

French draft political report at the Hague Congress (Spring 1948)

Caption: In April 1948, Edmond Vermeil, Professor of German History and Civilisation at the Sorbonne and Member of the French Council for a United Europe, prepares a draft report for the Political Committee of the Congress of Europe in The Hague in which he places particular emphasis on the fact that the finding of a solution to the German industrial problem is an urgent requirement for the future of the European continent.

Source: Archives historiques de l'Union européenne, Florence, Villa Il Poggiolo. Dépôts, DEP. ME Mouvement européen. Préparation du Congrès de l'Europe devant se tenir à La Haye du 07 au 10/05/1948, ME 1182.

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Congress of Europe. French draft political report submitted by Edmond Vermeil (Spring 1948)

The question, and it is an anguished one, which the Europeans of today, worn out by the daily spectacle of the national governments of both the East and the West, under constant pressure from huge, continental-sized empires, struggling and utterly powerless in the midst of insurmountable difficulties and constantly recurring crises, ask themselves is this: which way are we to turn? What way is there apart from turning towards Europe itself, but a united Europe or, if one prefers, a United States of Europe? So profound is the longing for this, whether secret or avowed, that on all sides it has given rise to a host of federalist groupings which, although the methods they adopt and the ends they pursue are quite varied, are nevertheless all driven by one and the same fervent desire: to see the establishment, on solid foundations, in between America and Russia, of a continent which, without sacrificing the marvellously wide variety of its aspirations and its cultures, will, after so many fratricidal wars and almost fatal episodes of devastation, give itself the political and economic unity which is now essential to its future prosperity and is the only way of ensuring, by new methods, that the overseas territories are developed on a proper and equitable basis in the common interest.

I. GENERAL AIMS TO BE PURSUED

1. The establishment of the United States of Europe necessarily entails genuine political solidarity, a real federation which enables European nations not only to decide on joint major production objectives and to allocate them among themselves but also to bind themselves together indissolubly by a pact. Forbidding them ever to engage in warlike conflict amongst themselves would be a contract that, by that very token, puts an end to the German danger. As national egoism is exacerbated by disparities in economic conditions, the supreme goal would not, of course, be to replace Europe's wealth of differences with an unendurable uniformity, but to raise its ways of existing to a higher level and, in any event, to safeguard the 'national dignity' of each country, even though there would inevitably be a surrender of sovereignty.

2. The problem of European unity is easily grasped as regards its economic aspects. The idea of a customs union has been on the agenda since the conference of the Sixteen. In comparison with the customs union that Switzerland took the risk of setting up in 1848, the 'Zollverein' which Prussia put together before Sadova and the recent 'Benelux' grouping, this Union seems strangely complicated. The European Union and the British Commonwealth have to be brought together; a precarious balance has to be struck between countries which are still prosperous and nations which are threatened with decline; the old customs tariffs have to be replaced by the delicate machinery of checks and permits with which we are familiar; the national economies first have to be cleaned up — it is all so difficult! How are we to escape from the vicious circle, when a clean-up can hardly take place until there is a Union? That is why we need American aid, if only to give us a kick start and until such time as Europe, once it has overcome this impasse, is able to do its planning for itself.

3. The independence we should be striving for would thus be continent-wide. A close-knit union of its constituent parts, the workings of a cooperation which, in the West, could only take its inspiration from liberal principles and can only rely on the consent of those concerned, these would make of Europe a whole supported by its overseas territories. The continent would then be in a position to assert itself as regards West and East, and to play the welcome part of an arbiter between them. What other outcome can there be to the present tragic situation? It is what Aristide Briand aspired to bring about in his day. It is what Britain, thanks to recent, painful experience, seems better able to understand. It is what is represented by the American tradition that takes its inspiration from Wilson and Roosevelt, and what France is moving towards, knowing full well that a federation of several hundred million people would enjoy much greater prestige and authority than a scattering of states incapable of coming together and giving each other mutual support in every field.

A free and united Europe true to its conciliating mission will certainly be a nuisance to America and Russia. Kominform would lose its best assets and Russia would have to resign itself to defending its security along its normal borders. The capitalist expansion of the United States would come up against social and economic structures which would hamper its influence. The American military would have to give up some of its

forward positions. But what precious advantages we would get in return! A truly neutral Europe would create, out of itself and between potential enemies, a zone of détente and peace which could deflect the conflict which threatens to break out. It would serve the interests of both sides, sidestepping any attempt to seize hold of it and any single influence, remaining open to very welcome economic and intellectual exchanges. We would escape from the terrible dilemma of deciding between utopia or annihilation.

4. Let me also say straight away that it would also solve the German problem.

We cannot, of course, overlook the current partition of Germany along the line of the Elbe, a historic partition, in fact, since it puts up a barrier between West Germany and the regions in the east once colonised by it. If Germany turns its face towards Moscow, Europe is at serious risk of crumbling around it and becoming a mere geopolitical appendage of the Eurasian landmass. If it turns towards Washington, the influence of the Soviet Union cannot stretch towards the Atlantic or the Mediterranean. Now, if Europe remains incapable of organising itself, will Germany not be tempted, as a means of rebuilding its unity, to tilt the balance towards one or other of the two empires which are trying to organise the world? The detailed problems — the Ruhr, the frontiers to the east, reparations, a central government — are all secondary to this supreme danger. From the day when Germany, even if reduced to its western regions, could join a European Community, that danger would vanish and give place to a new, pacifying mission. There is nothing vaguely utopian about such a prospect. It is the only prospect that we can realistically make attractive to young Germans disoriented by defeat, the only prospect which surpasses, in real greatness, the apparent glory of Hitler's ephemeral conquests. That is certainly an argument that counts.

II. STEPS TO BE TAKEN IN THE IMMEDIATE AND LONGER-TERM FUTURE

We believe that the steps to be taken are not of two, but of three kinds. The action to be undertaken must be at the governmental, interparliamentary and popular levels.

1. It will take some time to achieve European unity, break down the barriers that mistrust has erected all over the continent and gradually construct a European awareness. We will only achieve it by getting our governments to consult each other regularly. A permanent international organisation needs to be created at the European level.

The conference of the Sixteen has already given us a preliminary idea of the institutions to be set up. The Pan-American Union can be taken as an example. But let us not forget that there was already talk of regional agreements within the League of Nations and that the present United Nations provides for them. You remember that there was a proposal for resolving the Ruhr problem as part of a regional agreement looking to the UN. If, on the other hand, we were to hark back to the memory of the German Confederation or the Holy Alliance, it would be to reject, in the same breath, their reactionary policies which, after the failure of 1848, allowed Bismarckian unity to establish itself in the centre of Europe.

The consultative organisation to be set up would comprise two bodies, as follows:

— A permanent international Secretariat, financed jointly by all the governments involved. Its tasks would be to study the problems that the creation of a European Community would involve, and to formulate proposals for concerted action on all the matters put before it.

— A system of regular conferences of ministers from the various countries of Europe, with a view to getting these countries to adopt the same attitude.

Thought should be given, without delay, to reducing the scope of national sovereignty and possibly setting up a European central power, superimposed on the continent's nations, with a federal parliament and a parliament representing the people of the continent. This would not be a vague confederation united by weak common interests, but a true federation with powers divided between unitary bodies and federative institutions. It was precisely because it lacked cohesion and strength that Prussian supremacy was once the precondition for the future continental supremacy which Germany coveted.

2. Interparliamentary action should not be disregarded, for the good reason that it already takes place and is even the subject of a fervent campaign targeted at the members of Europe's parliaments by Count Coudenhove-Kalergi, once the promoter of the idea of Pan-Europe.

Many members of parliament have spoken out, on behalf of some 12 countries, in favour of a European Federation as part of the United Nations. They think that parliamentary majorities should be put together which are strong enough to support their respective governments' pan-European policies, or to pull those very governments behind them if they remain unconvinced.

Thus, the 'European Parliamentary Union' was set up at the preliminary meeting in Gstaad on 4 and 5 July 1947. From the outset, it proclaimed its independence of similar groupings: the Pan-European Union, the United Europe Committee, the European League, the Union of European Federalists. In September, in the same place, the Parliamentary Conference proper took place. It looked forward to a European regional grouping in the spirit of Article 52 of the Charter of the United Nations, a permanent Community known as the United States of Europe, and the convening of a European Constituent Assembly. The expectation of the continent, once it has been put back together, is that, because of its temperate climate, its mean agricultural production and its many ethnic groups, it should, in the midst of contrasts of which none is really tragic, restore a world balance which was previously at risk of breaking apart for good.

3. How could we possibly not share the British view that, if such a huge and difficult undertaking is to succeed, we must have the full backing of public opinion? The international campaign will therefore have to be pushed the whole distance.

Ordinary people must, at all costs, be aware in advance of the inestimable benefits which European reconstruction would bring them. What they must know, above all, at the present time is what the consequences, in the form of obstacles to the achievement of such a legitimate project, could be if the particular forms of egoism found within each nation are allowed to come into play. Europeans must say to themselves that a return to order, justice and prosperity depends solely on themselves, as Europeans. A continent so terribly threatened, as ours is, with total collapse cannot be organised on the basis of different forms of national anarchy. All these are valid arguments and forcible motives to put before the peoples of our countries, instead of the slogans put out by so many misleading propagandists! That is the price to be paid for purging public opinion of impurities.

III. THE GERMAN PROBLEM

The German problem, as we have said, can only be solved in the context of the European Community. Nor can it be separated from the problem of the whole continent. A special problem has to be reserved for it. If we cannot agree about Germany, how can we agree about Europe?

Either Germany will play the double game we are all familiar with, either taking advantage of a Russian invasion, after letting the British and Americans rebuild their industry, so as to recover its provinces in the West, or so as to align itself with the forces of the West, if the object is to provoke a war and the destruction of the Soviet Union; or else it will decide to join a European organisation greater than itself, in which the exercise of its will can no longer be supremacist in character or involve possessing destructive power.

1. The point, in the first instance, is to repair the damage caused the wars of the 20th century, by restoring the balance between Germany and the European periphery.

In fact, that balance barely existed in the past. At the time of Richelieu, to go back no further, the German nation, in the context of the already decrepit Holy Roman Empire, was no more than a scattering of 234 territories reduced to impotence by their fragmentation and their selfish sovereignties. In the two centuries between 1740, when Frederick II came to the throne, and 1945, the end of a second Thirty Years War, what a lot of things happened! The rise of Prussia; the creation of the pseudo-federal Bismarckian State, under Prussian dominance; the devastating industrial revolution which dictated the fate of the whole German

nation; a process of militarisation which, by grinding down the German soul and operating in the technological sphere, both in industry and in the army, stripped it of its essence; and, lastly, a fatal split in the development of the German spirit and a separation between the German people, now entirely given over to falsehood, and the magnificent culture it had once possessed.

These events, following on from one another, totally overturned the situation. Hitler's Reich, having attained its greatest possible cohesion, was to dream of a New Order which it would impose on the entire continent. It then set about taking action, and what action! Let us not forget that Nietzsche, in about 1880, predicted that if Europeans did not manage to unite, they would see, rising up in their midst, a monstrous state that they would then have to destroy.

Now that Germany is partitioned along the Elbe Line, some people think that there is no longer a German danger. Actually, the question is not whether Germany can or cannot provoke or declare a war by itself. The point is to stop it failing to do its European duty or, if you prefer, to win it over finally, or at the very least to win over its western part, to the cause of European union.

2. If we look at the economic aspect of the problem, which cannot be artificially separated from the political aspect, it is easy to see that we should refrain from any unjustified criticism of the United States' European policy, criticism which communist propaganda, of course, seeks only to accentuate. Any campaign of hate would risk tipping America over to the German side, just as Chiang Kai-shek, by discouraging American offers of help in the same way, finally steered it towards Japan.

America cannot let Europe slide into chaos. France's best interests would be served by favouring the implementation of the United States' economic plan for Europe, but that plan must not be allowed to impose conditions on it which would threaten its security or its prosperity. If France cannot reconstruct its industrial sector on a normal basis, if that sector, whether nationalised or private, is deprived of every kind of credit while large amounts of capital are channelled towards Germany to finance mass production which is seen as essential to its economic and financial independence, are we not anticipating the wishes that the former leaders of the German economy certainly entertain? We are all aware of the kind of relationship they wanted to establish between Germany and France in that area.

This is not, of course, the Americans' official intention. In this respect their foreign policy still tends to waver. But they could be induced, with the help of the reconstituted west Germany alone, to set up that economic order which the continent has, so far, not been able to establish in the full exercise of its initiative and its freedom, in a concert of all its nations. Some people seem to accept that the Nazi plan in the end served Europe by prefiguring the order which needed to be established, in other words the standard relationship between a powerful industrial nation and its farming-orientated neighbours. They add, of course, that Germany made itself insupportable by seeking to take advantage of this splendid opportunity for condemning the entire periphery to servitude. Does that make their reasoning any less specious?

The fact is that we have to decide whether Germany's industrial might is or is not vital to the future European Union. It would be regrettable if, even without wishing to do so, we were to turn the military defeat of the Third Reich into an economic victory for the present Germany. Who would want to demonstrate that crime pays? Or to overlook France's fears at a time when German steel production is set to rise from 5.9 to 10.7 million tonnes and coal is to remain in Germany instead of being distributed, as it should be, to the neighbours that it once occupied and ruined? Beware of German propaganda! The famine argument cannot have its full effect if the Germans refuse to make the requisite effort in terms of agriculture or employment, if, as the Hoover report suggests, their future exports should be justified by the possibly enormous scale of their imports. The fact that German output is still low in no way diminishes the concern we feel when we contemplate the change there has recently been on that front.

People are too inclined to forget that Belgium, Luxembourg and France can produce 17 million tonnes of steel on their own, with the requisite coal and coke. Are we supposed to rebuild the Ruhr steelworks to transport ore there from Lorraine, sending it on a journey three times longer than is required for the reverse process? Are we to see the rebirth of the International Steel Cartel that an all-powerful Germany once set

up? Having hanged the Nazi leaders, are we to use the very people who gave them bribes?

It is true that with the Marshall Plan the Russians have to face up to their responsibilities. If their aims are peaceful, they have everything to gain from the reconstruction of Europe. If, on the other hand, they want to penetrate Europe in order to establish their domination over it, the Marshall Plan is the greatest possible obstacle to their plans. Even so, we must not re-establish the German danger. There was a great deal that was worth retaining in the ideas once expressed by Roosevelt and Morgenthau regarding a reduction in the size of German industry. Has not unbridled industrialisation already been a disaster for Germany and for Europe?

France has called for the political separation of the Ruhr. Under the pressure of events, its government may have dropped this demand. At all events, European Union would do away with that thorny problem. The question is more political than economic and can only be solved as part of a German federal organisation that should be discussed later in the context of the federation of the whole continent. As the greater Prussian state is disappearing, the Ruhr will no longer depend on Berlin. The essential thing is, and will be, to see that, despite the relative scattering of industries across the territory of Germany, the Ruhr retains its role as a central nucleus and a monitoring centre without comparison.

The French idea of a form of control equivalent to effective international management and supervision is the right one. Why not say to the Russians, at least if their aims are peaceful, that the Ruhr must be used only for European reconstruction, so they have no business becoming directly involved in it, except to secure their rightful reparations? And tell the British and Americans that it is natural to relieve the Germans of an arsenal that they put to such tragic use?

So the mines in the Ruhr must belong to the whole of Europe; they should be exploited in the common interest; the coal extracted from them should be allocated among all the uses for which it is required in western Europe, wherever they are and on the same terms. All these uses must pay for the coal in return, in other words supply food and other necessities for the miners and provide for the maintenance of the mines. As regards the ownership and rational exploitation of the resources of the Ruhr, we can only, in the European Union, agree to the cooperation of all those who need the Ruhr coal, including Germany itself. There can be no question of robbing Germany for the benefit of Europe. This pooling of a natural resource in a united Europe does not only concern Ruhr coal. It may have a part to play in relation to colonial products, to access to raw materials held by other European powers. This, and only this, will solve the German colonial problem.

This would make the Ruhr, in the context of a united Europe, into a pledge of reparations, a way of acting on the greater part of the German economy in order to contain it within proper limits, an instrument for monitoring any future armaments. It could, in particular, be the chief regulating mechanism for a nationalised European economy which would then prevent us integrating the new international organisation into the United Nations, which would come down to taking our inspiration from a principle which we think is an excellent one: solving the German industrial problem before tackling the problem of political unity or that of re-education.

There is no need to mention the French plan here, except to say that, if we want a European Union, it will be difficult to manage without it. Why should this plan, which is actually inspired by a British idea and British practice, that of management control, run into opposition from, of all things, British and American points of view which, taking the old French idea of supervisory control as their starting point, argue for handing ownership of the mines, factories and steelworks of the Ruhr over to German administrative bodies and also making a German board responsible for managing them? Is there no way of reconciling productive efficiency with the interests of Europe?

3. Once this major problem has been resolved, it would not be very hard to tackle the problems of future political status and of changing people's thinking.

Between the partisans of a single central government and those who support pure and simple

dismemberment, there is a place for a midway solution: a federal state in which unitary institutions represented by a central power will be counterbalanced by federative institutions in the *Länder*, the map of which will have to be entirely redrawn. Bismarck's federal state, based on supremacy over a large territory covering the whole northern plain and aspiring to dominate one day the whole of Europe through the greater Reich, will thus disappear for ever. Inside the European Union, Germany's central bodies will have lost their old power to harm. On the contrary, they will serve to exercise a control which will have to remain in place for a long time. As for the *Länder*, the Germans, except under the pressure of the appalling dictatorship of Hitler, have always touted the benefits of comparative decentralisation. From this point of view, the federation of Germany can be seen as symbolic of the European Federation.

As for re-education and the change in thinking which it presupposes, we must avoid opting for easy illusions and succumbing to the optimism of command. This difficult problem can only be solved in the setting of a genuine European community that is able to place an insurmountable obstacle in the way of any German aspiration to dominance. Once they have this community before them, young people in Germany will know what the future has in store for them and what part they can play in a reconstructed and regenerated continent.

Whether or not Germany remains partitioned along the Elbe Line, whether or not it wavers between centralisation and decentralisation, between its old ambitions and its new European role, it hardly matters whether the problem of its industries is solved, if there is a fair share-out on this vital point between it and the nations concerned. In the years before it was defeated, all Germany's propaganda, by the Nazis, by the free committee in Moscow, by the Weimar émigrés, focused on maintaining the country's industrial potential. That potential is what is at issue. There is no reason for restoring it in its entirety. We do not think that Europe can revive and organise itself if Germany does not, radically and for good, lose all chance of seeing its industrial supremacy return.

RESOLUTIONS

1. The Congress calls on the governments of Europe to make a solemn joint declaration that they regard a united Europe as the only possible solution to current difficulties and, consequently, as the essential goal of their respective national policies. It asks them to commit themselves, during the waiting period which is bound to occur given the inevitable obstacles, to taking no action which could prevent or hinder the establishment of a united Europe.
2. The Congress also asks them to set up, without delay, an intergovernmental Council, comprising a permanent international Secretariat and a Ministerial Meeting, and to conduct research into the problem of the central authority to be created in Europe, an authority which would entail a loss of sovereignty in certain areas on the part of the united nations of Europe.
3. Finally, the Congress asks them to insist jointly on a just solution to the German industrial problem, on a restoration of the balance between Germany and the periphery, on arrangements which will induce Germany to adopt a reasonable political status and a culture which befits it, and to incorporate itself into the European Community.