

Letter from Robert Silvercruys to Paul van Zeeland (24 June 1953)

Caption: Letter from Robert Silvercruys, Belgian Ambassador to the United States, to Paul van Zeeland, Belgian Foreign Minister, on US concerns over the delay in ratifying the EDC Treaty in Europe.

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Washington, 24 June 1953.

Secret

The President asked me to go and see him this morning. I came and went by the back door, because the journalists were not supposed to know.

The Secretary of State met me in the President's antechamber. He told me that the President wanted to talk to me in private — on your behalf — about his concerns over the ratification of the EDC Treaty. Mr Dulles was very much hoping that you would succeed, before the parliamentary recess, in securing at least a favourable vote in the House. He felt that that would constitute an important step forward that would, in turn, have helpful repercussions in Europe and with Congress.

The President came straight to the point. He recalled the most recent discussion that he had had with you:

He said: 'We must all share in our common defence. A great nation like the United States has responsibilities at the military and financial level; but the other countries, too, have a role to play that is no less important, with a psychological and moral impact that must not be underestimated. I have always been struck in my dealings with your country by the unique position that it holds in European politics and by the influence of its statesmen.'

The President is convinced that only a united Europe can effectively ensure its own security. He therefore appreciates the efforts that you have made to bring about political integration and the ratification of the EDC Treaty. He does not intend to become involved with internal politics, whose impact on the outcome of events he does not underestimate, but he emphasises the importance of taking the lead.

In his conversations with European politicians — notably Mr Drees — he has sometimes been surprised by the tendency to prevaricate and seek to compromise. We tend to watch our larger neighbours and wait for someone else to make the next move. The position currently taken by Great Britain with regard to relations with the EDC should be encouraging. He asked me to tell you how much he personally was concerned that we should ratify the Treaty. If either of our Houses decided to pass it, this would be seen as an invaluable act whose consequences would greatly affect American public opinion and Congress. He hopes that you will rescue the discussion from its present stalemate and that Parliament will follow your leadership. He insisted that I should tell you how deeply concerned he was and how much he hoped for your success.

I explained the various aspects of the problem, the position of the political parties and the situation within them. I told him that the Government had taken a decision; it is taking positive action to encourage Parliament to take a decision on the proposal set before it. Several times you have personally intervened in the Social Christian Party meetings, in the House Committee, in your dealings with the Opposition. Accordingly, the problem has constitutional and political implications that are delaying the finding of a solution. I assured him that you would continue your course of action: I hoped that you would ultimately succeed.

Mr Dulles then referred to the difficulties that he was having with Congress. He reminded us of the motion by Representative Richards to make military aid dependent on the creation of the European Defence Community. This motion was such as to cause him problems. I asked him if the law could not be changed 'in conference' so that the President could use his discretionary powers — as the Senate recommended. 'This', said the President, 'is precisely what I wish to avoid. If I have to take the decision, I shall be in an impossible situation where I will please no one.' Mr Dulles then referred to the feelings of the Republican

Party that were becoming clearer by the day. He thinks that, in this session and with the help of the Democrats, the military aid programmes will be passed, but he is convinced that, without the European Defence Community, Congress will agree nothing further next year.

The President said once more that, if a European Defence Community was established, significant American aid could be guaranteed. 'Since America had come to the aid of a disunited Europe, it would not hesitate to help a united Europe, as long as help was needed.' 'This', he said, 'is how I interpret the feelings of the country at large, and I am sure that I am not mistaken. I hope that Mr van Zeeland will be able to convince the politicians of your country that Belgium has a role to play not only in the future of Europe but also of America, where ratification of the European Defence Treaty, if only by the Chamber of Deputies this summer, will be interpreted as a sign of the will of the nation to play its part in a system of common defence in which the United States will share.'

Thus the interview ended. The President gave me the impression of complete sincerity and total conviction.

Faced with the absence of French Government commitment, the recent Italian elections and not knowing Mr Beyen, as he himself admits, it is to you that he is turning, and it is you on whom he relies to show a desire for integration that he can use to win over Congress. I think that he has turned to Belgium in a spirit of confidence and friendship, because he is aware of your efforts and he feels that our country can give him support. The presence of the Secretary of State at the interview underlines the exceptional nature of the message that he wanted me to convey. He entrusted it to me, he said, because he knew me from a long time ago and because I was aware of the political situation in the United States.

After our talk, I told Mr Dulles that I hoped to see him again on his return from Bermuda, where the Conference of the Three was taking place from 8 to 12 July.

Yours very sincerely,

(Sgd) Silvercruys