The international context

URL: http://www.cvce.eu/obj/the_international_context-en-838ba2b6-f100-4125-ac45-2b99451560e4.html

Last updated: 08/07/2016

The international context

After the Second World War, France faced a dilemma with regard to its large German neighbour. Even though it dreaded the prospect of Germany's rearmament and the revival of its militarist tendencies, it could plainly see that Western Europe was at risk from external attack. Europe was increasingly divided into two opposing blocs and was undoubtedly in danger of once again becoming the theatre of operations in the event of an East-West conflict. The warning signs increased in number. In July 1947, the Soviet Union rejected the Marshall Plan for economic aid to Europe, as did the satellite states in its wake; together they rapidly established the Communist Information Bureau (Cominform), followed by the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA or Comecon). In April 1948, after the Western Allies took the unilateral decision to implement a monetary reform in their occupation zones in Berlin, the Soviets imposed a blockade on the access routes to the city. But this measure met with failure one year later thanks to the establishment of a vast airlift by the Americans, which enabled supplies to be brought to Berlin. On either side of the iron curtain, positions became increasingly entrenched, as demonstrated by the Treaty of Brussels of 17 March 1948, the establishment of Western Union, and the signing of the North Atlantic Treaty in Washington on 4 April 1949. The explosion of the first Soviet atomic bomb in Kazakhstan was also a sign of this deepening division. It marked the end of the US nuclear monopoly and therefore had considerable psychological and strategic implications. Finally, the start of the Korean War in June 1950 raised fears of a Third World War. Fear once again reigned in Europe. The intensification of the Cold War and the Communist threat gave the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) particular geopolitical importance. In this context, the question of defence in Western Europe became more urgent with every day that passed. The United States and the British who, with the French, occupied the German zones — which officially became the FRG on 23 May 1949 and enjoyed full democratic powers — were determined to make use of Germany's industrial potential and to make it a key part of their defensive strategy.

But for the French Foreign Ministry, Germany's rearmament was only conceivable if it took place within a European defence structure that would provide a solid framework. For its part, the United States was in favour of German rearmament, but through its integration into NATO. The aim on all sides was to secure the FRG's position in the Western camp. Realising that it had an increasingly important role to play, Germany began to express its own views. In Bonn, criticism of the international supervisory measures still imposed on the country became more and more prevalent. People protested against the continued dismantling of factories by the victors and the Allies' monitoring of Germany's foreign policy and foreign trade. The question of the Saar, which was economically attached to France in March 1950, remained a bone of contention between Paris and Bonn. Konrad Adenauer, elected Chancellor in September 1949, endeavoured to secure his country's membership of the International Authority for the Ruhr (IAR) on an equal footing. One month later, Germany joined the Organisation for European Economic Cooperation (OEEC), which had been established by the convention signed in London on 16 April 1948. In November, the Petersberg Agreement between the Three and the FRG enabled consular and trade relations to be re-established, slowed down the dismantling of factories and officially demonstrated the desire to welcome the FRG into the community of Europe. Efforts were also made for the accession of Federal Germany as an associate member to the Council of Europe, an organisation established by the statute signed in London on 5 May 1949.

France, keen to normalise its political and economic relations with Germany, sought an original diplomatic solution. For Jean Monnet, Commissioner-General of the French National Planning Commission, and for French Foreign Minister Robert Schuman, it was imperative that German heavy industry be integrated within an economic organisation that would provide an effective but not overly heavy-handed means of control. They believed that the solution was the establishment of a supranational authority responsible for governing coal and steel production in the two countries, with the possibility of extending it to other interested European countries. This was to be the main thrust of the Schuman Declaration of 9 May 1950. For Germany, this was a guarantee that they would see the end of the IAR, an organisation they considered discriminatory. The invasion of South Korea by North Korean troops, an event which occurred less than a week after the opening of negotiations in Paris on the establishment of a European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) between the Six (Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg and the Netherlands), profoundly altered the international order. At a European level, the risk of war increased the demand for steel, temporarily removed the fear of overproduction and, in so doing, lifted the threat of closure for less

profitable plants. This was a positive factor for the negotiations on the Schuman Plan, in which a large number of workers' and employers' trade unions were involved.