

Speech by Robert Schuman at the Council of Europe (Strasbourg, 10 December 1951)

Caption: On 10 December 1951 the French Minister of Foreign Affairs, Robert Schuman, spoke before the Assembly of the Council of Europe meeting at Strasbourg, exhorting it to encourage the constitution of a politically united Europe.

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Mr. President, Ladies and Gentlemen, the multitude of tasks with which a Minister for Foreign Affairs is constantly confronted prevented me from being present this morning to hear the speeches which you have already applauded. In Paris we are having at present the Session of the United Nations, at the same time as parliamentary debates which are, sometimes, complicated by procedural devices. All Ministers for Foreign Affairs are equally aware of the grave problems of foreign policy by which will be conditioned the future relations of the peoples of the world, and, indeed, the future of peace itself.

Your invitation, I may say, met the need that I have felt to associate myself, even if only to a minor extent, with your work.

In coming to Strasbourg I had two principal objects in mind: to give your Assembly, in the name of the French Government, an assurance of its solidarity in the quest of some form of political organisation for Europe which might correspond to immediate aims and be along the lines of previous action; and to find among you the moral support and the technical assistance which the Council of Europe is in a position to afford us.

The Council of Europe is, to be sure, the laboratory in which experiments in European co-operation are conducted, until such time as it is transformed into an organic institution of European unity. We are still at the stage of early disappointments and apparent failures, but they are never sufficient justification for discouragement, though they may sometimes justify a salutary impatience; like the laws of nature, true ideas come to be recognised and applied in the end. It is our inadequacies, our lack of courage and our passions that are responsible for the delay in their discovery and execution.

It would be wrong, as well as dangerous, to underestimate the difficulties of achieving the integration of Europe. We must make our American friends understand these difficulties, as, indeed, you have been doing. It is easier to effect the emancipation of regions that have reached the stage of being fully developed and to transform them into independent States, either through legal recognition of their development or even by an act of revolution, than to induce sovereign States, which have for centuries enjoyed complete independence, to abandon of their own free will even a fraction of their independence to a supranational authority, be it federal or otherwise. When force of habit combines with freedom of choice, they offer together a very formidable resistance to those who want changes to be made. So far in history they have given way only to the force of racial affinity, of the aspirations of a nation in process of formation or rebirth.

We are thus faced with an entirely new problem which, in its dimensions, is exceptional.

I do not need to tell you either how necessary or how urgent it is that the peoples of Europe should unite. You would not be here were you not already convinced of that. Your views differ only with regard to the immediate objectives of such unification, the methods to be employed and perhaps the rate at which reforms should be carried out. As for myself, I have not come before you to-day to offer you a plan, either governmental or personal.

During the last eighteen months France has promoted two specific measures which she is endeavouring to bring to fruition as rapidly as possible and in the best possible conditions.

To propose a plan is to take a much greater risk than simply to put forward an idea. The author of a plan commits himself and commits others. France therefore must concentrate all its present efforts on securing the success of these projects which have reached the decisive stage, one of them before the national parliaments, the other before a Conference of six countries. I speak, as you will realise, of the Coal and Steel Community and the Defence Community. Apart from these two plans, which have already taken shape, the plan for the pooling of transport and that for establishing a common market for certain agricultural products are also of French origin, and we count on your help to bring them to a successful issue.

It should not be forgotten, Ladies and Gentlemen, that the situation we are required to remedy, while

strengthening our conviction of the need to take action, as well as our will to succeed, at the same time complicates our task. The economic and financial difficulties which are universally being experienced, the political disorder which is reflected in our countries by unstable Governments and precarious majorities, the remaining traces of nationalism and traditionalism, and, finally, the international insecurity fanned by propaganda and skilfully-provoked incidents, all this creates an atmosphere which is hardly conducive to constructive and arduous reforms.

We can therefore with justice plead extenuating circumstances; but that does not absolve us from the duty to achieve results. To achieve what results? That of providing free Europe with common political institutions which will, on the one hand, facilitate the operation of the economic or military institutions to be created and will, on the other hand, ensure that unity of action and co-ordination which Europe needs if it is to survive and defend itself.

We have never doubted the need for such political integration. Our declaration of 9th May, 1950, even then proposing the establishment of a European Coal and Steel Community, looked confidently forward to the ultimate constitution of a European Federation, without necessarily giving this word "federation" its strict juridical meaning.

The urgent need of a European policy made itself felt more imperatively when the plan for a European army came under consideration. The Coal and Steel Community could, in fact be conceived, and was conceived, so as to fit in with our constitutional principles and without there being any need to create a supranational political authority. With regard to the Defence Community, it might perhaps be possible to set up and administer a joint army which was not a mere coalition of national armies without calling constitutional principles into question. Opinions on this may vary from country to country. But the use of such an army implies unity of purpose and determination in a sphere of fundamental importance, since it is a matter of peace or war, of involving the lives of men and the fate of nations.

In a coalition each State retains the right, *de jure* and even *de facto*, to withdraw the national troops which remain under its sovereign authority. In doing this it may perhaps break the promises it has made. But it remains master of its own decisions.

A common de-nationalised army would, and could, no longer owe obedience to a national authority, either as a whole nor in respect of the units of which it is composed. It would have sworn loyalty to the Community. The Community alone would have power over it. If any of its units were to follow the orders of a national Government, they would be regarded as deserters or rebels. If, therefore, such an army is set up, the only valid orders will have to come from an authority recognised by all the participating States.

What form will this supranational authority take?

The Commander-in-Chief? He has the military responsibilities and the powers he needs to meet them. But he is subject to the orders of the political authority of which he is the executive agent. If the two powers, political and military, were united in one person, the result would be a dictatorship, absolute power.

Our democratic principles are bound to be applied to the organisation of Europe as much as to individual States. This excludes a monopoly of authority in the hands of one man.

Let us, for the sake of comparison, see what happens in the Atlantic Treaty Organisation. The allied troops assigned to Atlantic defence are placed under a supreme commander, assisted by subordinate commanders and General Staffs composed of officers of various origins. But these troops still retain their national character.

The authority of their national Governments is only partly delegated to the single command. The national Governments, which, in signing the Treaty undertook to come to one another's assistance in the event of aggression, nevertheless retain the option of themselves deciding, so far as each is concerned, what the nature and extent of that assistance shall be. There is a coalition, a pact to provide mutual aid, but no

delegation of political power and no supranational authority. The same applies, as you know, to O.E.E.C. in which all decisions, other than those of so-called procedure, have to be taken unanimously. In that case, too, no transfer of sovereignty and no supranational power is involved.

In the event of its formation, the European Army would be placed under the combined authority of six Governments. How would this authority be exercised when it came to deciding whether or not the army should come into operation or be involved in war?

Let us suppose that there were a Committee of Ministers in which each Government would be represented by one of its own Ministers. Careful reasoning will show where the crux of the problem lies. In the event of this 'College' of Ministers being obliged to take unanimous decisions, each Government would be able to vote and decide freely; it would be able to conform with the constitutional rules by which it is governed. The result would be that each State would be able to oppose the use of this common army by its veto. This would risk paralysing it and rendering it powerless to act.

On the other hand, if the majority rule were to apply to this 'College' of Ministers, the Governments would undertake in advance to submit to a majority decision. In that event there would be a surrender of sovereignty, a supranational authority and an increased likelihood of effective action, but, to an equal extent, incompatibility with the constitutional rules at present in force in the participating States.

At present our constitutions reserve to our respective Parliaments the right to declare war and to vote military appropriations.

It can therefore be seen that a real transfer of sovereignty applicable would not suffice in the case of a European Army; it would at the same time be necessary to set up a common Parliament and establish common funds, though this would not solve the problem satisfactorily. The Ministers who were Members of the Council would still be responsible to their respective national Parliaments. Would they also be responsible to a common Assembly? Can we imagine a European Assembly being in a position to compel a Minister to resign who had not lost the confidence of his national Parliament?

I merely raise the question, since at the moment I do not know the answer.

In order to circumvent this difficulty, a board of independent men might be envisaged, to which the management of the common organisation might be entrusted. Here is a suggestion which might well be put to me. This is the case with the Coal and Steel Community, whose High Authority consists of nine men independent both of private interests and State power.

This solution might well be adopted — and, indeed, it is what we have chosen — where an economic undertaking is involved. But it appears to me to be out of the question when it comes to taking political decisions. In the latter case, the main authority can only be a Council of Ministers. This is, moreover, the solution adopted in the organisation of the Commonwealth. The national Ministers meet as a confederal body. Such an organisation would be responsible for defining common policy in matters of defence and in consequence, necessarily and logically, foreign affairs, insofar as the latter concern the community of associated countries.

Once this principle has been accepted, it may be hoped that, if the community spirit exists and gathers strength, a common opinion will eventually result, without any necessity for voting and without any majority or unanimity rule having to be applied. This is what happens nearly every day within national Governments.

Can we hope that a 'College' of Ministers, permanently and as an institution responsible for defining a collective policy of defence and peace, will show itself capable of preparing a general alignment of foreign policies in matters of common interest? That is the question we have to ask ourselves, that you will ask yourselves, and to which other systems of confederation have succeeded in finding an answer.

Once you are launched upon this road, an infinite number of gradations and stages are possible. We shall, time and again, be obliged to make a choice by common agreement. The important thing, Ladies and Gentlemen, is to make a start, to get ahead with the job.

You have given an example of this. Extremely interesting proposals have just been debated within this Assembly, and the outcome of the voting has already been encouraging. Your Committee on General Affairs has tabled some Motions thoroughly deserving of our attention. The Governments and the Committee of Ministers will in their turn have to state where they stand in these matters.

The French Government will continue to adhere to the general lines which it has already laid down for itself. It will strive to achieve results which appear to it to provide an assurance of being immediately effective. The particular position in which each participating State finds itself will, of course, have to be taken into account. The institution of Specialised Authorities and the possibility of partial agreements will enable us to undertake certain limited experiments, however modest, pending the conclusion of more general agreements.

It is in the interest of all of us to ensure that the specific experiments undertaken by us succeed. This will be the best way of convincing our British friends and others who may still be holding back somewhat but may be amenable to persuasion.

To achieve success we shall need a great deal of tenacity and patience, both within our own countries and in negotiations between the Governments themselves. But, whatever the result we achieve, the problem of the unification of Europe has been raised, and it can no longer be eluded. Should we show ourselves powerless to solve it as a result of our hesitancy, events and the aspirations of the peoples would take it upon themselves to force us to make the necessary decisions. If we do not make up our minds in time, Ladies and Gentlemen, we shall run the risk of letting slip the last chance of salvation for Europe and for our countries, and which of us, I ask you, would be prepared to take such a responsibility?

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