

'Positive Europeans' from the Süddeutsche Zeitung (24 September 1946)

Caption: On 24 September 1946, the German daily newspaper Süddeutsche Zeitung welcomes the address given five days earlier by Winston Churchill at the University of Zurich in support of a United States of Europe based on Franco–German cooperation.

Source: Süddeutsche Zeitung. Münchner Neueste Nachrichten aus Politik, Kultur, Wirtschaft und Sport. Hrsg. Friedmann, Werner; Goldschagg, Edmund; Schöningh, Dr. Franz Joseph; Schwingenstein, August. 24.09.1946, Nr. 77; 2. Jg. München: Süddeutscher Verlag. "Positive Europäer", auteur:Kreyssig, Gerhard , p. 1; 2.

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Positive Europeans

On Winston Churchill's Zurich speech

by Dr Gerhard Kreyszig

Those who have maintained the ability to see the big geopolitical and particularly economic picture, despite the destruction and misery that surrounds them and amid which they have to live, will not need lengthy explanations to understand that in addressing the burning postwar issues and problems the fate not only of individual countries but of the whole of Europe is on the line. After hatred has in a few years managed to destroy everything that people rebuilt with so much effort over decades of peaceful cooperation, it is understandable that mistrust should speak louder than reason. And when a continent has been devastated by war like never before it is also understandable that each devastated country should try to export its distress and misery to the country next door, in the short-sighted hope of alleviating its own 'local fate' within Europe. Misery cannot, however, be exported: no sooner does it seem to have been expelled than the wave of misery rolls back relentlessly, once again engulfing everything that had apparently been so promisingly reconstructed.

It is almost a truism that Europe's economic and cultural forces must be apprehended, revived, coordinated and creatively channelled to positive effect if the countries that constitute this smashed-up continent are to find a new basis for living. In the era of the atomic bomb there can be no 'islands of prosperity', nor can there be security within 'blocs', and no country can return to prosperity and peaceful development as long as suffering and misery have not been dispelled throughout the world and until genuine global trust has come to guarantee lasting peace.

One thing is clear: Europe will not find peace as long as the idea still prevails anywhere that misery, suffering and unemployment can simply be 'expelled' to the country that caused it: every vessel bursts when the pressure gets too great. If the vessel of misery lies at the very heart of Europe, as is the case, the entire continent will be blown to smithereens if we go through with the burst test!

Churchill has recognised these problems, has the courage to speak out and can, moreover, afford to discuss these matters openly. As long as the world is poisoned by nationalism, any appeal to reason will be exposed to misinterpretation. Arguably, the toughest fact to face when looking back on the 'tragedy of Europe' is that the democratic forces of freedom that withstood and obliterated Nazi tyranny were necessarily 'nationalistic', because for them, as patriots in the best sense of the word, the task at hand was to free themselves from the alien rulers who had invaded and subjugated them.

It is easier to go from patriotism to chauvinism than to come back again. However right Churchill may be when he declares that creating the 'United States of Europe' is the remedy, we cannot help thinking it unlikely that Europe can be saved 'as if by a miracle'!

As Germans, bitter experience has given us reason and the right no longer to believe in miracles; we are faced with the 'miracle' of the thousand-year Reich every day in the form of terrible heaps of debris and rubble; we have seen where the 'miracle' of the elimination of unemployment led us and what suffering it brought us and we have had to pay back the 'miracle' of the community of the people thousandfold, as suffering, misery and despair replace the happiness of ordinary people thoughtlessly sacrificed because a lunatic wanted to bring about 'miracles' with 'miracle weapons'.

The fact that this has turned us into an object of debate and politics cannot prevent us from thinking politically and having a political opinion. Germany's anti-fascists, Germany's democrats agree with Churchill and democratic forces everywhere that the guilty must be punished and it is the self-evident duty of every German to make good whatever possibly can be made good. We are determined to forever abjure the dark forces that have brought unspeakable evil to the world and caused our country's undoing. We know that it lies in our hands, as German democrats and uncompromising anti-fascists, to prove to the world that we are prepared, Germans though we be, to build a place in the European family of peoples and become

decent, upright Europeans of German tongue. Our country won't lose any of its beauty if it no longer has any German border posts; our self-awareness will not suffer if we relinquish our 'national' interests, which have driven one generation after another to death on the battlefield and to disaster.

If, despite all this, we call and argue for Germany to remain a single economic and cultural entity, this does not conflict with our commitment to Europe but rather grows out of our recognition that we will never be in a position to contribute, as Germans, to the pacification, shaping and prosperity of Europe if the foundations on which we depend to become German Europeans and ultimately European citizens of the world are destroyed.

Anti-fascist German democrats and socialists have the right to state this openly because we also have the courage and the resolve to put our own house thoroughly in order. We realise that we will be met with great mistrust on our path; we share this misfortune with such great men as Byrnes and Churchill who are also accused in some quarters of having their own political agendas, when sheer good sense and sober economic reasoning surely make the case.

We would like to give all those who meet us with unwarranted mistrust some food for thought: Germany was a threat to Europe as long as it remained the dominating power in the tangle of European states. Surely the best guarantee of security for all Europeans (and hence the whole world) can only be for such a peaceable entity as an economically recovered Germany to be governed freely and democratically and to represent publicly, as a member of the Council of the peoples of Europe, 60 of the existing 400 million Europeans, rather than, as previously, for a people of 60 million to threaten 340 million other Europeans?

Whoever takes this approach to the major decisions that will have to be made if the whole of Europe is not to be fatally paralysed along with Germany must surely agree with Churchill and won't even find it 'astonishing' that he sees close cooperation between France and Germany as a prerequisite for success. Before 1933 thousands of German democrats and socialists regarded mutual understanding between the two countries as the essential guarantee of peace and worked to achieve it. Today more than ever we wish for a deep and true friendship with France and aspire to mutual trust, in the full awareness that we will have to work to gain that trust.

European solidarity, encompassing a democratic Germany, is necessary if we wish, in Europe, to secure and maintain reconstruction, peace and prosperity.