

‘French National Assembly rejects US plans for a "European army"' from Pravda (31 August 1954)

Caption: On 31 August 1954, the Soviet daily newspaper Pravda applauds the rejection by the French National Assembly of the Treaty establishing a European Defence Community (EDC).

Source: Pravda. 31.08.1954. Moskva. "Natsional'noe sobranie Frantsii otverglo amerikanskii plan 'evropeiskii armi'".

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French National Assembly rejects US plans for a 'European army'

From Pravda's own correspondent

In France all eyes are focused on the seat of the French Parliament, the Palais Bourbon, where the fate of the European army is under discussion.

France stands at a crossroads; will it take the path of peace and national independence, or will it be drawn into US plans for a rebirth of German militarism that threatens the peace and security of France and other European nations?

The French are strongly opposed to the idea of a European army. The drafts of the Bonn and Paris Agreements were strongly opposed in French parliamentary circles.

The French Parliament began discussing the ratification of the Bonn and Paris Agreements on 28 August. The talks have now entered their third day. There is an intense political struggle between supporters and opponents of the European army.

As has already been reported, zealous supporters of the Paris Agreements tried to resort to procedural subterfuge in an attempt to have the parliamentary debates adjourned. They were afraid that the 'European army' Treaty might fail and so put proposals forward in an attempt to delay the parliamentary debates and, at the same time, reconvene the failed Brussels Conference of the six signatories of the Paris Treaty.

The manoeuvres by those attempting to resurrect the *Wehrmacht* were clearly coordinated with Washington. It was precisely at this time that the Belgian Foreign Minister, Spaak, sent the French Government so-called 'new proposals' on the plan for a 'European army'. Mr Spaak's proposals, which, as the French put it, 'contain nothing new', were to serve as a pretext for convening another meeting.

Upon discovering what the European army's supporters were attempting to do, nationalist and patriotic elements in the French Parliament took action. Aumeran put forward his proposal known as the 'preliminary motion'. His proposal boiled down to curtailing parliamentary debate on the question, thus rejecting the Bonn and Paris Treaties without a general debate.

Aumeran's motion was put forward on the evening of 29 August and caused much confusion among the European army's supporters. A recess was called in Parliament, whereupon the Cabinet met, as did the Foreign Affairs Committee, and there were behind-the-scenes discussions among parliamentary parties and groups.

By the time Parliament's evening session had started, it was clear that the manoeuvring by the European army's supporters had failed. They were forced to withdraw their proposal that the debates be adjourned. On that basis Aumeran also temporarily withdrew his preliminary motion. Substantive debates on the ratification of the Bonn and Paris Agreements then commenced.

Out of 78 registered speakers at the evening session, only three spoke. René Mayer spoke on behalf of the supporters of the European army. Mr Mayer is closely linked with big capital both in France and elsewhere. Mr Mayer repeated the threat that rejecting the European army could lead to the isolation of France. Of course, he was not able to refute the arguments that denounced the EDC Treaty as being contrary to France's fundamental national interests.

The first two days of the parliamentary debates clearly showed that the stooges of the European army did not have a majority and had suffered a further moral and political defeat. So they once again resorted to procedural chicanery.

On 30 August, when the morning session opened, the Member Schuppen (a supporter of the European army) announced that he was maintaining the proposal to have the debates adjourned. Schuppen's proposal was

intended to halt the parliamentary debates and have them resume only after the six signatories of the Paris Agreements had held a meeting.

Aumeran again tabled his preliminary motion, which took priority and was the first item to be discussed, in accordance with parliamentary procedure.

A recess was then called without the general debates being resumed. The Cabinet met once again, and the situation was also discussed by the Foreign Affairs Committee.

Most of the Committee's members denounced the efforts by the European army's supporters to stifle the parliamentary debates. It was in such a spirit that the Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee, Daniel Mayer, spoke at the evening parliamentary session.

On behalf of the minority of the Committee, Mr de Moustier verbally attacked the French Prime Minister, Pierre Mendès-France, and demanded that the debates be adjourned.

Mr Mendès-France responded by stating that the Government would not call for a vote of confidence either on the proposal to suspend the debate or on the proposal to adjourn it. In the former case Government Members would have abstained from voting.

After these statements, Schuppen announced that he was not withdrawing his proposal. The Honorary President of the French National Assembly, Édouard Herriot, aligned himself with Aumeran's motion to have the Bonn and Paris Agreements rejected without continuing the general debate.

Explaining his position, Mr Herriot spoke from his seat, since his health would not allow him to approach the rostrum. The leading French politician's speech received a standing ovation from most of the Members.

In his speech, Mr Herriot strongly criticised the 'European army' Treaty. He called it perilous, leading not to peace but to war.

'We are striving for a peaceful Europe in which there is a place for both Germany and the Soviet Union.

This is a matter of life or death for France. A European army would be the end of France!'

Herriot's analysis of the Paris and Bonn Agreements incontrovertibly showed that they would deprive France of its national army, its sovereignty and its independence. He emphasised that the European Defence Community would give supremacy to the German militarists and revanchists, and declared that the United Kingdom's desire to opt out of the EDC was, in his opinion, reason enough to reject the Treaty. He furthermore stated his opinion that under no circumstances should France accept the infringement of its sovereignty that the Treaty would represent. Mr Herriot referred to Article 20 of the Treaty as 'monstrous and ridiculous'. This article prohibits Members of the European Defence Council (the governing body of the EDC) from accepting instructions from their own countries and suggests that they forget their national origins so that they may be guided by a spirit of 'supranationalism'.

Mr Herriot asked, 'What kind of commissioners would these be? Supermen or robots? I say that the EDC means the end of France.' He continued: 'This important issue has divided us all, and it would be better for us to lance this abscess on French politics and conclude these debates once and for all. We need to find a peaceful solution to this thorny issue in Europe and prepare not for a European Defence Community but for another kind of Europe, a Europe which is solid and based on rapprochement with Germany and with Russia. A European Defence Community would be a perilous enterprise indeed. Reject it!'

Mr Herriot then addressed the European army supporters:

'How can we find peace while taking the path to war?'

Mr Herriot was rudely interrupted several times by supporters of the Paris Agreements. But these outbursts only caused resentment among most of the deputies, who expressed their support for Mr Herriot's position.

The Member Teitgen, a well-known advocate of the resurrection of the *Wehrmacht*, retaliated by asking Mr Herriot why he did not agree that a 'last chance' effort be made to reach a compromise at a further meeting of the six Western European countries (this refers to compromises on the 'amendments' to the Treaty on a 'European army' which do not actually alter its substance).

In response to Mr Teitgen, Mr Herriot said that no such meeting would resolve the issue.

'It is neither the details nor the format that divides us, it is the substance! We favour a united Europe, not a Europe of six countries. We want peace founded on peace and not on the armaments of certain countries; rapprochement with Germany and with other countries of Europe based on principles other than the 'European Defence Community'.

Mr Herriot recalled that he had signed an agreement with the Soviet Union and he had no regrets at having done so. He called for the signing of another such agreement with the USSR.

To conclude his moving speech, Mr Herriot warned Members of the exceptional responsibilities facing them.

Mr Herriot's patriotic speech made a huge impression on the deputies and the public.

After the socialist Mr Pinot had spoken, General Aumeran's preliminary motion was put to the vote. The motion was intended to stop the National Assembly from discussing the ratification of the European Defence Community (Paris Agreements) or the Bonn Agreement any further, and to remove it from the agenda.

A recess was called in order to count the votes.

When the meeting resumed, it was announced that General Aumeran's motion had been passed by 319 votes to 264. Thus the motion was adopted. After the results of the vote were announced, the opponents of the European army all got up from their seats and sang the *Marseillaise*.

Following the vote, the National Assembly withdrew the Paris Agreements and the European army from the agenda, and the debate on the issue was closed.

Thus the French National Assembly rejected the Paris and Bonn Agreements, rejected the plans to create a European Defence Community, and voted against the rearmament of West Germany under the mask of such a Community. The majority of the National Assembly thereby adopted the decision that was in keeping with the hopes and aspirations of the French people and the vital interests of France.

G. Rassadin
Paris, 30 August