

'France has opted for Europe' from Le Monde (19 january 1949)

Caption: In the French newspaper Le Monde, Maurice Duverge explains how France, by considering the Ruhr Statute as a transition from occupied Germany towards an independent Germany, is moving in the direction of European federalism.

Source: Le Monde. dir. de publ. Beuve-Méry, Hubert. 19.01.1949, n° 1 238; 6e année. Paris: Le Monde. "La France a choisi l'Europe", auteur:Duverger, Maurice , p. 1; 2.

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France has opted for Europe

Since 1944, French diplomacy has hesitated between two opposing avenues: firstly, traditional nationalism, which would lead to control of the Rhine, to the division of Germany and to a second Versailles Treaty where the fantasies of Woodrow Wilson would no longer paralyse the realism of Georges Clemenceau, and, secondly, a new federalism which would lead to a Europe so deeply united that border rivalries would lose all meaning, where the security of each state would be ensured by the cohesion of the whole and where a conflict between its members would become as unthinkable as a war between Massachusetts and Connecticut.

Under the joint influences of the personal views of the Head of Government and the natural instincts of a public that is still recovering from four years of suffering and hatred, the country initially chose the first avenue. However, fear of Russia, the influence of America and the growing strength of the federalist movement gradually shifted towards the second option, and that finally led to several government acts, notably the support given to the European Assembly plan.

What is strange is that this new thrust does not involve abandoning the old one, with our diplomatic effort finding itself torn between two opposing trends. In juxtaposing these contradictory policies, France risked having no policy at all. Its attitude towards Germany duly illustrated this false position: on the one hand, some reassuring declarations seemed to envisage a future Franco-German association at the heart of the European Federation; on the other hand, claims to the Ruhr and the efforts to maintain the separation of the French Zone seemed to be based on nationalist ideas.

However, the recent declarations of Mr Robert Schuman represent a new situation whose importance does not appear to have been properly emphasised. Do they not inaugurate a third phase in this diplomatic evolution, where France will have definitively suffocated its inner 'old man' of whom Saint Paul speaks in order to commit itself fully to the road to a European Federation; if so, 12 January 1949 will constitute an important date in French foreign policy.

Hitherto, France had viewed the Ruhr problem only from the security aspect: permanent control had to be established in order to prevent future German rearmament. Such an idea would be as dangerous for the future of Europe as for that of France. It would imply, on the one hand, keeping German industry under the perpetual authority of the Allies, a permanent crystallisation of the dominance of victors over vanquished. This would ruin the idea of Europe which presupposes cooperation between free nations based on the accession of each one. On the other hand, it would deliberately ignore the inevitable erosion of time which shrugs off all such controls. German resistance would one day win out, having helped for years to reawaken Nationalism and to maintain the desire for revenge.

When France took the British and Americans to task, protesting against their unilateral decisions, it was still motivated purely by this need for security. And the commentators who welcomed the adoption of the current status hardly swerved from that general line. On the other hand, the interview with the Foreign Minister at the Sudena agency seemed to inaugurate a completely different thrust.

For everything changes, depending on whether the new status is considered to be a definitive solution to the Ruhr problem or to be the first step in a general development of Allied policy towards Germany. In the first scenario, it is linked to the desire to perpetuate the domination of victor over vanquished, it becomes the instrument of permanent authority over German industry, in line with the traditional French position. On the other hand, the second scenario could be the point of departure for the gradual liberation of Germany, at the end of which Germany's rights would be recognised as equal to those of other partners in the European Federation, and all memories of war would be wiped out. It should be remembered that the new status actually substitutes civilian control for military control: that is at least a first step, but it is an important first step.

The second phase will consist of transferring Allied control to European control, or at least to European management in which Germany could play a fair part: the Ruhr would then become the first industrial centre

to come under federal control. In a third phase, that control would be extended to all economic entities whose importance exceeds the national framework and whose development is only possible at European level: mines, heavy industry, air transport, hydroelectric power from the Alpine range, etc. In this way, the Ruhr would form a living link between the peoples of Europe instead of a bone of contention.

The entire thrust of Schuman's declarations lies precisely in the fact that they seem to substitute this dynamic interpretation of the status of the Ruhr for the static interpretation. If the Foreign Minister is still in fact speaking about French security and of its being guaranteed by Allied control, he strongly insists on the provisional aspect of the measures being taken and of the role which the Germans themselves might play in their transformation by demonstrating their willingness to cooperate in working towards the peaceful reconstruction of Europe rather than by seeking revenge based on nationalism.

The question is thus very well put: it is clear that Germany could not suddenly switch from military occupation to total liberty which would include no guarantee for France, insofar as Europe would still be no more than a project. The fundamental problem of the present time is therefore to define transitions which will allow the progressive liberation of Germany from its conquerors in tandem with its integration, alongside other peoples of the old West, in a Europe being constructed at the same time.

In considering henceforth the status of the Ruhr as being in transition and not as a finished system, as a beginning and not as an end, France appears to be irrevocably steering its diplomatic efforts towards European federalism and to have overcome the schismatic contradiction which had been tearing it apart for four years.

But this new approach, which requires courage and perseverance, will not be able to survive unless the Germans agree to play the game properly and the French support their government. It is all very well finally to want to build Europe, but Europe will not be built without Europeans. It is time to make clear to the French as well as to the Germans that neither security nor greatness are possible for their countries outside a European federation, and that, for them, everything is at stake. May they quickly understand this!