

Address given by Alcide De Gasperi (Rome, 15 March 1952)

Caption: On 15 March 1952, Alcide De Gasperi, Italian Prime Minister, urges the Italian Senate to ratify the ECSC Treaty and strongly refutes the criticism of the Schuman Plan levelled by Communist MPs.

Source: GASPERI, Alcide de. Scritti e discorsi di politica internazionale, Alcide De Gasperi e la politica internazionale : un'antologia degli scritti su "L'illustrazione Vaticana" (1933-1938) e di discorsi all'estero (1945-1954). ALLARA, Giovanni (sous la dir.). Volume 3. Roma: Cinque Lune, 1990. 445 p. p. 409-414.

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[...]

I must reject the accusation that we have taken a decision on this issue simply on general political grounds. It should be open to me to bounce back that accusation and say the only reason the Opposition is against this proposal is because of its general political view. If the political geography of the proposal were different, I think there would be enthusiasm for the proposal itself despite its current formulation.

Colleagues on the far Left should forgive me if I do not enter into detail on their political arguments. The fact is during their exposés, they tried again and again, and this happens in all situations of this nature, to interpret all considerations relating to a particular proposal — regardless how specific and technical the proposal — in terms of a fundamental political thesis, namely that of ‘serving America’ and detesting or being in conflict with Russia. Senator Casadei spoke of a European plan, one which, he maintains, is in fact no more than a front for ‘serving America’. Senator Montagnani based all he had to say on the doctrinal thesis that ‘after the two world wars, the economies of the western world are beginning to change, as capitalism undermines the foundations of the capitalist countries. Hence the need for US imperialism to control not only the economy, but also the politics of the various European countries. Europe is therefore faced with various Marshall and Schuman Plans. It is likely that if capitalism cannot resolve the crisis sapping its vital forces, more radical measures such as war and conquest will result.’ This is the doctrine of Marxists and Leninists. It is in the texts, is trotted out every day in *Pravda* and is supposed to provide an explanation. But it is not an explanation. It is a prejudice that discredits all the conclusions our colleagues, or at least some of those on the far Left, reach. As a result, from being Communists they become anti-Communitarian; from being experts on southern Italian issues, they are now focusing particularly on the iron and steel industry. We shall meet at the ballot box to consider the argument you put in defence of the kind of privileges to which so many southern Italians have in the past objected.

I say this to excuse to some extent my reaction when I said you had become reactionaries. It is, of course, a word, that I am borrowing from you. But when you extol this form of regression — and Senator Pastore today tried to explain or at least rationalise it — and you do so in such a way that it becomes an attack on us, we have the right of retaliation and retortion. We have the right to quote to you the doctrines you are now rejecting.

[...]

In the Atlantic Alliance, as in the EDC, we are defending existing frontiers, not territorial claims. There may be claims, inasmuch as they are peaceful claims to be resolved through negotiation. But as far as we are concerned, they most definitely do not represent a military commitment, other than for the defence of the territory actually administered by the states concerned against outside attack.

[...]

And it is not true that all the organisations, including the Schuman Plan, are designed to shore up a state of affairs which will then definitely lead to war because of the link with the drafting of a contract that would drag us too into war, even indirectly. I do not know why, when our colleagues on the far Left make their speeches, they feel the need to conjure up such grim imagines and fantasies. I have no idea why they take such a gloomy view and like to be doom-mongers predicting misfortune and calamity ahead.

Moving on to two other questions, I shall answer Senator Casadei, banishing from my thoughts that peremptory, grand inquisitorial tone of his, one that is not customary in exchanges between Opposition and Government. In fact, I think his questions could be of interest to many others. The first question is: when the Assembly is appointed, will the Government have all the posts, or will some be reserved for the Opposition? The answer is that Parliament will decide.

But if Senator Casadei repeats what he had to say, including that if and when the Opposition enters the

Assembly, it will do its best to sabotage it and make it impossible for the Assembly to function, then I have to say to him that his words are not simply constructive criticism, they are a torpedo, an attempt at sabotage.

I say the time has come to put an end to this. If we can stop you, you shall not enter! And I say that without prejudice to the approach that the Chamber of Deputies may take. This is our criterion: those persons in particular who stand for the kind of government which seeks to impose socialist principles or is semi-dictatorial, and uses dictatorial methods to implement major plans for renewal, should not be surprised if we square up to the threat and resist it. We are clear on this: we shall resist even outside this House, in the Chamber of Deputies. We shall repeat it to all those who, on one pretext or another, in one form or another, threaten us. Just as Senator Pastore did at the end of his speech, despite his dulcet tones, when he sought to justify in advance possible rebellion on the ground that we would be making a mistake by today voting for the Treaty.

Let us consider the constitutional aspect of the Treaty. I am no lawyer, nor am I a lawyer's son, so I cannot claim any special knowledge. But, during the parallel discussions on the European army, there was much discussion of the problems of the limits within which Parliaments can today approve and ratify treaties which require the surrender of some elements of sovereignty to a supranational body. What applied to the European army, applies *a fortiori* to the Schuman Plan. Anyway, I have always tried to take advice from the strictest and most rigorous constitutionalists. And, in relation to our own position, I have to say, while we have Article 11 of the Constitution, and France has the same principle, but only in the preamble, not in the body of the text, the smaller states — those with constitutions drawn up between 1930 and 1948 — have no similar provision. Only Germany has an even more extensive provision, because its Basic Law was drawn up with that in mind.

Looking then at the wording of our Article 11, I would say that, according to the experts, although the text permits reciprocal limitations on sovereignty, it also permits the international organisations needed to guarantee that those limitations are correctly applied.

Those organisations have of necessity to constitute an international authority, which, as a result of those same limitations, can be supranational. Such organisations are not a source of concern, if you take the Workers International as a point of departure. There you have the concept of a supranational organisation that sanctions obtaining work.

So long as we are dealing with the kind of limitations of sovereignty that leave the bulk of sovereignty in the hands of the individual states, we are within the scope of Article 11. But if we go beyond that, that is to say towards a federal state, then we will need another constitutional provision. That is why, when referring to the committee on the European army, I said that there is a provisional stage, during which, in our opinion, Parliament will decide, when the time comes, whether we can operate on the basis of Article 11. There comes a final and detailed phase when it will be probably be necessary to revise the Constitution. But I think this Treaty clearly falls into the first category.

By ratifying the Treaty, we are using nothing less than a genuine, constitutional implementing provision, and, as such, it puts into effect, but only in part, what is laid down in Article 11. This has already been quoted and provides that: 'Italy ... shall agree, on conditions of equality with other states, to such limitations of sovereignty as may be necessary to allow for a legal system that will ensure peace and justice between nations.'

As far as we are concerned, all we need to know for certain is that we are, in this way, giving life to an international community based on the temporary cession of the exercise of that authority, or within which the participants are equals.

And so, in essence, it follows that, on the basis of our Constitution, there is no need for revision. The purpose of revision is to amend the Constitution, not to put it into effect. That is our view, and also the view of many experts consulted. The examples cited by Senator Rizzo cannot dent that view. Nor is it undermined because decisions of the Court are enforceable: enforcement orders are required for judgments of foreign

courts but not for international judgments issued by bodies on which we are ourselves represented. Good examples are the International Court of Justice at The Hague and the other international courts. Again, our view is not undermined by the alleged violation of Article 102 which prohibits the introduction of foreign judges: these are international judges. The same applies to the alleged violation of Article 113 which guarantees judicial review of administrative acts: the problem could not arise in relation to any internal administrative act. Nor is the complaint concerning the ability to impose fines well-founded: financial penalties can be authorised on the basis of ordinary ratifying law, as well as by the terms of Article 80 of the Constitution. Finally, the alleged violation of the regulatory powers of the Italian Regions in relation to mines is not persuasive: that regulatory power applies only in the framework of the Constitution in regard to the basic principles established by the laws of the state and the national interest.

Moreover, Minister Taviani alluded to the fact that those states, like the Netherlands and Belgium, that are far more rigid and have no provision to that effect in their constitutions, have already wholly or partly approved this bill in their Parliaments. I saw how carefully the representatives of the little nations defended the text of their constitutions, in relation to the European army. And, as I said earlier, we are dealing with a parallel issue and one with the same basis.

Senator Lussu ended his speech by talking of a 'sinister plot', and referred particularly, having engaged in painstaking research, to the precise date of Schuman's visit to the US Secretary of State's cabinet, as if Senator Lussu had been in receipt of confidential information from individuals watching over the 'plot' between these sinister figures.

But there is no mystery about it: the proposal we are discussing was conceived in Europe and cultivated in Europe for several reasons of an economic nature. But there is another vital reason for it, and I have personally discussed this with Schuman, who gave the proposal — one technically devised by a socialist — its political form. That reason is the need to find a way to stop the threat of a revival of German militarism and correct the mistake made in the days of Poincaré when it was believed that occupying the Ruhr was the answer. That did not work, and the basis of the resurgence of German industry for the Second World War was established. Why not accept that at least this is a genuine attempt to avoid giving a free hand to the German 'magnates' who have interests invested in coal and steel; why not accept that this is a genuine and reasonable attempt that should be given a chance and not just viewed with suspicion? America certainly has many other ways of defending itself and expanding its activity. But we are dealing here with an American need which relates above all to defence. And America wants Europe to defend itself, in its own defence interest also. It is clear, perfectly obvious, that this is the case.

You always repeat, and you have said this to me both in the Chamber of Deputies and here in the Senate, that we need to do all we can to prevent the resurgence of German militarism. You therefore declared yourselves in favour of Potsdam. You said it was necessary to destroy everything, get rid of everything, and demobilise completely. And I replied, how can you, as one who suffered from the constraints and repression inflicted by our own army, tell a people like the Germans that they should give up all forms of military defence for 50 years? You derided that argument, claiming that I was looking for sentimental excuses whereas the reality was dreadful. And you were still saying all that up to yesterday. Well now I can tell you this: be careful not to always carry out orders; wait in case those orders are countermanded. Read the latest Russian proposal. I do not wish to evaluate it here. I do not know whether it is an attempt at positioning or a serious proposal.

For the first time, the proposal envisages the creation of a German national army for defence. But that is exactly what we want. We need to agree on the size, but the principle is the same. And so it is not true that we have to abide by the Potsdam principle forever — that was the kind of principle you could only lay down in the atmosphere of the immediate post-war period. The Russian proposals of 11 March, following the very recent Lisbon decisions therefore, which are today discussed in *Unità*, also provide for the creation of a purely defensive German national army. They further provide (and think about what you said about war criminals) for an amnesty for Nazi war criminals. Thirdly, they provide for the abolition of all restrictions on the development of the economy and trade. In fact, it has to be assumed that the removal of all restrictions on production will include war material. And so your own stance has been almost completely undermined.

That is why it seems to me that you should adopt the old adage and not carry out orders in case those orders are countermanded. As far as you are concerned, it has been the same story since 1945, 1946 and 1947: abhorrence of the Marshall Plan and the subsequent plans and abhorrence of NATO. But you always forget one small thing, one incident of major importance in the psychological development of the anti-Communist struggle. You forget what happened in July 1947 in Prague. In July 1947, in Prague, the Czech leadership received from the French and the Americans an invitation to the Paris Conference to take part in the Marshall Plan. The rest of the satellite states also received the invitation, as well as Russia.

They voted unanimously in favour of accepting the invitation — the Czech Government was made up of 9 Communists, 12 Independents and 3 Social-Democrats. The next day Gottwald left for Moscow, summoned to justify himself to Stalin, who told him that he did not want the Czechs to accept the invitation. The scene was described by those who were present and survived. It is one that should not be forgotten. The Kremlin applied pressure and made a few phone calls, with the result that, on 10 July 1947, that is to say three days after the initial decision, the Council of Ministers published this communiqué, and I quote: 'It has been decided that the states of Central and Eastern Europe, with which Czechoslovakia has close economic and political relations, based on contractual obligations, will not take part in the Paris Conference. In the circumstances, the participation of Czechoslovakia could be interpreted as an affront to its friendly relations with the Soviet Union, and the Government has therefore unanimously decided not to take part in the Conference.'

Remember that. And I ask you to remember it for another reason: because there were 9 Communists, 12 non-Communists and 3 Socialists. What would happen tomorrow if the coalition ministry of fine fellows that Togliatti wants were set up! You may ask why I am interested in these things. I am interested in them because I want to retaliate against the claims you make against us. I am interested because what happened in Prague could happen in Rome, if we were not sufficiently vigilant. I also have a sense of gratitude towards those Czech colleagues who sacrificed themselves to set a good example to us and to the whole of Europe. I stress that to show that there are some gaps in history as you tell it. And we have to pick you up on them because, in peremptory manner, you have the audacity to throw one phrase at us: American lackeys! But do you not believe that we have the interests of our country at heart? It was the only excuse you could find to oppose the Schuman Plan. I am amazed at this petty, mean-minded, demagogic expedient of claiming that there were three Christian-Democrat Ministers there. As if those foreign ministers did not all belong to coalition governments; as if Schuman were the arbiter of the French Government; as if Adenauer did not have protestants and liberals in his government; as if ours were not a coalition government. It is the democratic principle that we are defending in Europe. That is our platform. Forget your fantasies about Charlemagne and the Middle Ages! This is a coalition of democracies founded on the principle of freedom. That is our bastion, that is our platform, that is our struggle!