

'Germany and the defence of Europe' from the Corriere della Sera (30 March 1950)

Caption: Given the threat represented by the numerical superiority of the military forces of the Soviet Union and its Allies on the European continent, the Italian daily newspaper Corriere della Sera emphasises the importance of rearming and integrating West Germany into the defence system of Western Europe.

Source: Corriere della Sera. 30.03.1950, n° 76; anno 75. Milano: Corriere della Sera. "La Germania nella difesa dell'Europa", auteur:Luzzati, Ivo , p. 1.

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Germany and the defence of Europe

Whatever the strategy adopted by the two opposing groups in any future conflict, possession of Western Europe will certainly be the main objective that both sides would like to achieve in the first phase of operations, because of the obvious advantages that these territories offer for securing a more rapid victory in subsequent phases of the war.

For the Atlantic Command, the territories of Western Europe represent an extremely valuable asset, both as a bridgehead and terrain suitable for the landing and build-up of the mass of troops and as a base for launching a counterattack; for the Russians, on the other hand, they are the vital prerequisite for defending their country against a threat from the West. The Russians must therefore attempt to take possession of those territories as soon as possible, both to deny the enemy their use and to put them to their own advantage as a launch pad for the despatch of their own aircraft and guided weapons to bomb the Atlantic Coasts of North America and North Africa.

Such needs will determine the shape of the initial period of the war in Europe, which will therefore be largely ground-based. As the opposing forces stand today, there is little doubt that the Soviet armed forces have a definite superiority over those of the Atlantic powers. Should the conflict break out in the not-too-distant future, the Russian armies would, without any doubt, easily and quickly succeed in conquering the entire continent.

In order to prevent this appalling possibility, the work of the bodies of the Pact is aimed at strengthening the Allied armed forces, the intention being to raise them as quickly as possible to a level of strength that will enable them to resist an enemy attack, at least until the arrival of the mass of the North American divisions, which will undoubtedly take a few months, a very critical period for the defence forces.

The press in the Atlantic countries has examined the various aspects of the problem in some detail. The solutions advanced have included a proposal to reinforce the defence of Western Europe through a suitably controlled rearmament of West Germany. The idea has also been recently developed by the German General Kurt von Manteuffel, head of the *Brüderschaft* organisation, who, in a letter to Chancellor Adenauer, proposed the formation of German divisions as part of a large European army under Allied command, thereby provoking an immediate reaction from leading figures and the organs of public opinion, particularly in France. And the words of the speech delivered by Mr Churchill the day before yesterday on the need for Germany to play its part in the defence of the West are still lingering in the air.

Of course, it is not difficult to appreciate the reasons for the hostility of French public opinion, but because these reasons are largely political they will not be examined in these comments, whose purpose is to look at the problem of the defence of Western Europe solely from a technical point of view.

In the particular case in question, it is vital to study and resolve the German issue in an objective and cool-headed way, setting aside any preconceptions and ideas that are still rooted in the past, but instead looking resolutely to the future. Taking into consideration its particular geographical position at the centre of Europe, the size of its territory, its production capacity and its demographic potential, Germany would appear to be a reality that certainly cannot be ignored in the political, economic and military organisation of the continent.

In view of this situation, which is set in stone, it is for the politicians alone to find a suitable formula that allows Germany to be included in the assembly of the European Powers in order to ensure its solidarity in the defence of the West against a Russian attack. It should not be forgotten here that German territory could well be the main theatre of operations in any future conflict. It is hard to imagine that, if large-scale military operations take place in so large a country with such economic and human resources, the country would remain outside the conflict. Such a situation would be entirely absurd and paradoxical, so that logic should dictate that the reality be accepted as it stands and ways be found to adapt it more effectively to the interests of Atlantic unity.

Just as it is impossible to balance Europe's economy in any lasting way without Germany, it is also impossible to envisage how the problem of the defence of the continent against a possible attack can be resolved without it. Its rearmament obviously opens up complex and important questions. It is difficult, especially for those who have suffered three successive aggressions in seventy years, to accept the unknown elements of a revived German military power. It is certainly not possible today to reduce Germany to the conditions in which it was placed by the Treaty of Westphalia, which broke up the unity of the Holy Roman Empire, fragmenting it into 343 large and small states, free from any bond of subjection to the Emperor. On the other hand, Europe is slowly heading towards a form of federalism from which the new German State certainly cannot be excluded. It would seem reasonable and appropriate, then, to begin the work of unification immediately by admitting Germany into the Western Union, an essential condition for German rearmament, which, as has been said, would be an asset of indisputable value for the military preparations of the Atlantic powers.

Diplomacy, always so well suited to the resolution of even the most complicated problems, has the task of laying the foundations for the implementation of this programme and, at the same time, of making sure that Germany's rearmament does not subsequently pose a new threat to the West. No time should be lost here.

The current tension in international relations will almost certainly be protracted even further without leading to a conflict; unfortunately, however, the other eventuality needs to be considered. This eventuality justifies the urgent need to create a political situation as soon as possible in which all available forces can be used for the defence of Western Europe.

Ivo Luzzatti