

Address given by Pierre-Henri Teitgen (Paris, 22 September 1947)

Caption: On 22 September 1947, the final day of the Paris Conference on European Economic Cooperation, Pierre-Henri Teitgen, Vice-President of the French Council, outlines the steps taken by France to revive its economy and play its part in the recovery of Europe.

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.

Copyright: (c) OCDE / Historical Archives of the European Union-Florence

URL: http://www.cvce.eu/obj/address_given_by_pierre_henri_teitgen_paris_22_september_1947-en-ef9a6691-fb29-4399-b42c-e59abf86f7e5.html

Last updated: 02/07/2015

Address given by Mr. Pierre-Henri Teitgen, acting Foreign Minister of France, at the final session held at the Quai d'Orsay on September 22nd 1947

I wish first to repeat that Paris and France, last year the seat of the Conference on the Peace Treaties, have appreciated the further honour of offering a meeting-place to the representatives of the sixteen European nations which have gathered together here to take the first step in a form of co-operation new in history and, through such co-operation, to erect a milestone on the road to a peace which, owing to mistrust and discord among those who are seeking it, constantly eludes our grasp — a peace of which, unless quickly achieved, the peoples will despair.

On behalf of my country and of all who wished and were able to accept the invitation addressed to Europe by our old friend Great Britain and ourselves, I wish to thank the distinguished men who have been the artisans of a task for which the world will be grateful to them; for, in a time of gloom when we might easily give way to despair, it is a work of reason and faith, therefore, foremost among these good citizens of the world, the delegates, experts and rapporteurs of your Conference, it is to Sir Oliver FRANKS, the Chairman of the Committee of Co-operation, that our most cordial gratitude must be extended.

While I would draw no invidious comparison between the contributions made to the common task by each of the countries here assembled, I shall doubtless not be censured if, speaking for my Government, I point out that, since Mr. MARSHALL's suggestion, the French ideas as to what the nations of Europe should do for their own salvation have never varied; and so we are glad to note that it is those ideas which, in a large measure, have inspired the general report — the expression of our common observations and resolve.

In this very place, two months ago, Mr. Georges BIDAULT expressed the spirit by which the French Government was guided in three essential ideas upon which he invited the assembled nations to reflect:

— To seek the first cure for our difficulties and miseries in the individual efforts of each country harmoniously blended in one common effort.

— To call upon external aid only for such additional supplies as are necessary to the following three ends: to secure for Europe, ravaged and drained by the Hitlerite tidal-wave and its aftermath, such essential raw materials and foodstuffs as it would be unable itself to pay for by exportation before the expiry of four years of labour and reconstruction; to supply on credit, the equipment required to restore its productive capacity and so to become progressively independent of foreign markets; to help to stabilize the internal economic and financial situation.

— To make that common effort without infringing the sovereignty of any state: the statements of requirements drawn up, the concerted programmes and the agreement reached should be such as in no way to result, either in aim or in effect, in any control over Europe, but should on the contrary aim at ensuring its independence by restoring to it the means to live and prosper.

In view of the above provisions where it is enough that good will, resolve and confidence be seasoned with common sense and that the suspicion of some dark design do not make a travesty of what is no more than a salutary undertaking, conceived sensibly and in the light of the facts, — in these circumstances is there any need to explain at length why the French Government has had no difficulty in assuming the undertakings contained in the general report?

It has done so the more easily since these undertakings, by their very nature, have long been the foundation of a policy approved by our Parliament.

Each country assumes these obligations on the national plane, but the fact that they are of the same kind for each country brings in its train a sort of European solidarity. The desire for that solidarity between nations is too much a part of our tradition and too near to our heart for us not to welcome to-day with feelings of confidence something which is at last more than a promise and a hope.

Now, in what practical form does France propose to fulfil these obligations as regards both individual and common efforts?

In respect of production, our aims are set forth in the Reconstruction and Modernism Plan.

In the agricultural field, France must be in a position, not only to cover almost all her own requirements, but also to have a wide export margin.

It is expected that in 1951, France will produce 63 million tons of coal, i.e. 15 million tons more than in 1938, and 12.7 million tons of steel, more than twice the 1958 figure.

This obviously presupposes that the production of coke, which is in short supply in Europe, will be equitably distributed and this implies a special agreement on production in the Ruhr. This is recognized in the Report, which says that "Considerations of security demand also that both the rate and nature of German reconstruction should be carefully controlled. The German economy must not be allowed to develop to the detriment of other European countries, as it has done in the past".

We have made it clear to the Committee that, in order to achieve internal financial and economic stability, we are resolved to cover every item of expenditure in the 1948 Budget, including military and reconstruction expenditure, from current revenue, the only exception will be compensation for private damage and expenditure on industrial equipment. We have further indicated that in 1948, advances from the Bank of France will be stopped.

As you know, these prospects form part of an overall plan for economic and financial stability and recovery which is now being prepared by a Special Committee presided by the Prime Minister, and, will be submitted to the National Assembly at its next session.

Finally, the French Government approves all the plans for European Economic Co-operation contemplated in the Report, with particular reference to Trade. As it has already stated, in present world conditions, only strong economic units with a sufficiently large internal market are in a position to lower industrial and agricultural costs of production, so as to secure, by means of better techniques, a higher standard of living for the populations concerned, and to enable their countries to compete in the world market.

The inequality between the situation in Europe, where an area of ten million square kilometres is divided up into some ten States barricaded by customs frontiers, compared with the free trade system of the 25 million square kilometres of the Soviet Union and of the eight million square kilometres of the United States, is a fact which has long been recognized.

This drawback has been noted, but up to now no serious attempt has been made to remedy it.

To achieve this end, the French Government is ready to negotiate with all European countries of the same mind desiring to establish a Customs Union with France — countries whose economic systems can be combined with that of France in a viable and profitable whole.

We have already expressed our regret at the absence from this table of other members of the European family.

We repeat that the door is open and that it will so remain. It will not be our fault if the hope that others will join us is not fulfilled.

We are prepared to enter into negotiations and exchanges of views with all other European countries whose resources can contribute to the solution of the economic problem of Europe. These consultations will take place as far as possible within the framework of the United Nations Organization or that of other existing international organizations.

We feel that we have done our honest best for our own salvation on and for the interests of world peace.

Any victory over isolationism is so much gained in the cause of peace.

We came together under the shadow of a crisis to draw up a programme; for the purposes of this programme, it is urgent to cope with the extremely difficult situation created by the scarcity of foreign currency and of the inflation which threatens many European countries.

Since the convocation of the Co-operation Committee, Europe's financial resources have constantly dwindled; on the 20th August, the United Kingdom was obliged provisionally to suspend the convertibility of pounds into dollars. On the 28th August, the French Government announced a stoppage in dollar imports with the exception of cereals, coal and other essential products. Similar decisions have been taken in Italy. The Italian Government has been obliged to suspend purchases of coal, oil and other basic products.

Similar changes and their consequences may, failing prompt action, shortly occur within every sector of world economy.

We have rung the tocsin; we have joined the ranks of those who wish to save Europe, faithful to that impulse of the peoples of Europe, who protesting against the German ideal of unification by force, voiced even at that time their sense of a no less real spiritual union, their aspiration for a community respecting the ideals of the different nations.

We have done our duty. We will continue to do it in a spirit of union and freedom. May this same spirit govern the decision of those who may join us and arm them in their fight for the cause of peace and mankind.