

'A dark day for Europe' from De Volkskrant (31 August 1954)


Caption: On 31 August 1954, the Dutch daily newspaper De Volkskrant expresses the disappointment felt in the Netherlands following the failure of the proposed European Defence Community (EDC).

Source: De Volkskrant. Katholiek Dagblad voor Nederland. dir. de publ. Kolkman, J.A. ; RRéd. Chef Lückér, J.M. 31.08.1954, n° 9 058; 32ste Jaargang. Amsterdam: De Volkskrant. "Donker uur voor Europa", p. 3.

Copyright: (c) Translation CVCE.EU by UNI.LU
All rights of reproduction, of public communication, of adaptation, of distribution or of dissemination via Internet, internal network or any other means are strictly reserved in all countries.
Consult the legal notice and the terms and conditions of use regarding this site.

URL:
http://www.cvce.eu/obj/a_dark_day_for_europe_from_de_volkskrant_31_august_1954-en-d7e7c551-68ee-4a03-a9db-cc19d1c858c9.html

Last updated: 06/07/2016



A dark day for Europe

YESTERDAY, without even bothering to hold a full debate on the Treaty establishing the European Defence Community, the French National Assembly voted by a majority in favour of a preliminary motion to remove the Treaty from the parliamentary agenda for good. It did not vote at all on the actual Treaty, simply stating that there was no reason even to discuss it. In so doing, the National Assembly dissociated itself from the initiative taken by the French Government that had originally put forward the EDC plan with the aim of preventing German rearmament, and cancelled the signature of the Treaty by a different French Government. It also dashed the hopes of all France's allies for a free and politically, economically and militarily united Europe in which France would take the lead.

Faith in the viability of a united Europe and a large measure of self-confidence were needed to take on this leading role, for which France seemed to have been designated. The French Parliament has sadly disappointed our expectations because it lacked that faith and could not summon up that self-confidence. Full of memories of its past greatness, France has missed a major opportunity to maintain its position in future at the head of a Europe that is free but under constant threat. For four years it maintained the pretence that it would play its part in a European Community for which it had managed to enlist the support of governments and parliaments in five other countries, only to turn its back on the Community at the last minute and take refuge in isolation, where it will be powerless.

Unfortunately, it has to be said that it is the current Prime Minister, Pierre Mendès France, who is largely responsible for this regrettable turn of events. If he had kept his word, things would never have reached this stage. The fact is that, in two fundamental respects, he failed to keep the promises he made when he came to office. Firstly, he had promised to restore unanimity in the French Parliament. As the result of yesterday afternoon's vote shows, he failed. What makes this particularly hard to take is that it is also clear from the result that a majority amongst the nationally-minded majority in the French Parliament was in favour of the European Defence Community. It was the Communists, on Moscow's orders, who killed off the EDC in the French Parliament, and the Mendès France Government acquiesced, although the Prime Minister said, when he took up office, that he would never ask for or accept support from the Communists.

The Prime Minister had also promised that, since he had not managed to secure approval for his proposals in Brussels, he would remain neutral in the parliamentary debate. He did not keep his word. With apparent objectivity, he spoke out against the EDC in the strongest indictment that the National Assembly had ever heard. As a result, and merely by suggesting that the EDC was not aimed at the resurgence of German rearmament, without ever explaining how he was proposing to avoid that dilemma, he played a large part in stirring up fierce opposition to the EDC in Parliament but accepted no personal responsibility for the consequences.

The situation now is far from encouraging. It is clear that another solution has to be found to the problem of German rearmament, but it is doubtful whether a majority can be found in favour in the French Parliament. It seems certain from the statements already made by various parties and political groups that no majority exists. The Government must know this better than anyone. So one cannot help wondering whether there might be a hidden purpose behind all this, namely to force the NATO countries into a position where, just to oblige the unpredictable French Parliament, they are forced to go along with the pet project of some of Prime Minister Mendès France's advisers and open new negotiations with the Soviet Union without involving Germany in Europe's defence. That would simply enable the Soviet Union to disrupt and demoralise Western Europe's defence system.

If that is the aim or effect of France's current foreign policy, it can only be hoped that France's allies will not let themselves be forced into that position. And it is more vital than ever to keep alive the hope that the countries of Europe, including France, will find a way to greater cooperation and unity. This is not the time to lose heart. With the Coal and Steel Community as a model, it is important to find other avenues to European economic and political integration. According to his statement after the Brussels Conference, even Mr Mendès France supports that aim.