

'The major problems facing a united Europe' from Le Monde (4 May 1948)


Caption: On the eve of the Congress of Europe in The Hague, the French daily newspaper Le Monde considers the successive stages involved in the European unification process.

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The major problems facing a united Europe

Pooling its resources is an essential requirement for success

By J. Maroger

A Congress to be held in The Hague will bring together representatives of the diverse movements that are involved in the implementation of this programme in various European countries. Aside from the general issues that will be debated at this Congress, it is perhaps useful to present some aspects from a specifically French angle.

For us French, the problem of Europe is essentially linked to the German problem: it is futile to think that one can be solved without the other.

The predominantly peaceful Europe of the 19th century was built upon the notion of a balance of power in Europe. Indeed, the root cause of the chaos in Europe which emerged in the early 20th century, at the peak of the industrial age in Europe, is the imbalance between the German giant and the peripheral nations. I use the term 'giant' not only because of its large population but also because of its industrial might which exceeded its own needs and was based on its coal deposits: Germany boasted the largest and best deposits in Europe. The giant was constantly unsatisfied because it lacked both the markets and, more importantly, the raw materials that other nations elsewhere on other continents possessed but Europe did not. Germany's fight for access to raw materials was at the root of its late colonial aspirations, and that led to the desire for hegemony and the thirst for conquest into which the old Germanic culture and its peoples' willingness to work were integrated.

A united Europe is inconceivable if this imbalance is not fully, or at least partly, redressed. It is obviously not a matter of destroying German industry and returning Germany to an almost pastoral economy. However, the international public must not think that, if it is to prosper again, Germany must recover its pre-war industrial strength. If that were to happen, we would just be recreating the causes of the imbalance and chaos that have twice found no solution other than war. Between these two extremes, we must find a formula that protects the European Federation from a dominant hegemony.

The division of Germany into two zones is not a solution, not even in the short-term; nor is the territorial reshuffle of West Germany.

The importance of Rhine-Westphalian coal

In the 19th century, we witnessed the genesis of two great territorial areas: the German Empire and the United States of America.

Coal was behind Germany's power and unity, from the day when Bismarck and Prussia ingeniously put it at the disposal of the whole of Germany. It was the distribution of this coal throughout Germany, and the chain of diverse, coal-dependent industries that spread across the German territory, ending domestic customs duties and shaking up old parochial attitudes, that transformed this mass of fragmented, rival States, who were often enemies, into a Confederation and then into an increasingly coherent, united and powerful Empire.

Similarly, it was the pooling of vast natural resources and diverse agricultural products that led to the cohesion and the unity of the United States of America, to the point where their secession into a series of individual territories, where one has coal, one oil, one wheat and one cotton, is now unimaginable.

In the same way, Europe will not be built until Rhine-Westphalian coal is declared a common asset and all European States, including Germany, but not Germany alone, have free and equal access to this coal. It will, of course, take time for the European nations to merge their economies, create a common currency and provide free movement of goods and capital. In the meantime, the coal must be shared equitably among the

various European nations, through a scheme that suits both the mines and the coal-dependent industries. It is through such organisation, with a view to ensuring its implementation and its secure and consistent progress, that the future political status of Germany must be considered and built.

Sharing overseas produce

However, coal is not the only asset that a united Europe might pool. I am referring to the markets and products of those overseas territories that some European nations have already linked with their destiny and marked with their civilisation; these territories were a source of such bitter disappointment and regret to pre-war Germany as it was excluded from them because of its own or others' actions. If these resources are pooled, Germany will easily recoup the equivalent of the several million tonnes of the coal to be shared among the rest of Europe. It would also be in the interests of the European nations which, hitherto, have assumed sole responsibility for these territories without always being able to offer them the markets and resources that they demand. Similarly, the territories themselves would benefit: they have, in the past, been quick to accuse their European masters of ingratitude or weakness; now they will be able to integrate into a larger and more powerful European community.

The support of the Dominions

American aid is clearly required, even if only during the early stages while we wait for Europe to emerge from the deadlock and reach the point where it is capable of organising its own affairs.

A no less important role falls to Great Britain, its Empire and the Dominions. It is their attitude in particular towards Europe that will determine to a large extent the success of the enterprise. Europe has not forgotten that, twice already, the Dominions have shed their blood for freedom. It is not a matter of blood today; what is needed is more widespread support, support which is simultaneously fraternal and material, more patient and more prolonged. Just as Europe cannot be born without American aid, it cannot become organised and established without the support of the Dominions, the help of the British Empire and the participation of Great Britain.

Freedom from fear

This is how a united Europe may be built, forming a coherent, reasonably prosperous and, therefore peaceful whole. Europe's freedom is not decreed: it can only be a continuous creation, inspired by a tenacious willpower that is beyond discouragement. However, each common project that is completed, such as the pooling of the Rhine-Westphalian collieries, the common use of resources from the overseas territories, and the social and economic solution to these European problems, is a step towards the final goal. Throughout this process, a European awareness will gradually be formed.

By embarking upon this task, the nations of Europe will provide the world with an invaluable service: freedom from the fear that constrains it. There exists a mutual fear between France and Germany; Britain and its Dominions fear Europe turning on them; Western Europe and the USA fear that Russia will soon be reaching the shores of the Mediterranean and the Atlantic; Russia fears that Germany — the dominant European power — will, with the connivance of the British and Americans, resurrect the old pan-Germanic dream and try once again to conquer the fertile lands of Ukraine and the oilfields in the Caucasus. Everywhere, these are just myths put about to inspire fear.

We, the French, know that, throughout its history, France has often been the loser. Medieval Mediterranean France was lost after the Turkish conquest, maritime France was defeated at Trafalgar, continental France was defeated at Sedan. But it has always been: France is dead; long live France.

We know that, in 1940, a certain France, a great world power, was defeated because its resources were no longer commensurate with the resources of other world powers. This is why today, through an associated and united Europe, we want a new France once again to succeed the old France.