

'The Council of Europe' from Le Monde (7 May 1949)

Caption: On 7 May 1949, commenting on the signing of the Treaty establishing the Council of Europe in London two days earlier, the French daily newspaper Le Monde analyses the powers and the role of the Strasbourg institution.

Source: Le Monde. dir. de publ. Beuve-Méry, Hubert. 07.05.1949, n° 1331; 6e année. Paris: Le Monde. "Le Conseil de l'Europe", p. 1.

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The Council of Europe

Yesterday, in London, Robert Schuman, acting on behalf of France, signed the Statute of the Council of Europe, which 10 nations are joining. This number will be increased to 12 by the imminent accession of Greece and Turkey.

If this Council might seem incomplete in comparison to Europe as a whole, and even to western Europe (Portugal, Spain, Switzerland and Germany are not included), it should be noted that it does not presume to represent the whole of Europe. It deems itself to be simply the point of departure for a European organisation which may develop further.

Other European organisations already exist, the OEEC, for example, established under the Marshall Plan but which is intended to last and which is dedicated to economic issues. The Council of Europe, although not excluding itself from dealing with these, will address them only on a subsidiary basis. It will not deal with military issues. Its powers and role are based on the composition of its two bodies, the Consultative Assembly and the Committee of Ministers.

The Assembly will essentially be an emanation of the national parliaments, even if it includes several members who are not MPs. As its name suggests, it has no decision-making powers. Above all, it will articulate public opinion and will strive to contribute to the development of European opinion by means of public discussion of the major problems, be they social, cultural, legal, etc., which affect the various nations.

The Committee of Ministers, which will be composed of the Ministers for Foreign Affairs, will take a more active role. It will consider the Assembly's recommendations. Its authority might be considerable, given that its members are in charge of foreign policy in their respective countries. However, they will not be able to take joint decisions either; they will have to settle for making recommendations to their governments.

The national governments, therefore, lose none of their sovereignty; they will not be handing over the least part to the Council of Europe. We are still a long way from the stage of a supranational State, to which national States would concede some of their powers. The aim is, rather, to facilitate the exchange of views between the nations belonging to the new organisation. While their leaders may have already discussed specific issues, the establishment of a permanent body would enable them to increase the number of such discussions and extend them to encompass other areas. Thanks to the Consultative Assembly, discussions will no longer be limited to government members, they will be reported to the general public, as are the debates that take place at the United Nations.

According to Article 5 of the Statute, a European country may, in certain circumstances, be invited to become an associate member of the Council of Europe. In that event, the country would be represented in the Consultative Assembly but not on the Committee of Ministers.

This provision is apparently aimed at Germany, whose Government, according to the occupation status imposed by the Western Powers, would have no power over foreign policy. How would this be applied if the negotiations about to begin between the Four Powers led to an overall agreement about Germany? Is it to be supposed that a Germany placed under quadripartite control might be able to participate in the Council of Europe? In theory, there is nothing to stop that: the Council of Europe remains open to the USSR itself, were it to accept Article 3, which stipulates 'the enjoyment by all persons within its jurisdiction of human rights and fundamental freedoms'.

At all events, it must be admitted that, whatever the results of the forthcoming conference, relations between Germany and Europe will give rise to delicate issues.