

Note on the Potsdam Conference from an unattributed source in the Belgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (1946)

Caption: A note dated 1946 from an unattributed source inside the Belgian Foreign Ministry appraises the economic consequences of the Potsdam Conference and of the Allied occupation of a defeated Germany.

Source: DE VOS, Luc; ROOMS, Etienne; DELOGE, Pascal; STERKENDRIES, Jean-Michel (sous la dir.). Documents diplomatiques belges 1941-1960, De l'indépendance à l'interdépendance. Tome II: Défense 1941-1960. Bruxelles: Académie royale de Belgique, 1998. 582 p. ISBN 90-6569-670-9. p. 82-84.

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The economic regime to be applied to Germany

Generally speaking, it is in Europe's interest for Germany to have a sound and viable economy. This fundamental principle should help in the drawing up of a guideline for our eastern neighbours. In so doing, it would be useful to examine the motives that led the Big Three to establish the Potsdam arrangements.

The official motives are that Germany is a permanent threat and should be prevented from committing further aggression by depriving it of the wherewithal to wage war.

However, this argument does not stand up to criticism because:

- (1) The essential instrument of German aggression is its spirit of invention, organisation and discipline.
- (2) The material means for waging war cannot be eliminated without totally depriving Germany of its industry because, in a war, every industry might conceivably be an instrument for aggression.
- (3) For many years hence, the devastation and the state of German industry will prevent it from being able to forge a powerful structure in the hope of carrying out more aggression.

Accordingly:

- (1) The Allies, spellbound by the great effort they had to make to defeat their enemy and impressed by their entente, which was forged only to hold a great danger in check, tend to believe that Germany is the only possible aggressor. To be convinced of the contrary, one only need look at the industrial might of the United States and the USSR and the evolution of the American economy.

This reasoning is, therefore, not valid, but it is true that if one of the Big Three were to gain total control over Germany, it would have enough clout to try and dominate the others.

- (2) Therefore, the conditions now look right for a review of the Potsdam principles.

The premises underlying my proposals:

- (1) Security may be effectively guaranteed only by means of total and permanent control. Since this type of control is impossible, because it is too expensive and wears down those in charge of the controls sooner than those being controlled, any type of restrictive system for Germany should be abandoned as far as possible.
- (2) The aim must be to build a stable economy in Europe.

Considerations deriving from the above principles:

Security:

Ensuring German non-aggression will depend mainly on the Germans themselves and not on what we seek to impose on them.

Maintaining restrictions on Germany will never contribute to the establishment of a normal economy because effective restrictions require a very costly military occupation which, in addition, is a factor for despair and depression. In security matters, we find ourselves in a vicious circle in which the risk of aggression is always there, regardless of whether or not violence is used. Aggression depends more on mind than on matter.

The question then is what kind of guarantees can Europe obtain concerning Germany, until such time as the German Government is able to provide the necessary assurances.

The simplest solution appears also to be the best, as well as the least costly.

The system outlined below requires, as does any system of control, an entente between the controlling countries. That is a self-evident reality.

A proposal for a control system:

Any control must have sanctions that are practicable and efficient.

The structure of Germany's economy has a weak point in raw materials. Coal is abundant, but iron ore is scarce.

Consequently, it would be enough to control German imports of iron ore, ferrous scrap and a few rare metals in order to keep in check all of Germany's war potential.