

‘Towards Western Union’ from Le Monde (14 March 1948)

Caption: On 14 March 1948, the French daily newspaper Le Monde reports on the proposal made to the Benelux countries by Ernest Bevin, British Foreign Secretary, that an agreement to complement the Treaty of Dunkirk between France and the United Kingdom be concluded. This initiative was welcomed and subsequently led to the signing of the Brussels Treaty.

Source: Le Monde. dir. de publ. Beuve-Méry, Hubert. 14-15.03.1948, n° 974; 5e année. Paris: Le Monde. "Vers l'union occidentale", p. 1.

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Towards Western Union

We do not yet know the terms of the five-nation pact which was recently concluded in Brussels and which will be signed and published next week. We *do* know, however, that it is based on an initiative by Ernest Bevin who, on 22 January in the House of Commons, said:

‘We shall maintain the closest possible contact [with France] and work for ever closer unity between the two nations.

The time has come to find ways and means of developing our relations with the Benelux countries. Yesterday, our representatives in Brussels, The Hague and Luxembourg were instructed to propose such talks in concert with their French colleagues. I hope that treaties will thus be signed with our near neighbours, the Benelux countries, making with our Treaty with France an important nucleus in Western Europe.

We have then to go beyond the circle of our immediate neighbours. We shall have to consider the question of associating other historic members of European civilisation, including the new Italy, in this great conception. Their eventual participation is, of course, no less important than that of countries with which, if only for geographical reasons, we must deal first. We are thinking now of Western Europe as a unit.’

These words provide the outline of a programme which is beginning to be implemented by the Brussels Pact. They met with an immediately favourable response from those to whom they were addressed. Mr Spaak, who has always been a great champion of Western Europe, grasped the hand held out to him and invited all those involved to negotiate. The Netherlands and Luxembourg proved equally willing, and the negotiations proceeded remarkably quickly, since differences of opinion between the partners were negligible.

This is a detail to which it is worth paying attention. A treaty on which five contracting parties can agree so easily and freely must respond to a need. The fates of the five nations in question have become closely linked as a result of two world wars. Those nations are aware that no conflict could affect any one of them without the others’ being obliged to become involved. It is, therefore, an instinctive reflex, a defensive reflex, which has led them to agree to provide mutual assistance in the face of aggression. We are given to understand that the planned commitment is for a period of 50 years and that assistance will be automatic within Europe and preceded by consultations if the aggression occurs in any other part of the world. Four of the five powers involved are, in fact, colonial powers.

To those who criticise the Pact because of its military nature, it would be too easy to reply that many defensive pacts have been concluded in Eastern Europe, that the United Nations Charter expressly authorises such regional agreements and, finally, that the current world situation is sufficient to justify them. No one could have imagined, three years ago, that it would take so long for things to settle down; if we now have, instead of a general peace, a situation in which various groups have been formed, to a greater or lesser extent hostile or at least alien to one another, those peoples who are the last to become associated cannot be held responsible for this state of affairs.

The importance of the Brussels Pact lies, above all, in the intentions to which it bears witness. Its significance is that of a gesture pointing in a certain direction. It remains to be seen whether the direction in which it is pointing will be followed and, if so, how far and with what degree of promptitude. If the signs do not deceive us, developments could be more rapid than anyone would have thought possible not so long ago.

This is particularly true in the economic area. Representatives of the sixteen nations are meeting in Paris on Monday, and it has already been announced that Mr Bevin will be making some important statements. In providing the impetus for a Western *entente*, the British Foreign Secretary has not merely yielded to his own personal inclinations. As our London correspondent reports today, all the political parties in Great Britain are involved in a movement in favour of this *entente*. Seventy-three Members of Parliament, of all shades of opinion, have declared themselves in favour of a highly organised political federation, with an assembly, a

constitution, and joint governing bodies. Will Mr Bevin become the interpreter of these aspirations?

It seems that what we have here is no mere diplomatic instrument, like so many of the treaties which have preceded the Brussels Treaty. Nations which have common ideals and interests feel the need to unite freely. They want this union to be complete, and they are seeking to give it the form which will be essential in order to guarantee their defence and their prosperity.