

Letter from Pierre Mendès France to Jean Monnet (16 August 1954)

Caption: In this letter to Jean Monnet, Pierre Mendès France, President of the Council and French Foreign Minister, describes the internal policy problems which he is encountering a few days before the vote in the French National Assembly on the ratification of the Treaty establishing the European Defence Community (EDC).

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My dear President and friend,

I have received your letter of 12 August and make haste to wish you a very speedy recovery. I envy you the possibility of taking a few weeks' rest at this time, which is particularly stressful for me.

I have read what you wrote on the question of European unification. I too have long been convinced that an effort should be made in this direction. However, I have to take into account the reluctance of the public and of Parliament. I am sure that the EDC would have easily been ratified 12 or 18 months ago, with perhaps some small changes or caveats. It is not so now; public opinion has been made much more sensitive on this matter.

One may question public opinion, but no one can argue about the prevailing sentiment in Parliament. Whether one agrees or not, there is a strong majority against ratification. I have been trying to win over a few hesitant Members, but I have received little help in this thankless task and have been strongly criticised for my pains from all quarters.

What is more, the recent Russian proposals have had a profound influence. Many Members would like a four-power conference to be held before any decision is taken on ratification. I, on the contrary, feel that the National Assembly should be induced to take a decision now on the first reading, while leaving the door open for international discussions if the circumstances give reason to hope that, on this occasion, they will not be futile, and if the Russians finally agree to make substantial concessions, which they have so far refused to do.

If I cannot assure them of that, I shall be shouted down in the Assembly, and at the same time all European hopes will be dashed. I have a chance of success — and even that is far from certain — on two conditions:

- (1) Our five partners will have to accept our implementation protocol; I assure you that this is the minimum without which no parliamentary agreement can be seriously envisaged.
- (2) The British and Americans must not close the door to further talks with the Russians, and the Russians must be solemnly confronted with their responsibilities.

If these two conditions can be met, I will fight a hard and uncertain battle, but there will be some chance of success. If not, I can tell you quite frankly that I will achieve nothing and we will find ourselves in a disastrous international situation both for our own country and for the whole of the West.

With my best wishes for a prompt and full recovery,

Yours, etc.