

'A perilous journey' from Le Monde (28 May 1952)

Caption: On 28 May 1952, on the occasion of the signing of the Treaty establishing the European Defence Committee (EDC) in Paris, the French daily newspaper Le Monde considers the participation of German forces in the European Army.

Source: Le Monde. dir. de publ. Beuve-Méry, Hubert. 28.05.1952, n° 2282; 9e année. Paris: Le Monde. "Sur une route périlleuse", p. 1.

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A perilous journey

After having initialled it on 9 May, the Ministers of the six member countries of the European Defence Community will meet today in Paris to sign the Treaty establishing a European army. We know that it is closely related to the 'contractual arrangements' signed yesterday at Bonn, which will not enter into force until after the Treaty has been ratified. West Germany's participation in European defence is regarded as the price it must pay for the advantages that these arrangements grant them.

One could point out that German rearmament is already an advantage, but that is debatable and debated amongst the Germans themselves: a strong minority, led by the Socialists, is against rearmament, if not in principle then at least under present circumstances.

This is actually one of the features of this European army: it has led to controversy everywhere and owes its creation to contradictory motives. The Americans, who are for it, would have preferred a German national army. The French, who gave in under pressure and proposed it merely as a lesser evil, would have liked it to remain in limbo and would, no doubt, congratulate themselves if it still came to grief. The British approve of the principle, while maintaining as far as possible their freedom to act.

France's request for an Anglo-American guarantee seeks to reassure a worried public. We must not have any illusions about its worth. We believe that Great Britain and the United States would undertake to leave their troops in Europe for as long as possible and to study what action to take, should one of the members of the Defence Community secede. Such a gesture would be considered a threat to Western security and might even lead to the cancellation of the agreements signed yesterday. These are not the kinds of statement that will intimidate Germany if, one day, it had to withdraw its troops from the European army. That would be possible only in the event of a political U-turn in favour of the USSR. It would thus have to break its ties with the West, which is enough to render any threats of a rupture futile.

These possibilities cannot be excluded. Two others seem more immediate, if not more likely.

The first possibility is that the European army is set up in accordance with the plans laid down. What would be of concern to France in that event is the balance between French and German forces. The issue is settled on paper; numbers of troops and divisions have been determined. But it is obvious that, if Indo-China continues to claim the best French contingents, it will be impossible for France to be on equal footing with Germany in Europe. Therein lies a problem of global policy and strategy that goes beyond both French policy and the European army. It needs to be resolved globally and, firstly, with the United States.

The second possibility is that, if an agreement were to be concluded on the unification of Germany, the European army would no longer be possible for the moment. Perhaps it would be possible later, but it would have to be shelved during the period when a unified Germany was organising itself. No one can know whether any army at all would be temporarily refused or whether Germany would have a national army as the USSR would have it, whether this army would be restricted and controlled, or for how long it would be so. Whatever the outcome, new problems would arise: they simply need to be stated for us to gauge their difficulty.

German rearmament in the European context is undoubtedly not the best solution. *The New York Times* wrote, 'We are embarking today on a perilous journey.' It would be too easy to believe that dismissing rearmament is enough to solve everything. A peace settlement implies that the two opposing sides agree on various issues and on the future of Germany, with or without an army. Is an agreement possible as things stand? It is up to the diplomats to prove it and to make a great effort before the accelerating pace of one-upmanship drives both sides to the point of no return.