

'The European Defence Community: a bargaining counter' from Der Spiegel (5 August 1953)

Caption: On 5 August 1953, the German weekly magazine Der Spiegel considers the interconnection between the debates on the reunification of Germany, the rearmament of the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) and the establishment of a European Defence Community (EDC).

Source: Der Spiegel. Das deutsche Nachrichtenmagazin. Hrsg. Augstein, Rudolf ; RHerAusgeber Becker, Detlev. 05.08.1953, Nr. 32; 7. Jg. Hamburg: Spiegel-Verlag G.M.B.H. "Die EVG ist ein Tauschobjekt", auteur:Daniel, Jens , p. 4-5.

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The European Defence Community: a bargaining counter

by Jens Daniel

The Bundestag elections have given the Americans another pretext to continue for a while with the German policy that they have routinely been pursuing without great success for three years. Since the Chancellor's position must not be weakened ahead of the elections, it was proposed to the Soviets that they should convene a conference of Foreign Ministers and, on that occasion, offer up the Soviet-occupied zone to the Americans for NATO. Once again, it was asserted in the same breath that a pan-German government must have freedom of action and, at the same time, be affiliated to the EDC.

As though it were just the Soviets who are against a reunited Germany joining the EDC! As though the French had even the remotest intention of joining forces with a reunited Germany in the EDC! Reunification and the EDC cannot be pursued at one and the same time (as the Federal Government has recently come to accept), because the two are mutually exclusive. It took two years for this to be fully realised, but meanwhile even old 'Auntie Times' has accepted the truism that any form of reunification will turn the EDC into a pipe-dream. As long as reunification is on the agenda of East-West talks, not much can come of the EDC, which is all for the best.

Nobody should be surprised that the Soviets have not accepted Washington's agenda; by not doing so, they have probably done the British a favour. Malenkov would obviously like to have his say, too, and, in the long term, Preacher Dulles will not be able to prevent it. The Korean War is over, and international politics are looking for a business deal. One of the bargaining counters will then be the EDC.

It became clear on 17 June that German reunification cannot be blocked by drawing-board politicians. As 17 June showed, it can be brought about in a controlled manner, otherwise we shall face a real disaster in the foreseeable future. This fact struck the French and British with some force.

If half a million West Germans had been armed on 17 June, who could have guaranteed that they would not have rushed to the aid of their rebellious brothers? In this situation, just imagine a Chancellor who combined the pigheadedness of Konrad Adenauer with the belligerence and false promises of a Syngman Rhee! Or a German commander with the resolve of General von Yorck at the Tauroggen Convention!

It became clear that a defence pact aimed at the peaceful liberation of the whole of Eastern Europe and that therefore welcomed and encouraged any uprising would spell disaster. It became clear that the situation was particularly explosive on German soil and that its explosive force was in inverse proportion to the forces that the West could mobilise to this end if the worst came to the worst. We can be sure that the division of Germany will constitute a prime danger to world peace if a German army is formed. Germany would then become the powder keg of Europe.

But how did the plan for a German army come about? How did the division of Germany come about? How did the Federal Republic come about, and how did it come about that the first German Bundestag had to debate a defence project that the second German Bundestag is likely to have to debate again?

The Potsdam Agreement, which is the only link between the two Germanys according to both the theory and the practice of all four occupying powers, provided for Germany's economic unity in 1945 and for the creation of state secretariats for all four zones. It is worth noting that it was the victorious power, France, and not the Soviets, that prevented the creation of the all-German state secretariats by its veto. This set in motion an unforeseeable movement of opposition to German unification. Otherwise, we might still have had the 'Austrian solution' today, in the form of four occupied zones and a freely elected government in Berlin.

No sooner had the French put paid to the idea of all-German state secretariats than the Soviets began to organise their zone according to Bolshevik ideas and to bleed it dry relentlessly. The SED's reign of terror began. Endless trains rolled eastwards.

But starvation and deprivation reigned in all four zones. The Americans, the richest and most generous occupying power, supplied aid. Yet they could not dip into a bottomless pit. In particular, they could not finance the impoverishment of the Soviet zone. It was impossible to deal with the Soviets. In September 1946 the bi-zone was created in order to spare as much of Germany as possible from the sad fate of relying on hand-outs from the USA.

The Soviets loudly accused the Allies of wanting to split Germany. They controlled the industrially less valuable and less populated part of Germany. They would have liked to play a part in controlling the rest of Germany, especially the Ruhr area, where the British Labour Government had meanwhile created a situation more in line with its ideas.

A conference of the four Foreign Ministers was convened in Moscow in March 1947, 'to prepare a peace treaty for Germany and Austria'. Once again, not only the Soviets were to blame for its failure. The French Foreign Minister, Georges Bidault, held out so obstinately for more Ruhr coal that the British and the Americans risked losing out in the face of the combined Franco-Soviet pressure on the Ruhr. On top of that, the Soviets demanded US\$10 thousand million in reparations from a pan-German government for a period of 10 years, which, as it still seemed then, would have had to be provided by the Americans; this was 14 times the sum the Federal Republic is paying Israel. The participants left without coming a step nearer to the German economic unity provided for under the Potsdam Agreement, let alone achieving a peace treaty.

Another conference on the same subject was held in London six months later. In December 1947, America's Foreign Minister, George Marshall, made the Soviets one final offer of German disarmament for 40 years — in vain. The Soviets wanted to be paid in cash, as Roosevelt had agreed during talks. Until that point, their attitude had been refractory, crude and crass, but not illogical. They seemed to take it as a matter of course that they should Bolshevise their zone, and this was almost accepted as such. They drew the US\$10 thousand million in reparations from their zone, and quite a bit more, too.

The Soviets thought they had time on their side and evidently wanted to convene many more fruitless conferences. In February 1948, however, they crossed their Rubicon: the Communists seized power in Prague by a *coup d'état*. The results of the Bolshevisation of Czechoslovakia, this spoilt child of the American desire to be the benefactors of foreign nations, were about as disastrous as those of the breach of the Munich Agreement when Hitler entered the Hradčany. The Soviets had brought the wrath of the entire free world upon themselves.

General Clay made arrangements to found a West German state, regardless of Potsdam. In June 1948, the Soviets responded with an act of further brutality and blockaded Berlin, which the Americans had omitted to protect by legal measures. After an unsuccessful year, the Soviets lifted the blockade; what they had been trying to prevent happened: the Federal Republic was founded.

When the red revolutionaries of North Korea fell upon the belligerent autocrat Syngman Rhee in June 1950, possibly under the direct orders of the Kremlin, the Americans finally lost patience. Foreign Minister Dean Acheson, supported by Chancellor Adenauer, moved towards the rearmament of the newly created Federal Republic. But West Germany was not merely to set up police forces to counter a possible attack by the Soviet zone's People's Police; it was to become the cornerstone, the solid core, of the Atlantic Alliance pact in Europe — and this happened three years after an American Foreign Minister had offered 40 years of disarmament.

This alarming development induced the Soviets to call for a four-power conference. While the six coal and steel partners were signing the Schuman Plan in Paris (April 1951), the deputy Foreign Ministers of the Big Four were meeting next door, in the Palais de Marbre Rose, to fix the agenda. It was another repeat performance. At the time, the Soviets could still quite easily have prevented the rearmament of the Federal Republic, but Gromyko refused to confine the agenda to Germany. He was adamant that the Atlantic Pact must also be discussed. The Western powers walked out, to the Soviets' consternation.

The Western powers met in Washington. In September 1951, Acheson persuaded his colleagues Morrison

and Schuman to agree to 12 German divisions. The Soviets called Grotewohl for 'pan-German consultations'. In Paris, the coal and steel partners were negotiating the EC with the Federal Republic; in Petersberg, the High Commissioners were negotiating the General Treaty.

When the outlines of the EDC Treaty had been drawn, the Soviets intervened. In March 1952, they sent their famous Note, proposing a neutral, reunited Germany with a national army. It was the best offer that they could make, given their position. The German Chancellor spontaneously and firmly refused, because the Soviets, who, in his view, were weak enough to be driven back behind the Vistula by the EDC once it was founded, would, again in his view, exert too much pressure on a Germany whose neutrality was guaranteed by the big powers.

But the French, too, were appalled. They had been deeply shocked at the prospect of a German national army, given that, at all events, they have only ever recommended solutions to the German question that have no chance of success. So the Soviets had no luck with their proposal, and a senseless volley of Notes ensued. The Americans had become set on the EDC, and the British, too, had tired of Stalin's games.

Stalin died on 5 March 1953. The Berlin Blockade is long gone. The Korean War is bankrupt. In the satellite states that Stalin subjugated, as in Czechoslovakia, conquered by a cold-blooded *coup d'état*, the easing of the situation goes hand in hand with unrest. Seen from the outside, the situation on the basis of which General Marshall offered full German disarmament for 40 years seems to have been restored. That is only six years ago. But these six years have been long enough to strengthen one part of Germany so much so that it can calmly face negotiations on Germany by the four occupying powers.

German reunification is no longer a pipe-dream; it has moved into the realm of the possible. Of course, the West will have to pay a price if the negotiations are to have any point at all. The Soviets cannot accept the EDC in its present form. The EDC is calling on the Soviets to give up their zone, while offering them nothing in return. It was thanks to the non-stop, and often also fruitless, discussions that, by the end of the first Bundestag's legislative term, it became clear without a shadow of doubt that the Germans have to choose between reunification and the EDC. The Chancellor prefers the EDC, but will the governing parties still prefer the EDC after the elections?

Only the fact that the EDC virtually precludes German reunification induced the French not to consign this uncomfortable project to perdition just yet. The French Foreign Minister, Maurice Schumann, speaking at the Congress of Georges Bidault's and Robert Schuman's party, said that everything possible must be done to prevent the reunification of Germany. The EDC would not make German reunification an acute issue until the whole of Eastern Europe had been liberated. And Guy Mollet, Secretary-General of the French Socialists, went so far as to declare that the Germans would have to agree to the EDC, even if that made reunification an impossibility. Nice tips!

Bundestag Members who are serious about the future welfare of a pan-German government often object: let us sign and seal the EDC and then negotiate with the Soviets. That is an illusion — once the EDC becomes more than a piece of paper, the Americans will be even less willing to sacrifice it, because then the West Germans will probably be their only faithful allies.

First we were told: we want to sign the agreement and negotiate during the interval between signing it and ratifying it. Now we are told it has to be ratified, and then we can negotiate. In reality, the Americans never want to see negotiations on Germany, unless the Soviets capitulate absolutely. If there are to be any negotiations at all in Europe, they must be about the EDC, and it is only worth negotiating about the EDC so long as it has not entered into force. Once it has entered into force, nobody will be able to impose any amendments to it. The EDC is the bargaining counter we can offer, even though we are not sitting at the negotiating table. What card do the Soviets have to play?

They can not only save the French from the nightmare of German-American divisions; they can also offer, with reservations, an end to the war in Indochina which is eating away at France's already weak constitution. For their part, the French can offer the Soviets a pan-German government that forms part of

Western Europe, with a police force that would not be allowed to have anything to do with NATO but could be controlled in a European framework.

These two approaches are not so very incompatible. Possibly, though, the Soviets will still insist that a pan-German government could not join any alliance against the Soviets if the Germans are allowed to have armed forces. Then the British diplomats will finally have to offer more than greetings from one side to another.

If they want to overcome American resistance, the British might ultimately have to commit themselves more strongly to the new state of affairs than to the EDC. A solution without the Americans' final consent is unthinkable. The concept of Europe that we have seen to date required the Germans to give up the idea of reunification; the new concept to be shaped calls on the Americans to give up their plan to turn West Germany into the cornerstone of NATO.

Following Stalin's murderous tactics, the Soviets and Americans have both gone too far, and the power blocs are weakening at the edges. In future, America will be faced with more independent allies than before. It will learn to value its 'neutral allies'. The more weakly the Soviets seem to be established in the satellite states that they have subjugated, the less Germany's western neighbours will be inclined to turn the revisionist Federal Republic into a major land fortress for the Americans.

Now that the Korean War has offered the Rheinland Chancellor an opportunity finally to escape the dangerous clutches of the victorious powers through the Control Council, the Chancellor of the second Bundestag has a huge chance to make use of what may just be a temporary softening of the fronts with a view to reunifying the two parts of the country. We do not know whether this chance will succeed. But nor do we know if it will ever come again. We must stand at the ready in the corridors and, as Bismarck put it, try to 'hear God's footsteps marching through history'. Then we must step forward and 'try to catch on to his coat-tails as he marches past, that is all.'