

Report by Christian Fouchet, published in Le Monde (11 April 1972)

Caption: In April 1972, ten years after the failure of the Fouchet Plan, the French diplomat Christian Fouchet reports in the French daily newspaper Le Monde the reasons that resulted in the failure of an attempt to achieve political union in Europe.

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Christian Fouchet's eyewitness account in *Le Monde* (11 April 1972)

With our heads held high, just like ten years ago

By Christian Fouchet

When he chose to appoint me as principal negotiator, from March 1961 to March 1962, for the French proposals on a 'Union of States' of the Six (known as the Fouchet Plan) across the table from our five partners, General de Gaulle made me privy to his innermost thoughts about the political future of Europe. There were probably other people involved, but not many. For this reason, I was asked a few days ago by a number of people to indicate where I stand on the issue raised by the referendum.

It was my firm intention not to speak out, so as to avoid any misunderstandings, because no one can now say what General de Gaulle would have done. But events are taking such a strange turn, because of the sharply conflicting motives of the various supporters of the 'yes' vote, that I have decided to make my thoughts public.

Since the end of the war, the vast majority of French people have supported Europe. The adults do so because they have suffered too much from conflicts between European nations, and the young support it because they have never known such conflicts at all. So what has caused this bogus polemic between pro- and anti-Europeans that everyone is talking about? It arises solely from the efforts made by some peddlers of illusions to exploit the pro-European mood in order to promote their utopia, by which I mean a 'stateless, technocratic and irresponsible Europe'. In so doing, these dreamers, both at home and abroad, have hindered the untiring efforts of genuine Europeans, the foremost of whom, even since before the end of the war, was General de Gaulle (as witness his speech of 18 March 1943). Through their stubbornness, they foiled the Fouchet Plan, despite the efforts of General de Gaulle himself. I believe that it was René Pleven who recently said on television that he deeply regretted the blunder made by the Belgian and Netherlands Governments, who were responsible for the fiasco.

Therefore, I would appeal for a show of humility from those hard-core and persistent opponents of General de Gaulle's policy. These are the people who, for more than 20 years now, have been bleating about supranationalism and about an Atlantic Europe being towed along behind the United States, and now they are singing and dancing about a 'yes' vote in the referendum, claiming that it represents a radical change in the way that we see Europe! Cannot these people, who are pretending to be blind, see that their supranationalism has been reduced to ashes and that nobody is interested in it any more, particularly the British? Étienne Hirsch understands this perfectly well, and that is why, consistent in his views, he will abstain.

Cannot these people, who are pretending to be deaf, understand that General de Gaulle's so-called 'veto' against Britain was simply a demonstration of his unremitting efforts to persuade the British (our friends, allies and the saviours of the free world in 1940, but also the seafarers and traders who have always looked out to sea and to the American seaboard that they once settled and conquered) to understand this essential fact that one has to be European if one wants to be part of Europe? So now, faced with the overarching need not be left alone to face the American giant when it shuffles its cards, Britain has rallied to the camp of those countries that have decided to join forces in order to defend their interests and with whom it shares common humanitarian values. Neither the indomitable Churchill, nor Eden nor Macmillan could ever have conceived the possibility of abandoning the 'high seas' in order to 'drop anchor on the continent'! And now Mr Heath is doing just that, and the President of the Republic tells us that the British are not just going through the motions but actually believe in what they are doing. On 16 May 1967, he proclaimed that, 'Should Britain one day take that step, France would wholeheartedly welcome that historic U-turn.'

However, Europe evolves with every passing day, as does life itself. And changes are inevitable. While France has to forge a path to the future through a consistent foreign policy, it has to do so in conditions that are now far more difficult than before. In the six-member 'Union of States' of the Fouchet Plan, the main language would have been French, and the crucially important political secretariat would have had its

headquarters in Paris. The agreement on this point was such that, together with some of my foreign colleagues, we visited the small townhouse on the corner of Rue de la Faisanderie and Place Bugeaud where it was to be housed. In today's Europe of Ten, the French Government has a duty to fight with no thought of retreat so that the French language yields no ground to English. It is, therefore, vital that the planned political secretariat remain in Paris.

However, it is not just the prestige of our language that is at stake in this great undertaking. How will Paris, as a financial centre, face up to London? What will be our ranking amongst the Ten, with everyone bitterly defending their own interests? With so much at stake, the French people should stop quarrelling amongst themselves because, really, as is always the case, it is their steadfastness that will provide the answer to these questions. It seems to me that it would be quite nonsensical to proclaim victory at this stage. Instead, the French people must be made to realise the need for sweat and toil.

The same applies to each of the Ten. Indeed, a litmus test will soon demonstrate the genuine nature of Britain's European commitment and the genuine European nature of the Europe of Ten. Circumstances require the Ten to hold talks with, and even to confront, the United States so as to ensure that the monetary system, which is inflationist and dominated by the dollar and which is threatening the global trade balance, gives way to a new equilibrium characterised by a common European monetary policy. Here, too, we can see just how right de Gaulle was, and he was right before anyone else! If it were to come about, what a posthumous victory that would be for General de Gaulle! If it does not, what will remain of this Europe of Ten?

True Gaullists must keep their heads held high and not become downhearted or be misled by the jeremiads or lies of their opponents. It is absolutely essential that the referendum signals the victory of the European policy that France has been pursuing for years. Here, I am referring to the 'European Europe', not the 'Atlantic Europe' — the Europe of nations and not of illusions.

That is why it is a pity that the treaty on enlargement which is to be put to the vote in the referendum is so vague about the shape of the institutions of the Europe upon which we are embarking. Who could doubt that this would certainly have been General de Gaulle's major concern?

Christian Fouchet