

Commentary by Paolo Emilio Taviani on the WEU (November 1954)


Caption: In November 1954, Paolo Emilio Taviani, Italian Defence Minister, emphasises the importance of Western European Union (WEU) for the military security of the European continent.

Source: TAVIANI, Paolo Emilio. *Solidarietà atlantica e comunità europea*. 5 éd. Firenze: Le Monnier, 1957. 400 p. p. 289-299.

Copyright: (c) Translation CVCE.EU by UNI.LU
All rights of reproduction, of public communication, of adaptation, of distribution or of dissemination via Internet, internal network or any other means are strictly reserved in all countries.
Consult the legal notice and the terms and conditions of use regarding this site.

URL:
http://www.cvce.eu/obj/commentary_by_paolo_emilio_taviani_on_the_weu_november_1954-en-2cfoe76a-60a2-4237-920b-3fede7c20091.html

Last updated: 05/07/2016



Commentary by Paolo Emilio Taviani (November 1954)

The Paris Agreements have given rise to many different comments and interpretations. This is logical, given the importance of the events and the speed at which they took place after the French Assembly stunned European public opinion by its rejection of the European Defence Community.

There is no need to dwell on the comments of the Communists and the faction of the Socialists that is in thrall to Communism. Both have a single inspiration and a single tactic: their inspiration comes from Soviet policy and their tactic is to try, from the inside, to sway Italy and the other western countries towards Soviet foreign policy.

Three interpretations worth looking at in more detail have emerged from the comments made by those who, although from different ideological backgrounds and holding different points of view, have wholly Italian souls and interests.

The interpretation of those opposing the EDC in good faith is simple: the EDC was too cumbersome, it had major shortcomings and it sacrificed national sovereignty. Western European Union (WEU) is rearming Germany and so is making a powerful contribution to Europe's security without the unwieldy apparatus and serious drawbacks of the EDC. It is therefore very fortunate that the EDC collapsed and WEU has been set up.

[...]

WEU is therefore making western Europe more secure and helping to consolidate its internal solidarity.

Following the collapse of the EDC, people said that the European international situation was fluid: in a sense it is even more fluid today. In September, the situation was not so much fluid as a vacuum, creating a risk of chaos. Now we have returned to firmer ground with a guarantee of security and solidarity in western Europe. On this firmer ground, however, the European situation is genuinely fluid in the sense that new prospects are opening up for the long, difficult and arduous, but no less appealing, road towards European unity.

It is a small step, perhaps too small a step, along the road to integration: this is the problem that the Paris Agreements leave open and that the EDC was an attempt to resolve. While we have to accept that this is the case, there is absolutely no need to go into mourning in the belief that any further progress towards European integration is now doomed. We need to demolish any attempt at bilateralism, which would be a real backward step in the process of European unification and would in the end threaten Europe's very solidarity and — from Italy's own point of view — would be highly detrimental to our national interests.

There are still roads, not just the one road, towards European integration, if the committed Europeanists of Italy and other countries possess courage, imagination and initiative, and above all if they are able to stand their ground and not give up the fight.

The position of the MRP

The Mouvement Républicain Populaire wound up its National Congress with a motion:

- (1) reminding French public opinion of the heavy responsibilities of those who brought about the downfall of the EDC;
- (2) re-affirming its fidelity to the policy of European integration, conducted under the impetus of Bidault and Schuman, and its firm intention to continue the fight for continental integration;
- (3) ruling out any vote in favour of the Paris Agreements on Western European Union.

We obviously agree with the first part of the motion. It echoes what we have already said, and there is no

need to dwell on it at length. Christian Democrat thinking has always been and continues to be unanimous in this respect: the EDC was not merely an instrument for German rearmament, it was a major step along the road of European integration, felt to be crucial and indispensable if we are to guarantee the dignity and independence of the individual nations for future generations.

The tenacity and commitment with which the French Christian Democrats intend to fight for the European ideal therefore has our full support, and indeed our admiration. Their situation is much more difficult than ours: French public opinion is less decided about the concept of Europe than are, for instance, the Belgians and Dutch. This makes it harder and, from an electoral point of view, riskier for the French Christian Democrats to take such a line. For that reason, their unequivocal and courageous commitment is even more praiseworthy.

We send our sincerest good wishes to them, and to Jean Monnet (who, to dedicate himself to the battle for European unification in his own country, of his own volition gave up the post of President of the High Authority of the ECSC). Especially as it is very reassuring for us Italians that the French Europeanists are standing their ground: Italy would have everything to lose and nothing to gain, not even from a tactical and contingent point of view, if the process of European integration were to be replaced by a system of Franco-German cartels.

Why we should ratify WEU

We cannot, however, agree with the third part of the MRP motion. Apart from anything else, it does not follow on from the other two.

There is no doubt that the EDC was the best solution since, in addition to leading to German rearmament and greater Atlantic solidarity, it laid the foundations for a soundly based economic and political integration of the European continent. Following the rejection of the EDC, attempts nevertheless were needed as soon as possible to achieve at least two of its fundamental goals, those that are the most urgent and vital: to consolidate and strengthen European solidarity and to return the people of West Germany to the fold of free and sovereign peoples, thereby filling the vacuum — dangerous and serious in strategic and military terms — that has existed up to now in one of the more delicate areas of East-West relations.

That vacuum is especially significant when, on the other side of the Elbe, for years the Soviets have with few formalities had a *Volkspolizei*. As we shall see below, this is less a police force than an army, as it already has four motorised divisions, with 100 000 men in total, in addition to 136 000 members of the various types of police force and 20 000 or so navy and air force personnel.

If, for some dreadful and, fortunately, unlikely reason, WEU were to fail, could we perhaps delude ourselves that we could pursue more substantial and supranational integration? On the contrary, if WEU is not set up, it is not just the European integration process but the whole system of the West — which cannot but include the European integration process — that would be in jeopardy, perhaps also threatening the very existence of the peoples of the West as free and sovereign peoples.

For the paramount purpose of peace, of peace in dignity, liberty and security, to which we are all fervently committed, it is vital for WEU to be set up. Contrary to what the latest Soviet memorandum would have us believe, our view — as our Foreign Minister has rightly pointed out — is that Western European solidarity has to be a reality if we are to negotiate and achieve a peaceful, lasting and effective co-existence.

Does support for the ratification of WEU weaken our Europeanist commitment? Certainly not. Within WEU, we must continue along the road of European integration by strengthening or extending the ECSC, or by taking any other suitable initiative that circumstances may offer us. One lost battle, after all the others that have been won, should not call success into doubt.

The task of those who intend to commit themselves fully to the path of Europe is not one of becoming *laudatores temporis acti*; those who have such a prospect before them, which contains the future within it,

must not, cannot be mere barren eulogisers of the past.

The task of the Europeanists is to take the actual facts as a starting point for finding a road along which the civil foundations for Europe's political and economic unity can be laid. This prospect is in keeping with the needs of life everywhere: we need to tackle any opposing interests, in concrete and precise terms; we need to make European policy, in the individual countries, feasible in practice.

The parties and WEU

A marginal note, finally. The Communists have so often spoken of the 'Catholic Internationale', of 'Vatican Europe', We have reached the point at which the NEI (*Nouvelles Équipes Internationales* — New International Teams), a series of free meetings between Christian-inspired democratic parties, has been labelled a kind of white Cominform.

The Italian Christian Democrats are disappointed to see their friends in the MRP, although agreeing in principle, largely shrinking from any practical political action. This is nevertheless the best sign of the extent to which individual national positions may vary and of the complete freedom of political choice, nationally as well as individually, albeit with a common fundamental vision. We look forward to the day when even a single Cominform party, from any nation of the world, takes a stance differing from that of a sister party, not to speak of that of the Foreign Minister of the USSR.

The fact that the Italian Communist Party is against the ratification of WEU is understandable, as its policies are not decided by Italian activists or leaders but have to comply strictly with the foreign policy directives of Russian leaders.

What explanation is there, however, for the attitude of Nenni's Socialists?

They said they opposed the EDC because it was too supranational and too much individual sovereignty was lost. But today's Western European Union is in no way a supranational body.

They said they opposed the EDC because Europe without Great Britain would be a Europe dominated by Catholic parties. In today's Western European Union, Great Britain is present with all its might and prestige. The Socialists are therefore having to bend over backwards to find ways of justifying, to their own consciences and their grass-roots, a position that has only one foundation: subjection to the Communists and Soviet foreign policy directives.

WEU and German rearmament

The Communists and Nenni's Socialists are trying to find common ground in their desperate fight against WEU by raising the spectre of German rearmament. German rearmament, organised and managed by the Soviets, has been taking place in East Germany for some time. Seven divisions, including three motorised divisions, have already been set up in the Soviet zone's *Volkspolizei*. They include infantry, artillery, tanks, logistics and engineering.

Four years ago, i.e. three and a half years before the signature of WEU, on 2 February 1951, a German regiment was stationed in Löbau in Saxony, equipped with 122-mm howitzers and guns, anti-tank guns, 180-mm howitzers and 76-mm self-propelling guns!

The German armoured units now have Soviet tanks of the T34 type as well as German 'Tiger' tanks: a total of some 1 500 units including armoured vehicles, self-propelling guns and genuine tanks.

One hundred and ten thousand men are enlisted in the military divisions of the *Volkspolizei* as well as 35 000 in the border police divisions, trained to infantry unit level and equipped with light arms; in addition to these 145 000 men there are 100 000 actual policemen, divided between the PK, the S, the K, the Trapo, the Va, the J and the Gw: political police, law and order, criminal police, etc., the whole range of police

forces that every Communist country possesses.

The problem that the ratification of WEU raises is not whether to rearm the Germans, but of deciding whether armed capability should be an exclusive prerogative of those countries with Communist regimes, or whether all peoples have the right to defend themselves and secure their freedom, independence and peace.

The Soviet Union and its followers, the supporters of Cominform in every country, were against the EDC and are now against WEU because they do not want the integration or solidarity of Western Europe. In a divided world, it would be easy for the USSR to extend its domain by using the method of bilateral negotiations.

Up to now Soviet foreign policy has not deviated from the line of ideological totalitarianism and has never denied — although its tactical moves have differed — its goals of imperialist expansion.

It would be culpably naïve to believe in a peace offered by the Soviets. In the past, Greeks, Berliners and Koreans in turn have all had the sad experience of the ephemeral nature of peace without security.

We do not believe in a ‘passive peace’; we believe in an ‘active peace’ based on the military, political and economic security of the free world. The Soviets have always shown that they respect only force and for that reason the democratic countries have had to set up, within the Atlantic Pact, a common defence force which will be even more closely-knit and extensive with the inclusion of West Germany.

Europe’s security can be consolidated in this way. It is in this climate of security that it will be possible for the European nations to make further progress along the road of wider and deeper political and military, economic and social, integration; in this way a concrete foundation can be laid for those prospects of a European federation that alone can offer our own and future generations a future of peace and serenity.