

## 'The lights are going out on the EDC' from Die Welt (19 May 1954)

**Caption:** On 19 May 1954, the German daily newspaper Die Welt speculates on the risks and consequences of a possible refusal by France to ratify the Treaty establishing the European Defence Community (EDC).

**Source:** Die Welt. Unabhängige Tageszeitung. Hrsg. Schulte, Heinrich ; Herausgeber Zehrer, Hans. 19.05.1954, Nr. 115; 9. Jg. Hamburg: Die Welt. "EVG im Zwielight", auteur:Ahlers, Conrad , p. 3.

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## The lights are going out on the EDC

By Conrad Ahlers

### France hesitant since 1952

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### Indochina stronger than Europe

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### Pressure for new solutions

The debate in France on ratification of the EDC Treaty is for the time being off, and it is doubtful whether it will ever take place at all. Even the supporters of a defence union have given up hope that, under the present circumstances, a majority can be secured in the National Assembly. They are letting events take their course in order to spare France the political defeat that would be the consequence of the rejection of a Treaty originally inspired by a French Government.

The prospect of the EDC's failure must therefore be seriously contemplated. This has not been done as yet, so as not to relieve France of its responsibility for the fate of the defence union. But since May 1952, when the Treaty was signed in Paris, France has constantly evaded this responsibility by postponing ratification from one month to the next. The French have succeeded in deceiving themselves and the world for far too long and have thus hindered the search for an alternative solution.

The West is now able to recognise that the unfortunate developments in the war in Indochina are dealing the death blow to the EDC. France is trying both diplomatically and militarily to make an honourable withdrawal from the global political scene where it has played the part of a world power for longer than its strength would allow. In Geneva, France's Foreign Minister, Georges Bidault, is having to negotiate with the Russians and the Chinese, who regard the EDC as a military alliance directed against the East. Ratification at this point in time would destroy his chances of reaching an agreement on Indochina.

The war in the jungle has moreover decimated the ranks of France's career soldiers, the backbone of its army. The cadres needed to build the 14 divisions foreseen for France in the EDC Treaty are thus missing. Barely half that number could today be formed alongside the 12 divisions planned for Germany. This is why France is unwilling to take on military commitments that it cannot honour.

These matter-of-fact considerations have for some time now been joined by a series of emotional arguments that have driven the French in increasing numbers into the camp of the defence union's opponents. The anxiety about Germany is so strong that even the EDC's advocates feel obliged, in arguing the case for the Community, to point to its supervisory role. The concept of European integration itself, though it originated in France, has never met there with the kind of response it has enjoyed in Germany. The French are reluctant to forego the protection of the nation state and its most powerful expression, the national army, in order to enter into a close relationship with the German partner.

Renouncing the EDC would leave Europe one hope poorer. It was intended as a means of ensuring both the security and unity of Europe and of reconciling Germany and France. Instead, the increasingly heated debate on the subject of the defence union has seriously troubled German–French relations over the past few years. It has delayed the deployment of German troops and thus endangered European security.

The failure of the EDC would, furthermore, represent a defeat not only for France and the European idea, but also for German and American policies. In the words of the US Secretary of State, speaking last December, both Washington and Bonn would have to undertake a 'painful reassessment' of their foreign and military policies.

In view of the critical global situation, this reassessment will involve neither an American withdrawal from Europe nor a decision not to deploy German troops. While it will lessen the idealistic interest that the Americans have shown so far in European development, it will give American policy greater freedom of

movement. For Washington has until now held stubbornly to the EDC, thus depriving itself of the ability to adjust in time to the new situation. In Germany, the reassessment will give stronger emphasis to the question of reunification as opposed to that of European integration.

These consequences need not be viewed with fear as long as the Western nations maintain a common political line. A decision not to go ahead with the EDC would liberate those forces in France which advocate cooperation with Germany outside the framework of European integration and which, like Marshal Juin and wide circles in the officer corps and the French centrist and right-wing parties, favour a German defence contribution. In Germany, such a move would secure SPD support for defence policy and pave the way for a common foreign policy between government and opposition.