

'The organisation of Western defence and the European army project' from La Gazette de Lausanne (1 September 1951)


Caption: On 1 September 1951, the Gazette de Lausanne gives reasons why it believes that the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) should participate in Western defence.

Source: La Gazette de Lausanne. et Journal suisse. Réd. Chef Béguin, Pierre. 01.09.1951, n° 207; 154e année. Lausanne. "L'organisation de la défense occidentale et le projet d'armée européenne", auteur:Rigassi, Georges , p. 1.

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The forthcoming international conferences

The organisation of Western defence and the European army project

By Georges Rigassi

This year, September will be without a doubt a 'great month for diplomacy and politics'. After San Francisco, the conferences in Washington and Ottawa will address problems for which the solution is of utmost interest to Europe. Once the Japanese Peace Treaty has been signed, the Foreign Ministers of the United States, France and Great Britain will meet in the American capital city — most likely on or about 11 September — particularly with a view to finalising the project concerning the German contribution to European defence. A few days later, the Atlantic Council will meet in Ottawa to consider, among other things, the applications of Greece and Turkey for membership of the Alliance. And, finally, definitive decisions will be taken in Rome in October as regards the procedures for German rearmament.

It would require an entire column to list all the problems of a political, military and financial nature that are on the agenda of these meetings. We shall limit ourselves to selecting one, in respect of which it would not be an exaggeration to say that the solution could have an immeasurable impact on the future of the old continent: a European Army project, in connection with Western defence.

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All of the statesmen, military experts and international policy specialists who have studied the problem with cold, hard reasoning now agree upon the following:

1. *The growing threat of Soviet hegemony and the drastic disproportion of military power between the USSR, assisted by its satellite countries, and Western Europe require a rearmament of the West that is as rapid and as complete as possible* — otherwise, in the words of General Koenig, Western Europe may well be 'Koreanised' or 'Sovietised'.

In its response to Mr Morrison, *Pravda* acknowledged that Russia has the same sized army as before the war, i.e. 175 divisions. Emanuel Shinwell, British Minister of Defence, states that this figure of 175 concerns combat divisions, to which should be added the other 40 anti-aircraft and anti-tank divisions. For the time being, Western Europe can pitch against these forces no more than a derisory number of combat-ready divisions.

2. *The organisation of Western defence necessarily implies German involvement.*

The Atlantic Pact, signed two years ago, makes sense only if there is a strong army on the continent. The resources of the Western European nations are not on their own, with Germany excluded, sufficient to form this strong army. From a military point of view, European defence cannot be imagined without the support of German units: all the experts agree on this point. Just as the journalist and perceptive observer Mr J.-J. Servan-Schreiber from *Paris-Presse-l'intransigeant* remarks, to oppose German rearmament outright is tantamount to renouncing the defence of Europe. 'It is wagering on the USSR's willingness for peace, and, if the wager is lost, accepting Stalinist hegemony as an obvious consequence.'

What is more, can we ask American, British, French and Italian soldiers one day to fight to defend West Germany, while the inhabitants of this country sit idly by and watch them?

But the question becomes even more complicated when it comes to deciding exactly how Germany will contribute. Since:

3. *The creation of a German national army is a legitimate source of worry for countries which, like France in particular, have suffered under warlike and conquering German forces more than once and been forced to undergo hardship and losses that defy the imagination.*

It is understandable that the French in particular do not accept the idea of the resurrection of a German national army that no one will know how to diminish once the seed has been planted and that, they fear, will one day bring about the destruction of political democracy and the revival of militarism in Germany.

What is to be done, then? How can the requisite German rearmament be achieved without creating an autonomous German army that entails these serious risks?

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There is one solution. The initial idea was proposed over a year ago at the European Assembly in Strasbourg following a speech by Mr Churchill.

4. The solution consists of creating a 'European army', a continental army, where the German troops would be integrated and become part of an international whole, an army made up of 'European units' — French, German, Italian, etc. — that would unite under one common supranational authority.

For five months, a conference with delegates from France, Italy, Germany, Belgium and Luxembourg was held in Paris with a view to getting the European army project off the ground. Not without difficulty, the delegates finished by reaching an agreement, and their report, initialled on 24 July, will be submitted at the conferences in Washington and Rome. Their draft has already received the full support of the American Administration, General Eisenhower and Mr Churchill.

The major advantage of the European army, according to its advocates, is that it does not allow the German army to rebuild, with its own powerful general staff of painful memory, and thus prevents an aggressive resurgence of former Germanic militarism. Furthermore, it has the added advantage of being accepted by Germany and, from a political point of view, the advantage of forming with the Coal and Steel Community a very important stage along the road to creating a united Europe.

Technically, according to military leaders (and among them General Béthouart quoted in the *Figaro*), the creation of a European army is perfectly feasible. The obstacles that stand in the way are primarily psychological: tradition and national pride, that remain so strongly rooted in the old peoples of Europe. Are we sure, ask some, that the soldiers would fight just as well if, rather than belonging to a national army, they were dispersed and merged into a 'European homeland' army that, for the time being, exists only in word? To which the others respond with the example of Korea, where we see the United Nations army 'subscribe to an ideal capable of instilling the spirit of sacrifice that is the honour of national armies and where competition among the contingents from the various nations has proved to be extraordinarily powerful.'

The best solution is no doubt the one recommended by General Béthouart: to establish close cooperation between the national armies, whose traditions and sense of identity would be preserved insofar as they are compatible with the goals sought.

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I do not claim to arrive at a conclusion, particularly since the European army project raises many other difficulties as well. I simply wished to set out aspects of a problem that greatly interests the Swiss in their position as Europeans and as neighbours to Germany and France.

I take refuge behind the opinion of an eminent statesman whose gift of second sight must be acknowledged. Mr Churchill recently declared in a speech: 'If we want to defend our independence and our freedom, Europe must be defended as a whole.' Is this not perfectly evident? Strength through unity. The safety of Europe depends on its unity as the point of departure for common means of defence. The European army is so much the obvious next step that it seems impossible for it not to come about in one way or another. Let us hope that it is not too late!

G. R.