration as it savours the success of the Paris Agreements. Two outside factors have nevertheless been decisive: the reversal of the British position and the change in French policy that allows Mr Mendès France to fulfil the dominant role in the country for which his prestige has prepared him.

(Sgd) R. Silvercruys