

Paul-Henri Spaak, Integration or decline

Caption: In April 1955, Paul-Henri Spaak, Belgian Foreign Minister, publishes an article in the magazine *Écrits de Paris* in which he shows that the revival of European cooperation is necessary for peace and prosperity in Western Europe.

Source: SMETS, Paul-F. (sous la dir.). *La pensée européenne et atlantique de Paul-Henri Spaak (1942-1972)*. Volume 1. Bruxelles: Goemaere, 1980. 1256 p. p. 427-431.

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In April 1955, Paul-Henri Spaak publishes two articles: one, in the magazine *Écrits de Paris* with the title 'Intégration ou décadence' (Integration or Decline); the other, in the American review *Foreign Affairs* with the title 'The Atom Bomb and NATO'. In the former, the Foreign Minister defends European integration as a necessary condition for freedom and prosperity.

Integration or decline

It is not my intention to go back over the dramatic circumstances of the Brussels Conference and the rejection of the EDC in a spirit of bitterness and regret. I should simply like to affirm and recall the scale of the concessions made to France by its partners: as regards most of the problems brought up by Mr Mendès France in Brussels, the five other countries had agreed to take into account France's wishes — the decentralisation of the Commission, changes to the appeal process before the Court of Justice, the establishment of an initial period of two years for the integration of national armies. But our desire for agreement and conciliation could not lead us to sacrifice the essential, that is to say, to renounce all 'supranationality' and to break an agreement that we had made a few months earlier on 4 May 1954, at France's own request, to create as quickly as possible common political institutions in accordance with Article 38 of the Treaty and to establish an Assembly elected by universal suffrage. It is not creating an argument simply to recall historical truth or to say what a severe blow the French Parliament's refusal dealt to the formation of Europe and in what a difficult situation it put the other countries.

This EDC, so criticised and feared, was it anything other than the application of a general and well-known principle which states that, in every society, in every community, whatever it may be, a restriction on the independence of each unit will be to everyone's advantage? What is true for individuals is also true for nations. What was it then that the six countries were sacrificing that was so essential? They were pooling their rights and their sovereignty. If they lost a little freedom, each at least maintained the right to monitor the others. Inasmuch as personal ownership lost some ground, collective ownership benefited.

Is it necessary to recall the inconveniences of conventional military coalitions and the extent of the dissension that they eventually create between allies? The reasons for rivalry remain permanent and definitive, while integration creates a changeable and perfectible system. A coalition does not evolve, except towards its own dissociation; on the contrary, in an integration the gears run themselves in, correct themselves and improve over time. A coalition wears itself out until it breaks, but a community continually builds itself.

But let us not dwell on the past, unless it is to remember that the EDC was nothing more than a stage, imposed by circumstances and made necessary by unprecedented military threat, along the road to a broader community and that it is the economic and political integration of Europe that we offer. The ratification of the London and Paris Accords by the French Parliament, no matter what the difficulties were and considering the abstention of numerous 'European' MPs who deemed them inadequate, proves that a majority exists in France, as in the other countries of free Europe, in favour of beginning integration. If these accords signify a step backwards compared with the EDC, they at least affirm, in the very words of their preamble, that integration must be pursued. The European idea has been able to survive a setback; it is not dead, and we all know henceforth that France will not abandon it. Perhaps, to use an expression that says exactly what it means, we even have had to 'take a step back to be able to jump farther forward.' With this worry aside, let us rejoice and resume European contact.

For this new effort, we have two foundations: one is this *Western European Union* that the Paris Accords recently instituted and which, if they do not create a common army, must nevertheless allow for a European solution to the problem of both the Saarland and arms control; the other is the ECSC, which has the first and very important merit of having existed, persisted and operated for several years now and with which Great Britain recently signed a cautious treaty of association. But, on its own, the ECSC would be no more than a short-lived and limited achievement if it did not serve as a starting point for other types of unification: I am thinking of common policies on transport, oil, nuclear energy and electricity. Thus expanded, and with its powers increased and its decision-making powers reinforced, the European Community will be in a position to undertake tasks that it alone can carry out successfully.

We know only too well that new common markets cannot be created without conflicts and sacrifices. We do not deny that monetary difficulties may occur along the road to the unification of national economies. But was any country ever exempt from such bumps in the road? At least the cohesion of an organised group will enable comprehensive measures to be taken, which will bring the values, the 'normal ones' of all the participating countries, to a more balanced position. As such, the Community will be able to act as a shock absorber, with better things and more to come.

Just as an ancient philosopher proved the principle of movement by walking, it is in extending as far as possible the scope of the ECSC that we shall give to the peoples of Europe the conviction that our old continent is on its way to unification. They will gradually grow accustomed to substituting for the schoolboy concept of geographic unification the living reality thereof. They will feel and understand that European integration is the combination of all political, spiritual, military and economic forces of all the countries that comprise it and that, faced by the terrifying dangers that threaten them, the death of this integration would mark the beginning of the decline.

There are two countries in the world whose economies are in full expansion and which display astonishing vitality, youthfulness and strength: the USA and the USSR. Those two countries have neither philosophies of existence, political ideals, nor economic and social structures in common. Over essential problems of government, over its methods and over the issue of human destiny, we see them oppose each other every day with increasing violence. If, in spite of their fundamental differences, their economies progress, it is because each of those two nations has an immense market, with which the market of no European country may be compared. However, if the European countries actually did consent to unite, to federate instead of always setting themselves against one another, if they instituted amongst themselves a common market that was no longer simply a common market for coal and steel, why should they not also achieve the same power? Our production lines would greatly improve our production costs; our industries would find outlets as vast as the ones which Russian and American industries are able to find. The general economy would be improved, and we could raise everyone's standard of living.

Europe is not guns, tanks, and atomic weapons, however necessary our joint rearmament in the face of the dangers that threaten us may be. Europe is not a fortress with impassable borders and forests of bayonets and raised fists. Europe must be the epitome of freedom, because it must also be the epitome of prosperity. It is the end of wars between nations. It is, for everyone, an opportunity to live in a harmonious whole.

But let us beware: if our continent delays too long in uniting, if our old hostilities and our border quarrels get the upper hand, if we slow down the huge effort that carries us towards unity, then, through no one's fault but our own, we shall go spiralling into an irremediable decline, and we shall have nothing left but our tears to mourn a great civilisation that we refused to save when there was still time.