

Inaugural address given by Georges Bidault (Paris, 12 July 1947)

Caption: On 12 July 1947, in Paris, Georges Bidault, French Minister of Foreign Affairs, opens the Conference on European Economic Cooperation, attended by representatives from the 16 countries of Western Europe that have accepted the economic assistance proposed one month previously by George C. Marshall, US Secretary of State.

Source: Archives historiques des Communautés européennes, Florence, Villa Il Poggiolo. Dépôts, DEP. Organisation de coopération et de développement économiques, OECD. Committee for European Economic Co-operation, CEEC. CEEC 03.

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Inaugural address given by Mr. Georges Bidault, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the French Republic (Paris, 12 July 1947)

I declare open the Paris Conference for European Economic Co-operation.

To all the representatives of the European countries which have responded to the invitation of the United Kingdom and France, I extend the cordial welcome of the French Government and people.

For the first time since the end of the second world war, States which have been divided by history before coming together again, are now meeting in a common will for peaceful mutual assistance. I am glad that Paris has been selected as the meeting place of a Conference which is to witness the assertion of a fraternal determination which has sprung from our joint misfortunes, to achieve our joint salvation.

It was no one's fault if all the nations of Europe are not present to-day at this meeting. Everything possible has been done to secure a favourable reply from a unanimous Europe to the appeal of the American Secretary of State. Faithful to the ideas by which we have constantly been guided, we shall take care to say and do nothing that could induce anyone to remain absent from this gathering, in the hope, which we still cherish, that the empty chairs may one day be occupied, as seems to us absolutely necessary in the collective interest of Europe and in the special interest of those not here.

To-day, we are faced with a task whose amplitude and urgency are obvious to every sincere thinker.

After those terrible trials which, in the course of a single generation, were a repetition of the first great calamity by which mankind had been visited, our Continent of Europe, cradle of modern civilization, was left weakened and ravaged. On May 5th last, a great statesman, Mr. Marshall, launched an appeal to which we are anxious to respond, in order that European self-help may secure for us that temporary assistance from America which is so essential.

It is unnecessary to recall to-day the events which, since General Marshall's offer, up to the end of the Anglo-Franco-Sovietic Conference in Paris, have led to the consequences known to you all.

Each of you, studying them, can draw his own conclusions and realize what has been done, and by whom, by way of conciliation, and what has proved the obstacle, and in what conditions.

It has been alleged with a certain sameness in the rash statement, which I note without wishing to dwell upon it further, that this Conference would affect not only the sovereignty, but also the independence of the States; on the contrary, notwithstanding a declaration, the repetition of which is not an apology for its inaccuracy, it is here and to-day that the sovereignty and the independence of the States is being affirmed.

What is the object of the present Conference? Simply to establish an organization which can draw up a balance sheet of the assets and needs of Europe.

It must be done quickly. This is the reason why the Franco-British invitation was addressed to you the very day after the dispersal of the Conference of the Three Ministers in Paris. It is also why you have had such a short time in which to reply. In the near future, there will be many countries which will not know how to cope with the purchases of those "key" products, which they must have owing to the existing distress of our Continent, without having sufficient foreign currency reserves.

Such are the motives underlying the initiative taken, in common agreement, by Great Britain and France in the general interests of Europe, and because it has not been possible to associate the Soviet Union with their invitation.

We have no intention of imposing our views or our methods on any one, still less of seeking to use this Conference to establish a hegemony in Europe by which, as you are well aware, Gentlemen, no one here is threatened. What we are proposing is to organize freely and on the basis of decisions in which each of us

will share the joint efforts of the European nations here represented in order to limit the co-operation of the United States to what is strictly necessary; in other words, to what cannot be achieved by our own unaided efforts.

It has been alleged that the occult purpose of this meeting was to begin by the reconstruction of Germany. The resources of that country must be used for the benefit of Europe as a whole, including Germany. I wish to declare emphatically, on behalf of the French Delegation, that any other interpretation is entirely unjustified.

The time has come to constitute Europe, as already proclaimed twenty years ago by a great Frenchman “not against other countries, or any other country or group of countries, but to emancipate immediately by better conditions of peace, in order to put an end to a state of anarchy which, by maintaining distress, fosters strife”.

Europe is not fully represented here to-day, but those of you who are present are entitled to speak in her name, to act on her behalf. Reinforcement will arrive, I am convinced, when our loyal efforts have proved to all where the path to genuine independence, coupled with our obvious interest, was really to be found.

The time has come to fulfil Europe’s destiny by restoring her to the position which she has occupied since the dawn of history, in the life of the civilized world. The lofty initiative taken by the United States Government is a clarion call to our peoples whom we should betray, if we turned a deaf ear. We therefore mean to try to help each other, and to make that effort which will entitle us to aid, without loss of time.

For many generations, men of every country who rejected a selfish nationalism have sought to realize a gathering such as is taking place to-day. We can rightly feel proud to witness this, and to be the artisans of a task which has been dreamt of for centuries and has now become urgent.

I must again stress that we hoped for no refusal, that we have spared no efforts to ensure that this meeting should be more numerous, and that, even as it is, it provides good reasons for all those now present and those still to come, to have confidence in the future.