

Anthony Eden, Full Circle extract on the European Defence Community

Caption: In his memoirs, Anthony Eden, British Foreign Secretary from 1951 to 1955, recalls the tour of European capitals that he undertook in order to set out his plans for pursuing the goal of European unification following the failure of the EDC.

Source: EDEN, Anthony. Full Circle. The Memoirs of the Rt. Hon. Sir Anthony Eden. London: Cassell, 1960. 619 p. p. 149-150; 151-153; 162; 163-164.

Copyright: (c) Sir Anthony EDEN

URL: http://www.cvce.eu/obj/anthony_eden_full_circle_extract_on_the_european_defence_community-en-959e95c8-4e37-4e08-ab7c-b271164424e1.html

Publication date: 14/05/2013

Anthony Eden, *Full Circle*

[...]

A week later, after two days of bitter and emotional debate in which M. Mendès France was more referee than advocate, the French Assembly passed the crucial motion to 'move to other business' by 319 votes to 264, with 43 abstentions. E.D.C. was dead. So long as there had been the faintest hope that it could be saved, I had not been willing to hold any formal discussion of possible alternatives, for to do so would have strengthened the hand of the opponents of E.D.C. in France. I had also been against exercising pressure upon France, for I was convinced that this would drive hesitant moderates to join the opponents of German rearmament in any form. On the day before the vote, the United States Government suggested that we should hold an eight-power conference excluding France. One of the objects of this meeting was to emphasize French isolation. I thought this a bad plan, for, whether we considered French action right or wrong, we needed France, and I saw no cause to stand her like a naughty girl in the corner. The idea was dropped.

All the same, the problem was urgent, and we should have to move fast if Western European unity was to be saved. Some months earlier I had asked my skilled advisers at the Foreign Office to work on this problem, and at the end of August I considered their findings. There was no easy way through. One alternative was a diluted E.D.C., within the framework of N.A.T.O., to which the United Kingdom would belong. The French could be expected to like this, but there was not much in it for other E.D.C. powers. The dilution would make the mixture rather thin for them. I preferred to bring Germany into N.A.T.O., under the various safeguards which had been devised for her entry into E.D.C. This solution would be likely to run into trouble in France, although Mendès France had optimistically told us at Chartwell that the French Assembly would find it hard to take a second entirely negative decision. We would have to devise safeguards which were effective but not blatant, otherwise we should lose German opinion. The Germans could not be offered less now than in 1951, when E.D.C. was first conceived. Despite these complications, I thought that the entry of Germany into N.A.T.O. must be faced. My colleagues authorized me to discuss this with the German Chancellor and with the Americans.

[...]

The Brussels Treaty, signed in 1946, had been directed principally against a revival of German aggression. If we could bring Germany and Italy into it and make the whole arrangement mutual, we should have a new political framework for Europe, without discrimination. The Brussels Treaty could be transformed into a mutual defence pact, of the Locarno type, which would cover all Western Europe. There would be other advantages. The supranational features of E.D.C. would go, and the United Kingdom could then be a full member, sharing from within instead of buttressing from without. The Brussels Treaty lasted longer than N.A.T.O., for fifty years as against twenty. In its new form, it could provide a focus for those in all countries, including Western Germany, who cherished the vision of a united Europe: Finally, I had been troubled by the conviction that if Germany came into N.A.T.O. we should be asked to increase our military contribution on the continent. This would not be popular at home, but it would be more acceptable if it were made within the context of a revived Western Union.

On my return to London, I sent this minute to the Prime Minister:

We may now expect Adenauer's reply on Tuesday. On the assumption that it is not entirely out of line with our ideas of Germany in N.A.T.O. on certain conditions offered or shared, we should, I think, consider whether we can do anything further to prepare for the eight or nine-power conference.

My own feeling is that it would be helpful if I could take a rapid tour of the European capitals concerned, in advance of the conference, in the following order:

Brussels (for the three Benelux powers)
Bonn
Rome
Paris.

There are, of course, always certain risks in such a venture, but the advantages seem to me to outweigh them. The journey would enable me to establish contact in each of the capitals with men whom I know, and I would hope to get some impressions which would be of value to us before and at the conference. Furthermore, by travelling in this order and visiting Paris last, I should have a formidable body of opinion behind me, supposing we are all agreed upon the general line for handling this problem, i.e. that Germany must be brought along into the N.A.T.O. family as proposed.

Paris would no doubt be the most difficult capital, but I might be able to dispel some of the illusions there, which could be helpful in advance of the meeting.

I do not ask for a final decision on this until we have had Adenauer's reply on Tuesday. But I am asking the Foreign Office to prepare the necessary telegrams and time-table so that the messages can be despatched on Tuesday. I hope you will agree.

The Prime Minister did agree. I also discussed the transformation of the Brussels Treaty with him and one or two principal colleagues, and they liked the idea.

When we received Dr. Adenauer's final reply on September 7th, it appeared that, although the Chancellor was in full agreement with our general aim, he shared Mr. Dulles' fear that an immediate nine-power conference might fail for lack of preparation. He was inclined to favour a plenary meeting of the N.A.T.O. Council, preceded by personal discussions. He thought, however, that it would be entirely appropriate for the United Kingdom to take the initiative and to act as a kind of 'honest broker' in exploring the ground on behalf of N.A.T.O. as a whole. This accorded well with my own ideas. On September 8th I received a warm message of encouragement from M. Mendès France, welcoming my proposed tour. Others followed in the same sense.

Before I left for the first stop of my journey, Brussels, the French Ambassador gave me some indications of his Government's latest views, which were not entirely discouraging. He began by saying that the admission of Germany into N.A.T.O., with nothing but some conditions which Germany might offer, would have no chance in the French Chamber. I pulled a long face at this, whereupon M. Massigli said: 'Wait, there is more.' The French Government, he continued, had further considered whether there was any way in which the situation might be eased, particularly from the political angle. Their preliminary conclusion was that the Brussels Treaty might be the best instrument for this purpose. The treaty might be reshaped to include Germany and Italy, and some military arrangements might be made under it, which could conceivably include a European commander-in-chief. I replied that while I was prepared to consider any proposals, I was not enamoured of the idea of building any kind of military structure under the Brussels Treaty. I was firmly convinced that the admission of Germany into N.A.T.O. was the right way to handle the military aspect. This conversation showed me that although my visit to Paris would certainly be my toughest assignment, there was at least some common ground which might lead to agreement with the French. Much would depend upon the extent of the support which I could muster in other capitals.

[...]

I returned to London well content with our progress so far. At least the way was now open for the nine-power conference in London at the end of September, with a fair chance of success, provided that the American attitude could be softened. I reported in these terms to my colleagues immediately after my return, and they fully approved the outline of the settlement which was now taking shape.

I then drove out to London Airport to meet Mr. Dulles who, on arrival, introduced a most generous passage into his comments to the press. He spoke of the 'brilliant and statesmanlike British initiative'.

[...]

At our formal meeting that afternoon, I explained to Mr. Dulles that I had undertaken my tour of the European capitals because of the urgency of finding a solution to fill the gap left by the collapse of E.D.C. The ideas I had outlined were:

(a) German entry into N.A.T.O. with safeguards over German rearmament of a non-discriminatory character, and the concentration of all military arrangements within the N.A.T.O. framework;

(b) The expansion of the Brussels Treaty for use as a political instrument to keep alive the idea of European unity.

In Brussels, Bonn and Rome I had found a hundred per cent. agreement with these ideas. In Paris, the discussions had been more difficult. I then explained the position of M. Mendès France. I concluded by asking Mr. Dulles whether he agreed that a nine-power conference could now profitably be held and whether he thought that there was anything further we could do to prepare for it.

Mr. Dulles prefaced his remarks by saying that his earlier description of the United Kingdom initiative as brilliant and statesmanlike had not been empty words. But he must emphasize the difficulties with which he was faced through the collapse of E.D.C. The idea of a United States of Europe had great appeal in his country and this had been reflected in Congressional resolutions and legislation. The rejection of E.D.C. had come as a great shock and would be used by opponents of foreign aid and by the isolationists. The American Chiefs of Staff were still engaged on their strategic reappraisal and had not yet reached their conclusions. The tendency was reflected by the withdrawal of American land forces from the area of Korea and Japan and unwillingness to build up land power in South-East Asia. The presence of American troops in Germany was an exception and it was doubtful how long that exception could be maintained in face of Congressional pressure. It was really immaterial whether a N.A.T.O. plus Brussels solution was better or worse than E.D.C. Congress had been 'sold' on the latter as the means of uniting Europe, which would then be capable of standing on its own feet without American help. In the new conditions, the future for foreign appropriations was highly doubtful and, though he and the President were determined to salvage as much as possible, we must assume that continued American participation in Europe, on the present scale and in the present form, was impossible and that some reduction was inevitable. He added that the assurances given in the President's declaration of April had only secured Congressional approval with the greatest difficulty in the context of E.D.C. We certainly should not rely upon them being repeated for the plan now under consideration.

I remarked that this was a grave and worrying statement, because continued American support was crucial. I hoped, therefore, that American opinion could be brought to realize that our present plan for German entry into N.A.T.O. and the Brussels Treaty provided the best means of strengthening the West.

Mr. Dulles acknowledged that he saw no better alternative, but repeated that American policy was under reappraisal, that he could not prejudge the outcome and accordingly would not be in a position to make any commitments on behalf of the United States at a conference later this month or indeed, very likely, until after the elections in November. He subsequently qualified this by saying that the United States Government could agree to the restoration of German sovereignty and the admission of Germany to N.A.T.O., but could

not accept any new commitments about the American forces in Germany. He would of course do his best.

[...]