

Summary of talks between Paul-Henri Spaak and Pierre Mendès France (Paris, 30 June 1954)

Caption: On 30 June 1954, Paul-Henri Spaak, Belgian Foreign Minister, summarises the talks that he had had the same day in Paris with Pierre Mendès France, French Prime Minister, during which he explained the reasons behind some of his reservations regarding the plans for a European Defence Community (EDC).

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. 370-372.

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Paris, 30 June 1954.

Report of the conversation between Mr Spaak and Mr Mendès France in Paris, on 30 June 1954.

I was received by Mr Mendès France at the Quai d'Orsay at midday today.

Mr Mendès France began immediately by explaining his point of view concerning a conference that will bring together the six countries that have signed the Treaty of Paris.

Mr Mendès France told me first that he was obliged to give absolute priority to the question of Indo-China and could not allow himself to be distracted from his efforts on that matter. He added that he was at the present time convinced that, as matters stood, there was no majority in the French parliament for approval of the EDC treaty. Even if, contrary to his belief, there should prove to be a very small majority in favour, it would not be enough to impose the treaty on the whole of France. He was therefore trying to find a compromise by holding discussions between French supporters and opponents of the EDC. He hoped that by the end of the month his efforts would culminate in a solution he could submit to Parliament.

It therefore appears that Mr Mendès France's main idea is to find a compromise on the EDC, drawn up by the French on their own.

I replied to Mr Mendès France that everyone followed with interest, and sympathised with, his efforts to find a solution to the Indo-China problem, and that they also realised the importance, to France and the West as a whole, of the success of his mission. I added that I could also understand, to a certain extent, that in the present state of parliamentary opinion he should want to inform himself of the exact situation facing him. However, I added immediately that it seemed to me quite impossible that France should unilaterally amend a Treaty it had concluded with other countries and seek to impose its amendments on those countries, or at least hold them responsible for all the serious consequences of a rejection. I told him that in my opinion such a course of action would resolve a French deadlock only to create an international deadlock that was at least as dangerous.

I also told him that, although I perfectly understood he could not be rushed and that nothing should be done in haste, we were running out of time. All our hesitations would at some point lead the Americans, and perhaps even the British, to propose, not an alternative to the EDC, but an alternative European policy. This policy had already been worked out, and plans were well advanced for its implementation. It consisted in either admitting Germany into NATO on an equal footing or giving Germany back its full sovereignty, and thereby the possibility of recreating a national army.

I emphasised to him that it was because I disapproved of this alternative policy that I was advocating the EDC so strongly.

Having listened to what I had to say, Mr Mendès France said he understood that it was not possible to present France's partners with a *fait accompli*, and that he agreed the conference I had proposed on behalf of the Benelux countries should be held at some point. However, for reasons of parliamentary tactics, he wanted it to take place as late as possible. He believes that if he manages to resolve the question of Indo-China he will enjoy greater authority, and that will perhaps enable him to push through solutions he could not carry through today.

Having secured this slight advantage, I tried to determine when the conference could be held and under what conditions. I told him that I thought it was impossible, even dangerous, for the French to hold discussions on their own without keeping us informed of the direction they were taking. He agreed with this and offered to have a member of my staff kept informed unofficially, but said there would probably be nothing to report for a fortnight.

I stressed once again that it was absolute imperative that the French Government not take a final position

before ascertaining officially the reaction of its partners to any proposals it had in mind. I even proposed that the French Government undertake not to submit an arrangement to Parliament without the prior approval of its partners. Mr Mendès France seemed struck by this proposal and said he could not reply straight away but would think about it. As for my insistence on France not adopting a final position before consulting its partners, he gave his agreement.

It is therefore understood that the conference will take place before the matter is submitted to Parliament.

I then remarked to Mr Mendès France that what made the discussion so difficult was that no one seemed to know for sure what sort of compromise or alternative might be put forward. Mr Mendès France admitted that this was true and that he himself could not give me any clarification. In his opinion, the alternatives could range from ratification of the Treaty subject to certain implementing conditions, to far-reaching amendments and even substantive changes. At which point I interrupted somewhat forcefully to make it clear that, in my opinion, major amendments to the text, not to mention changes of substance, had no chance of being accepted by France's partners. He must take into consideration the situation of countries that had already ratified the Treaty and the fact that in each country, specific reasons had been put forward for ratification of the EDC that could not be omitted from a new text. No real progress was made on this subject during our conversation.

I informed Mr Mendès France of my disappointment, dismay and pessimism as to the outcome. He replied that I was probably exaggerating and that he himself was still reasonably optimistic. He also said that, at all events, he was conscious of the serious consequences that rejection of the EDC would have, and he believed it necessary to do everything in his power to have it ratified. He also said that a few months ago he had been opposed to the EDC but believed there had then been a majority in Parliament in favour; now he supported the EDC but believed, unfortunately, that the necessary parliamentary majority no longer existed.

Apart from the procedure on which we agreed, namely that a meeting should be held before the matter was submitted to the French Parliament (and it seems impossible that such a meeting should be deferred beyond the end of July), we reached no agreement on details and were unable to work out any solution.

In summary, Mr Mendès France seems perfectly aware of the gravity of the situation; he appears to have no illusions about the dire consequences of rejection of the EDC. He is prepared to make an effort to secure a positive vote in Parliament, but would probably be content with a less effective version of the EDC. This latter point remains totally unclear, because Mr Mendès France did not tell me how far he was prepared to compromise.

The compromise we reached in our conversation was that we agreed on the principle of a conference, to be held at such time as the Government of the Republic has clarified its position in the light of the current internal French discussions; and that, at all events, the conference will be held before the matter is submitted to Parliament. Finally, Mr Mendès France asked to be able to reflect on the possibility of proposing an alternative solution, if his partners did not accept it.

NATO Council to P.-H. Spaak, Minister of Foreign Affairs.