

'Birth or death of Europe?' from Le Monde (9 August 1949)

Caption: On 9 August 1949, the day after the first meeting of the Council of Europe, the French daily newspaper Le Monde remains cautious about the role of the future Assembly of Europe and is concerned about the obstacles that litter the road towards European unity.

Source: Le Monde. dir. de publ. Beuve-Méry, Hubert. 09.08.1949, n° 1 411; 10e année. Paris: Le Monde. "Naissance ou enterrement de l'Europe?", auteur:Duverger, Maurice , 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/birth_or_death_of_europe_from_le_monde_9_august_1949-en-4e26b95b-efaa-4901-870c-c9ff6b7b7006.html



Last updated: 06/07/2016

Birth or death of Europe?

by Maurice DUVERGER

There is such temptation to honour the inaugural European Assembly in Strasbourg with a song of victory! True, significant headway has been made since 1945, when only a few voices cried out for the unity of the continent, and feeble voices at that against the great din of nationalist feelings unleashed by the war and the occupation! Federalism seemed scarcely anything more than a topic of dinner conversation, and its advocates were not far from being taken for harmless, but hardly serious, dreamers. Even the serious words uttered by a certain Mr Churchill were considered by many to be the somewhat showy demonstration of an old fighter who had always had a taste for the eccentric, while the most charitable thought deep down: 'He is right; but it is impossible.'

And now the dreams are coming to life and parliamentarians of Western Europe are gathering around Churchill – not as delegates of their respective countries, but as representatives of the European Community as a whole. Of course, the powers of the Strasbourg Assembly are still quite limited, and we are a far cry from the United States of Europe: but did not the members of the first assembly in Philadelphia firmly believe they were a long way from the United States of America?

*
* *

Europeans, however, are still prone to modesty, and the hour of the triumphant paean has not yet come. Although the European cause has moved forwards on certain fronts, it has taken steps backwards in other, not insignificant, areas.

Last year, one could set the idea of a European federation against an Atlantic empire and consider Europe as another potential great power between America and Russia. That makes no sense today, unless in retrospect. Europeans have chosen between the two horns of the dilemma, at least for a few years, and some without much enthusiasm, for that matter. The idea of a European 'third force' died on 6 April 1949, and Europe is now conceivable only as part of the Atlantic community.

It is not that the establishment of the European Union has lost its appeal: its significance has simply changed. For Europe alone can restore a certain degree of balance within the said Atlantic community and set limits to the possible expansion of its biggest members' predominance. In essence, the basic choice open to the people of the old continent is this: to become citizens of Europe or freed men, but without citizenship rights, in an American remake of the Roman Empire.

We must not regard this latter hypothesis as a mere product of the imagination. Do we not see before our very eyes the rebirth of the old distinction between noble forces and servile forces? Will the Atlantic army not divide into the imperial legions of a strategic air force on the one hand, and the barbarian militia mounting guard along the new *limes* on the other? Machiavelli pointed out a long time ago that there could be no true alliance between two princes of whom one was infinitely more powerful than the other; there could only be domination. Europe alone can prevent the Atlantic Union from becoming the American Empire.

*
* *

But there will never be a Europe if there is no European economy instead of a plethora of rival national economies. For it is pointless to want to reform Europe's industrial structure if we maintain compartmentalised markets. America's true superiority is not in the strength of its structure, but in the scale of its market, for one could not exist without the other. Compared to the USA, European countries resemble somewhat a small tribe stuck at the stage of subsistence economy, while its neighbour has moved on to an

urban economy: they are currently bogged down in a national economy, while the others have arrived at, and even moved beyond, a continental economy.

In this area as well, the idea of Europe has moved backwards. Urged on by the Marshall Plan, it seemed that the coordination of European economies would be accomplished with the necessary stages and transitions. In that respect, the Marshall Plan failed. Almost all of the nations that received aid used the funds to increase, and not decrease, their independence, driven by an *idée fixe*: in 1952, buy nothing from and sell as much as possible to foreign countries ... Now each country submits its requests with no regard for its neighbours: the most recent instance of a country showing its true colours occurred when England laid claim to the lion's share at the risk of disrupting the continental economies.

The greatest danger facing the Strasbourg Assembly is the belief that Europe has been born, when it has not actually been conceived. A meeting of politicians, as experienced or eminent as they may be, is not Europe. It could even become the death of the idea of Europe if each one of them were to use the Strasbourg platform as an instrument for their own propaganda. Building Europe does not mean making speeches about Europe.