

Letter from Dean Acheson to Robert Schuman (30 October 1949)

Caption: On 30 October 1949, Dean Acheson, US Secretary of State, sends a letter to Robert Schuman, French Foreign Minister, in which he refers to the settlement of the German question and proposes that France take the initiative to establish the main lines of a common policy for the Western Allies with the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG), so that the FRG can be integrated into Western Europe as soon as possible.

Source: BEYER, Henry. Robert Schuman, L'Europe par la réconciliation franco-allemande. Lausanne: Fondation Jean Monnet pour l'Europe, Centre de recherches européennes, 1986. 171 p. (Cahiers rouges). p. 40-50.

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October 30, 1949

My dear Mr. Schuman :

The London accord of 1948 and the agreements which you and Mr. Bevin and I concluded last April have now borne fruit in the establishment of the Government of the Federal Republic of Germany. We have had some weeks of experience with this government and some opportunity to observe the interplay of forces between it and the High Commission. Meanwhile the pace of other international developments has not slackened. The establishment of the « German Democratic Republic » with its capital at Berlin has introduced new political elements into the German problem which although anticipated did not exist and could not be clearly delineated at the time of our earlier decisions. We must consider not only the ways in which the Germans should be expected to improve their attitude as time goes on, but also what contribution we can make to the development of a Western European community in which the Germans can assume an appropriate position as a reasonable democratic and peaceful nation.

Whether Germany will in the future be a benefit or a curse to the free world will be determined, not only by the Germans, but by the occupying powers. No country has a greater stake than France in the answer. Our own stake and responsibility is also greater. Now is the time for French initiative and leadership of the type required to integrate the German Federal Republic promptly and decisively into Western Europe. Delay will seriously weaken the possibilities of success.

In our discussions last April we have firmly established in our agreements on the Military Security Board, prohibited and limited industries, and the International Authority for the Ruhr, safeguards against German military or economic aggression or preparation for aggression or efforts to dominate Europe by Germany or German industry. We have also reserved to ourselves in the occupation statute very considerable powers with respect to the action of the German Federal Republic.

But can we safely be content with the juridical framework which we have constructed ? I do not think so. We must and shall exercise constant and effective vigilance. But a strong and effective safeguard is the growth in Germany of a wholehearted desire to participate in the political and economic development of Western Europe and the development in Germany of a truly democratic and peaceful society. The character of the present government in Germany, and of an opposition party attached to democratic policies, provide us with an opportunity. I believe that we shall probably never have any more democratic or more receptive atmosphere in Germany in which to work than we have at the present moment. Unless we move rapidly the political atmosphere will deteriorate and we shall be faced with much more difficult and dangerous personalities in the German Government. The 1920's teach us that we must give genuine and rapid support to these elements now in control of Germany if they are to be expected to retain control. Extremist views and weakening of the allegiance to democratic principles will come if these parties and their supporters are not strengthened. The USSR is actively abetting the development of anti-democratic and aggressive tendencies in Germany and is prepared to exploit them to the full.

There is another aspect of the situation which provides us with a rare opportunity to enlist the cooperation of the Germans with Western Europe. The split between East and West in world politics today is dangerous in the extreme. We do not doubt that. But the pressure of the Soviets on the Germans drives the Germans into the arms of Western Europe. Because of their dislike and fear of Communism and of the Soviet Union the Germans are psychologically and politically ripe to take measures for genuine integration with Western Europe. Unless advantage is taken of this political opportunity, we may again face a Germany aligned with the Soviet Union or feeling itself able to ask for bids.

I think there are two major areas in which we can and should take action. In both of these French leadership is essential and will ensure success.

France, as the strongest democratic power on the Continent, can take the lead in endeavoring to obtain

rapidly the participation of the new German Government in all the international, political, economic and social agencies in which German association is possible. Such participation was contemplated in our recent discussion in Washington, ranging from such technical associations as the Food and Agriculture Organization to such political associations as the Council of Europe. It will do a great deal to persuade the German people and their government of our sincere desire that they shall share fully in the rights and responsibilities of the Western European community. All of this involves no diminution of the authority of the High Commission. The weakness of German loyalty to international obligations and to democratic procedures, isolated from the main sources of the development of the ideas and institutions upon which our society is founded, and grossly intensified in the period of Nazi domination and the occupation, must be ended by a very much increased intercourse with the western world.

Secondly, I believe we must consider carefully the attitude which our representatives in Germany should take toward the German Government in the fields of German domestic affairs.

These difficult problems involve direct and indirect interests of our own, as well as German interests, and in most of them we have grown accustomed in the past four years to making decisions for the Germans or making our views felt in Germany. Unless we consciously endeavor to restrain use of our powers in these fields, both political and economic, and to give to the German Government both the substance of responsibility in these fields and the ability to make clear to the German people that their Government is acting on its own initiative in the interests of the people of Germany and of Europe, we will risk our entire program. The most damaging attitude will quickly develop in Germany if it becomes accepted in German opinion, however unjustified it may be in fact, that the High Commission is constantly imposing on the German Government policies or practices in these fields.

We could, of course, take the attitude that, having given to the Germans the Occupation Statute, we should wait for clear and definite evidence on the part of the Germans of behavior in accordance with our expectations. Can we afford to do so, in view of the shortness of time still at our disposal ? Might it not be wise to take the first step to advance to the Germans a political credit which they have not yet fully earned ? In this way we could make more certain that the developments which we much desire will take place in Germany, since by our action we could strengthen those forces in Germany upon whom we must rely and make less likely the emergence of groups whose actions could not be expected in any circumstances to facilitate our policy. I believe we would be wise to give an « advance » of good will to the Germans in view of the strength of the safeguards which we have erected and our ability to call upon the powers we have reserved. Although we have these powers we cannot reasonably hope to recreate a German will to cooperate if we once permit it to die for lack of nourishment.

I believe that our policy in Germany, and the development of a German Government which can take its place in Western Europe, depends on the assumption by your country of leadership in Europe on these problems. We in the United States have pledged ourselves to a very considerable range of assurances with respect to the future of Germany and there is, on our part, every desire to carry out in full the agreements which record our progress and to maintain vigorously the institutions established to carry them out. I repeat that our own stake in this matter is very great.

We here in America, with all the will in the world to help and support, cannot give the lead. That, if we are to succeed in this joint endeavor, must come from France.

Very sincerely yours,

Dean Acheson

His Excellency
M. Robert Schuman,
Ministry of Foreign Affairs,
Paris.

