

'New construction' from Le Monde (5 November 1949)

Caption: On 5 November 1959, the French daily newspaper Le Monde considers the European issues to be discussed at the meeting in Paris between Dean Acheson, US Secretary of State, Ernest Bevin, British Foreign Minister, and his French counterpart, Robert Schuman.

Source: Le Monde. dir. de publ. Beuve-Méry, Hubert. 05.11.1949, n° 1 487; 6e année. Paris: Le Monde. "Nouvelle construction", p. 1.

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Paris, 4 November 1949

New construction

The discussions which Mr Acheson is due to hold shortly in Paris with Mr Bevin and Mr Schuman will deal mainly with the organisation of Europe and the status of Germany, these two problems being closely linked.

The European problem has recently tended to take on a new slant. On the one hand, the attempts at economic unification mediated by the OEEC have had little success. While the liberation of 50 % of trade, as recently adopted, is certainly not inconsiderable, it is a very modest step compared with the goals which had been set, and it is still not known to what extent that decision will be implemented. On the other hand, Britain, without withdrawing from the European organisation, is visibly keeping its distance: while on the political and military fronts it remains linked to the West, it seems to want to keep its autonomy on the economic front as part of the Commonwealth.

The situation is therefore no longer what it was when the United States adopted the Marshall Plan, thinking that it would make it into an instrument for the unification of Europe.

The plan's failure in this area is clear; although it has succeeded in boosting industrial production in the assisted countries, that success would perhaps not be sufficient justification for the American Congress to authorise its prolongation. In order to justify this policy, the State Department will have to present a new plan, adapting the old one to circumstances which have changed.

In a recent speech, Mr Hoffman suggested the idea of regional groupings which would act as stages towards a wider European grouping. In reality, in a Europe already reduced by the split between East and West, the cold shouldering of Spain and Portugal, and Switzerland's reservations, there is not much room for 'economic regions'. The Scandinavian countries having followed in Britain's footsteps (it is, moreover, possible that they will form a customs union among themselves), all that remains are the Benelux countries, France, Italy and West Germany.

A possible union of the first three under the name 'Fritalux' has been discussed. The difficulties which the Benelux countries are encountering, as an association which is not yet operating, as well as the proposed customs union planned between France and Italy, do not inspire much hope in a merger between the two groups. If it were to succeed it would have the major disadvantage of leaving Germany isolated. Germany would have no choice but to turn to the East: that is not exactly the policy that Washington has been recommending for the last three years.

The 'Fritalux' formula seems to have been simply put up to test the water. As long as Britain stays on the sidelines of Europe, there is no other grouping possible except the one between Germany and the other Western countries. France and Germany being the most significant, the other countries should gather round them. Their agreement would be the basic condition for this European union.

Imagining that the American Secretary of State will act in this way is not very productive. Although, together with Mr Bevin and Mr Schuman, he is endeavouring to resolve a certain number of German problems, such as the dismantling of German monopolies and the cessation of the state of war, he is doing so in order to give the Bonn Government a clearer situation and more authority, as much vis-à-vis East Germany as this Europe into which West Germany must be integrated.

It is only in this way that foundations can be laid for a solid union, founded on common interests. One of these will probably be the pooling of Western Europe's coal and steel industries, industries which play the most significant role in security matters because of their economic importance.