

'A phoney choice' from La Libre Belgique (2 February 1953)

Caption: On 2 February 1953, Paul Struye, Belgian Member of the Common Assembly of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC), comments on the United States' position on the proposed European Defence Community (EDC) and describes the role of German forces in the future European army.

Source: La Libre Belgique. 02.02.1953, n° 33; 70e année. Bruxelles: Edition de la Libre Belgique S.A. "Une fausse alternative", auteur:Struye, Paul , p. 1.

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An integrated European army or an 'autonomous' Wehrmacht?

A phoney choice

The address given by the US Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles, has provoked far from favourable reactions in Europe.

As was to be expected, attention has focused on those parts of the address relating to European policy, although they were only a small part of all the problems addressed by the eminent speaker.

One sentence in particular was seized upon, and, to many ears, it sounded unpleasantly like a threat. Having reminded his listeners, with the directness of a businessman who likes to talk numbers, that the United States had 'invested close to 30 000 million dollars in Western Europe in the belief that unity could be achieved,' the Secretary of State went on to say that, 'if there was no chance whatsoever of genuine unity, and particularly if France, Germany and the United Kingdom were to go their separate ways, it would certainly be necessary to readapt slightly (some versions spoke of rethinking) US foreign policy with respect to Europe.'

Is this an attempt to exert pressure on the European democracies, requiring them blindly to ratify the plans for a political and military community of six countries, or to pay the price by having the United States end all economic aid to the Old Continent, withdraw its troops from Germany and organise the peripheral defence of Europe? That would mean that, in the event of Soviet aggression, Central and Western Europe would be occupied and destroyed before being liberated at the cost of even further destruction.

Of course, this is how our Federalist friends are tempted to interpret the American statesman's words. Obviously, if they are able to convince the general public of the sinister intentions of the United States, should the draft treaties not be ratified *ne varietur*, it would be easier for them to secure the support of many of those who are reluctant to support the treaties.

There is no disputing, however, that the words used by Mr Foster Dulles do not justify such ominous interpretations.

That he should have come out in support of a more unified organisation of Europe was quite natural. It is news to no one that the United States ascribes importance to an issue that no one in Europe itself underestimates either.

That American policy should be based on the association of all Western countries for joint defence against the common threat from the East is implicit in the agreements and the institutions known as NATO.

It is, therefore, quite natural for Mr Foster Dulles to have stated that, if the pursuit of that policy were to be rendered impossible by France, Germany and Britain each deciding to go their own way, this new element would force his country to reconsider its own position.

However, if such were to occur, he foresaw only a 'slight' change in American policy. It is difficult to imagine how simply abandoning Western Europe to its own fate and the radical upheaval that a purely peripheral defence would imply could be regarded as just a 'slight' change.

What is more, it goes without saying that it is not out of pure philanthropy, or 'europhilia', that the Americans have so far supported the European defence concept beginning 'as far east as possible'. In this respect, the Old and the New Continents share common interests.

There are other parts to Mr Foster Dulles' speech that do not justify the accusations made by some newspapers that he is 'exerting pressure'. In particular, he stresses that during his European visit he will make no commitment of any sort, because 'it is the responsibility of the United States' Congress to make commitments in cooperation with the Executive branch of the Administration.'

This is a fresh assertion of the principles underlying a democracy. The Governments of European States would sometimes do well to follow them. Too often, they end up by subjecting their countries to 'international commitments' without allowing their respective parliaments to approve, amend or reject them.

The words of the Secretary of State surely mean that he acknowledges that each national parliament has the fundamental prerogative, just like the American Congress, to determine its country's destiny.

It would be paradoxical indeed for the United States, which, for decades, has been systematically promoting self-governance for not very advanced peoples or communities, to envisage impinging upon the autonomy of European nations with their ancient civilisations.

In fact, the real European problem that is justifiably of concern to Mr Dulles and to America as a whole is none other than the role of German forces in joint defence.

Agreement has been reached by all concerned on the principle of this participation, with, clearly, much more resignation than enthusiasm or even conviction. There is no point in complaining about the inevitable. The contribution of 10 German divisions will probably not alter the balance of forces of the two blocs, for the very simple reason that the USSR will easily put up 10 or 20 new divisions to face those 10. But it is also true that, in a world that is rearming, it would be unreasonable to abandon Germany as the only unarmed country. Young French, British or American men cannot be asked to sacrifice their lives for German territory when there are young Germans unable to take up arms. Nor can Germany be freed from contributing to the financial cost of joint defence.

Therefore, the only question now is how Germany will be rearmed.

Will it be through a European army, making the renaissance of German militarism impossible, or through an autonomous Wehrmacht with all the risks of war that that implies? That is the choice that supporters of an EDC Treaty never fail to put forward as though it was axiomatic.

On closer consideration, this choice could well be just another of those 'false truths' that have often misled public opinion.

It would seem to be excessive to claim that German divisions, which will be 'European' only at army corps level, will lose all their national character as a result and will be immune from any nationalistic virus and will be prevented from ever 'breaking away'.

But the other side of the choice is just as partially accurate. A Wehrmacht that was associated with NATO in the same way as the British and French contingents and given modern weapons technology could not be self-sufficient. It would have to take orders and follow instructions from Supreme Command, just as our national armies are already doing. It would, therefore, not have that total 'autonomy' which is seen as having such perfidious consequences.

That is why Mr Van Cauwelaert, Speaker of the Chamber of Representatives, was right in saying in his recent speech in Strasbourg that: 'It is a mistake for us to make our American friends believe that, if the Defence Community is not established in the way that it was imagined, then the entire defence structure and political organisation of Europe will be in ruins.'

Paul Struye