

Note from Louis Scheyven to Paul van Zeeland (12 to 15 January 1952)

Caption: Note from Louis Scheyven, Director-General of Policy in the Belgian Foreign Ministry, to Paul van Zeeland, Belgian Foreign Minister, on the stance to be taken by Belgium if the Federal Republic of Germany should join NATO.

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. 459-460.

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B.Z./A.E.,15.397.

Brussels, 12 to 15 January 1952

Top secret

Subject: the possibility of German membership in NATO

[...]

What might be Belgium's position on this issue? We have summarised below the advantages and drawbacks of German membership of NATO.

A. The advantages

It would be more consistent if Germany, along with its partners in the EDC, also joined NATO. That would simplify relations between the EDC and NATO.

— For the German people, membership in both would be an essential component for recovering equal rights and, on the basis of this fundamental idea of which so far they have made ample use, they would be able to secure further advantages in the areas of costs arising from occupation and financing their own rearmament.

— Since Germany already takes part in the work done in Strasbourg and in the OEEC, a better balance would be struck if it were allowed to participate in NATO.

— If Germany sat on the North Atlantic Council, the Council could voice its opinion on the issues that will come up when the EDC is created. If Germany were outside the North Atlantic Treaty, the Council's decision on the EDC would have to be delayed until the requirement to obtain Germany's approval was fulfilled by other means.

However, this advantage appears to be one of form only. Since, in the North Atlantic Council, agreements must be unanimous, Germany might also cause difficulties. It might feel more inclined to do so there than if it were in an isolated position within the EDC. But this issue alone does not appear to be decisive.

— While the fear of a revived German militarism may be justified, one must not overlook the possibility that, in the EDC, Germany may quickly assume a dominant position, not only militarily but also even politically.

In a community of six Member States, Germany's influence will be offset only by five other countries — three small ones plus France and Italy. The Franco-German entente, which appears to be developing, might induce France to support Germany on a regular basis. France's political instability also limits its scope for action.

Can Italy really constitute a serious counterweight to Germany? Doubts abound.

On the other side of the coin, Germany, as a member of NATO, would stand face-to-face with 14 other countries of the first magnitude, such as the United States and Great Britain. Germany's influence would be considerably diminished, and, in the North Atlantic Council, it would find someone to talk to.

This aspect, which has been mentioned both by those who do the bidding of the United States and Great Britain, and by Jonkheer von Starckenborgh, must be kept in mind

B. The drawbacks

Participation in NATO would mean the recognition of Germany's full sovereignty, which in time would call into question the contractual relationship and the legality of the presence of Allied troops in Germany on the basis of the 1945 Agreement.

— As regards Russia, this would mean the end of the quadripartite regime allowing the stationing of Allied troops in Germany and, especially, in Berlin.

— The defensive nature of the Atlantic Treaty would decline, given the scale of West German claims against Eastern Europe.

— There would be a risk of exacerbating tension between the East and West. Germany's involvement with the Western powers might serve as a pretext for all the mutual assistance treaties that bind the people's republics to be used against the Western powers.

— There might be a challenging psychological impact on Western parliaments and public opinion.

Some of these drawbacks are relative, and it may be possible to overcome them to a certain extent. However, the dangers inherent in a hasty revival of a powerful Germany and greater tension in relations with the USSR are self-evident. We have seen that these drawbacks, which appeared crucial several months ago, are increasingly being ignored, but they have yet to be totally written off.

One may wonder if it would be ill-timed to allow Germany to join NATO in a hurry. The Twelve would consent only if rock-solid guarantees were provided by Germany. To give Germany everything in exchange for a mere declaration of goodwill might place us in the position of having nothing more to offer in the months or years to come. But, when we see Germany's demands and the way in which it interprets equal rights, one can be sure that its ambitions will expand across the board. Consequently, it is still premature to allow Germany to join NATO.

It would be better to let the issue ripen and take it up again when the European army has become a reasonably consistent reality.

Given these circumstances, it would not be wise for Belgium to be at the head of the movement, but should rather be content to follow the majority trend, while maintaining a relatively cautious stance.

The Director-General

[Signature] L. Scheyven