

Letter from René Massigli to Georges Bidault (London, 17 February 1947)

Caption: On 17 February 1947, René Massigli, French Ambassador to London, informs Georges Bidault, French Foreign Minister, of the substance of his latest meeting with the former British Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, on the United Europe Movement which Churchill recently established and on his personal views on European unity.

Source: Ministère des Affaires étrangères; Commission de publication des DDF (sous la dir.). Documents diplomatiques français. Volume I: 1947, 1er janvier-30 juin. Bruxelles: PIE-Peter Lang, 2007. 346-347 p.

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Letter from René Massigli to Georges Bidault

Telegram No 449

London, 17 February 1947

Re.: Winston Churchill and the United States of Europe

Telegram No 205 EU from this Embassy dated 23 January drew your attention to the steps being taken by Mr Churchill in setting up a Committee for the United States of Europe, a Committee whose members come from a variety of backgrounds, for, alongside representatives of the various political parties, they include a range of eminent figures, trade union secretaries and church representatives. Given the current circumstances, this has caused a stir, and the Labour Party, in response to the anti-Soviet stance taken by the former Prime Minister, has felt it necessary to officially advise its members against joining or remaining on the Committee.

It is too soon to tell whether this advice will be followed; it is likewise too soon to gauge the extent to which Winston Churchill's appeal will be successful: the promotion campaign that he is planning will not be launched for a few weeks.

At all events, during a lengthy conversation, Mr Churchill provided me with an opportunity to gain a clearer understanding of his programme.

I was anxious to voice my concerns over a move that was, at the very least, premature. I particularly told him that, in the current circumstances, the anti-Soviet feelings that he was alleged to be exhibiting were in danger of compromising, in the countries of liberated Europe, the success of a venture which, with time and caution, was worthy of a more positive outcome; I was keen to impress upon him that the grieving process for the war was still very fresh in peoples' minds, the feeling of resentment caused by the Occupation was too strong and the concerns over the future course that Germany would take were too justifiable for any kind of cooperation between the Germans and their former adversaries to be usefully contemplated at the present time. Should some form of cooperation between Germany and its former victims eventually prove necessary, it was also necessary to avoid creating a succession of obstacles that would make such cooperation particularly difficult.

Mr Churchill bore these criticisms with good grace; however, he was eager to clarify what he referred to as the 'misunderstandings' that have arisen over his proposal.

First of all, it should be made very clear, he told me, that the responsibility of bringing the countries of Europe closer together must fall to France and to France alone. Great Britain had a role to play, one that should be played alongside France, but Britain, just like Russia, was only partly European, and so it must remain, to a certain extent, on the sidelines of the future organisation that only France could lead. Mr Churchill also emphasised two conditions that, for him, were essential for the course of action that he is advocating: the continued comprehensive disarmament of Germany and the establishment of German states; it was not the Reich that should join the European organisation but individual German states. Finally, the union should not, at least not at present, seek to achieve political ends: for the time being, it was only at cultural and economic levels that any course of action was possible.

In this spirit, it is not surprising that one of the primary concerns should be the establishment of the French Committee. I am not under the impression that a great deal of progress has been made thus far; the names that Mr Churchill has mentioned prove, at all events, that the movement's supporters in France recognise the need not to lay themselves open to the slightest suspicion of systematic anti-Sovietism.

(Europe Directorate)