

'Institutions and conditions' from Esprit (November 1948)

Caption: In November 1948, the French periodical Esprit publishes an address given by Léo Hamon, adviser during the Fourth French Republic, in which he sets out various objectives for a future European federation.

Source: Esprit. dir. de publ. Mounier, Emmanuel. Novembre 1948, n° 150; 17e année. Fontenay-aux-Roses: Imprimerie Bellemard. "Institutions et conditions", auteur: Hamon, Léo , p. 629-630.

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Institutions and conditions

The European Federation, until recently a mere pipe dream, has become a key idea in less than a year.

What, then, does Western Europe expect from this new idea? It may provide a solution to some of our economic problems (we now accept that our individual national economic structures are too small to be viable) and, more importantly, it may bring to an end those flaws which have allowed the moral message we gave to the world to be negated. That message now sounds hollow, and the peoples of Europe have lost their sense of purpose. Most significantly though, the European Federation is expected to guarantee peace through the creation of a third world power, one able to play the role of mediator or, at the very least, able to reconcile disputes between the two existing world powers.

What does the idea of a European Federation mean in practice? It means that the collective solidarity of our nations will no longer be surrendered to the insecurity of alliances between the various sovereign states, nor will it rely on the maintenance of good relations and even tempers between our diplomats; an idea not founded on institutions which translate its intentions declines rapidly, no matter what form it may take. We must build a constitution in Western Europe which provides the Federation with the power to govern and defines its sphere of influence. That sphere of influence must include security, the way diplomacy is conducted and, indeed, everything required to promote economic unity in the member countries.

A federal government must have two chambers, one made up of representatives of the national parliaments, in numbers corresponding to the size of their electorates, and the other made up of representatives, in equal or similar numbers, of the national governments of each Member State. An executive body will be required to oversee communal business, while a court of justice would rule in instances of dispute over the respective powers of the federal and national authorities.

What are our particular conditions for entry to this Federation?

People of France! We must accept that we are faced with the choice between a European Federation and the French Union. We are not talking only of Metropolitan France joining the Federation, but all the countries of the Union, not as colonies for joint exploitation by Europe, but as a constitutional element, as an ‘inviting power’.

Men of peace! We want Europe to be an instrument of peace and not a force for aggression, and we must strive, I repeat, to reduce and not augment the conflict between the two existing world powers. And, if the circumstances are such that we need a shield to protect ourselves, then we will not shrink from that task: Europe will be ready to raise its shield but never its sword.

Democrats! In the end, if we are to build the Europe together with all who wish to do so, then we must concentrate our efforts on creating social justice and economic democracy within it. Without this, the Republic would be, in our opinion, pointless.

Europe cannot be created without its working classes — their support comes at a price and will be given only to those who have their interests at heart; no less than social justice requires freedom, we believe that nothing permanent can be created for peace without the people; in other words, without freedom and social justice. This is the inevitable price which must be paid for their support.