

Address given by Konrad Adenauer to the Council of Europe (Strasbourg, 10 December 1951)

Caption: On 10 December 1951, Chancellor Konrad Adenauer, Foreign Minister of the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG), outlines to the Consultative Assembly of the Council of Europe the main guidelines of Germany's European policy.

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[...]

Mr. President, Ladies and Gentlemen, the European policy of the Federal Government has many times found its expression in resolutions and actions. Nevertheless, it will not be superfluous to describe the tenor of this policy once more to-day. On the contrary, I am particularly glad that the invitation of the Consultative Assembly, for which I express my heartfelt thanks, offers me an opportunity to speak about a political issue in which we all are interested, and for which we all together bear responsibility, before a group of persons that may claim, more than any other, to represent the public opinion of Europe.

For, much as the present Statute of the Council of Europe may be criticised, and much as such criticism may be justified in some details, let us not forget that the existence of this European organisation, even such as it is now, is extraordinarily valuable politically. I remember very well the European Congress held at The Hague in 1948, and in which I took part; and when I think what the situation was at that time, of all the good will then prevailing, the abundance of individual efforts to be seen then but, nevertheless, when the essential defect was the absence of any permanent organisation in Europe, then I am bound to say that we would do well, even if we have not achieved everything, to recognise all that has meanwhile become reality. It is no small achievement.

It is of great significance for the political development of Europe that here, in the organs of the Council of Europe, we have a platform on which the representatives of Europe meet regularly, discuss their worries and anxieties, their desires and their hopes, a platform where they try to establish common criteria for evaluating their requirements, and where, in general, they co-operate with one another in a spirit of fairness and of good neighbourliness. In other words, here we find an expression of the European conscience. And it is also greatly significant that here, at any rate, there is a place where almost the *whole* of Europe gathers together, despite all the different shades of opinion that have shown themselves in our efforts to achieve closer organisational co-operation. European policy in every country will ultimately receive its impetus from the collective will of the European peoples. But nowhere is this so manifest as a collective will as it is in the Council of Europe.

It must be admitted that the Council of Europe is not the only organisation by means of which European policies are being formed and European realities are created. Beside it there are the policies of the governments which, in greater or lesser completeness, supported by their national parliaments, are taking steps towards the realisation of the European community. I am not thinking only of the Organisation for European Economic Co-operation, but of the steadily increasing number of plans that have been put forward. Only when we include in a general survey these various efforts and what is coming to pass in Strasbourg can we get a complete picture of European policy. The essential function of the Council of Europe is, indeed, to see that the consciousness of, and the will to achieve, a European community never slumbers. As things are at present, the steps taken to coordinate Government initiatives, on the one hand, and those launched by the Council of Europe, on the other, do not seem to be adequate. When one particular project came to be discussed, the most important, and the most topical, that of the European Defence Community, a specific necessity was demonstrated, as M. Schuman explained to us just now in such impressive terms, that of facing up to the creation of a political organ which, within the framework of the common defence of Europe, would be required to take political decisions. Kindred political problems arise in connection with the European budget which is made necessary by the financial aspect of the expenditure for European defence. Here the problem of European control of a collective financial policy arises.

All these questions arise at a moment at which, in the Council of Europe, too, deliberations have taken concrete shape in drafts for a political organisation of Europe. A more opportune moment for talks between the representatives of Governments and the members of this Assembly than the present is, therefore, hardly imaginable. This is the case all the more as time is pressing with regard to the concrete questions to which I have alluded.

You all know that the world situation with respect to the problem of the Defence Community does not permit of procrastination, and that, therefore, the efforts of the Governments concerned are reaching a crucial stage in these very days. It, therefore, seems useful to me that some of my colleagues and myself have an opportunity at this hour to give our points of view regarding the questions of European politics that are under consideration.

But, before I do this on behalf of the Federal Republic, permit me to make a preliminary remark that seems necessary to me for a proper appreciation of the European problems. I have the impression that discussions everywhere suffer because questions are posed in the form of irreconcilable alternatives. Brusquely an “either-or” is proclaimed. In the face of such a posing of the problems the question is not always considered whether there might not be a “third solution”. This is true especially in the case of two problems which it has become customary to discuss in a very antithetic form, *viz* the problem “functionalism or federalism” and the problem “Little Europe” or “Great Europe”. I consider that to present these two alternatives, as if that were all there is to it, is wrong.

For the practical realisation of European solutions we have applied methods which some of our critics describe as functionalist. That is to say, we have envisaged the creation of a basis for joint action in the economic field, the most important of which is the Schuman Plan. We adopted the same measures in the sphere of European defence. But we have always done so with the underlying conviction that by such solutions we might hope to approach a political solution in the most efficacious and quickest way. During the discussions of these special solutions we repeatedly pointed out two facts: first, that these special solutions do not in themselves make sense as separate individual solutions, *i.e.* that they are in need of being completed by a comprehensive political organisation; and, secondly, that it is precisely by tackling these particular problems that the “European momentum” will be intensified in the most effective manner.

I could adduce many examples, but I shall confine myself to one only. By establishing the European Defence Community we integrate, to begin with, only an instrument, namely the defence forces. We therefore place at the disposal of the member States of this community a homogeneous army. In connection with this, however, we cannot evade the question of what is to be the body that will decide about the use of this instrument. This, however, is a political decision. The pursuing of the technical military plan itself has therefore compelled us to make a decisive contribution to the political integration of Europe, in the true sense of the term.

A similar problem is posed when questions of the European Defence Budget are discussed. In both these cases, the question of European parliamentary control of the executive inevitably arises. So we see that in this manner we penetrate into the sphere of political integration immediately and very quickly. As similar necessities urge themselves upon us also in the case of the other plans, it can easily be seen how urgent will be the need for these European political competences, and how great the chance will be to achieve success by this method.

Similarly, the antithesis “Little Europe” or “Great Europe” seems to me to have been very much exaggerated in the discussion. It seems to me that the mistake in viewing this matter is that it is supposed that there is only one single, and therefore an exclusive, form of organisation for the realisation of the European Community. Reality, however, will in all probability look quite different, even if European efforts proceed along the most favourable lines.

I, too, believe that the participation of all European countries in the permanent political organisation of Europe, which is to be all-comprehensive as far as possible, should be the supreme and ultimate goal of our efforts. But I believe, too, that this aim is quite compatible with the existence of certain closer connections, of smaller circles within a Greater Europe. There will be certain communities I imagine, that will combine in a particularly intensive and compact manner, namely those States which now already are prepared to surrender part of their sovereignty to a Community formed between them.

That, after all, is the basic idea of the Schuman Plan and of the plan for a European Defence Community. But none of these Organisations has ever been considered as an exclusive organisation by either ourselves or

the other Governments with whom we discussed these matters. We shall never cease to affirm, on the contrary, that these communities remain open to all the other European States, and that we also regard it as possible and desirable that States not wanting to become members of these communities in the full sense of the word should form a somewhat looser association.

Yet another form of expanding a limited circle of communities, particularly closely linked together, is imaginable and has already been developed. An example of this is the fact that the European Defence Community as such belongs to the Atlantic Community. In this case, the smaller Community is taken up into the bigger one as a member, and in this way an organic relationship is established between the Member States of the narrower and those of the wider Community.

I make this observation particularly having in mind the United Kingdom, which has declared that its participation in supranational organisations is impossible for certain political reasons. I must say here again what I have said repeatedly in other places: that we most earnestly desire the participation of Great Britain in some way or another in the European Organisations. We cannot afford to do without — nor do we wish to — the political power and the political talent of Great Britain in building up Europe. We are only too conscious that the historic links between Great Britain and Europe, its cultural, economic and political connections with European destinies are too strong for us to be content with Great Britain not taking part in European developments in the most far-reaching manner of which it is capable.

For this reason, the support given by Great Britain to the Schuman Plan and to the European Defence Community, which has been formally expressed in the Washington Declaration and recently repeated by the new British Government in the British Parliament, is of particular value as an important encouragement of our policy. But there is not only the way of full membership of the most closely-linked up communities which we want to create, to make the desired participation of Great Britain possible. The association with these communities is possible; there is likewise the possibility of the integration of the small communities in the bigger ones; there is co-operation within the Organisation for European Economic Co-operation; there is collaboration within the Council of Europe, to mention only the most important possibilities. I therefore do not believe that the fact that Great Britain at present refuses to become a full member in those more closely connected communities should be a reason for us not to go ahead establishing these communities. On the contrary, British practical sense, which is one of the greatest values that Great Britain can contribute to the shaping of the destiny of Europe, is sure to find ways and means quickly to open up practical possibilities of co-operation, once European realities have been created.

After these preliminary remarks it will not be difficult for you to appreciate the fundamental attitude of the Federal Government in questions of European policy. Our European policy is positive, active, and concrete.

It is *positive*. The whole German nation — with the exception of a tiny minority — acknowledges the values of Europe — and also is desirous that the unity of Europe should find its expression in some political form. Bitter and perilous experience has taught our people that all the forces available to sustain, develop and defend the civilisation of the West must be exerted if this civilisation is to survive. We are also profoundly conscious of the fact that the unity of Europe over wide areas of the social life of the participating nations, and not only in the sphere of civilisation, has for long been a reality. This fact finds more than symbolic expression in the Convention on Human Rights elaborated not so long ago under the auspices of the Council of Europe, and which has been adopted by the various Governments. The necessity of integration in the economic field is not less obvious.

In the German Bundestag at Bonn some months ago, in a splendid speech summing up the situation, which has left a deep and lasting impression in Germany, the President of this Assembly gave the reasons for combining the economic forces of Europe.

He pointed out that during the last decades, Europe's share in the economic overall production of the world and the productivity of Europe has decreased so much that since about the end of the First World War this Europe of ours has been kept alive economically only by virtue of the magnanimous assistance given by the United States of America. The Marshall Plan, he rightly asserted, is only a new garment in which this old

fact is clothed. This dependence of the European economy on subsidies galore from the New World, can be eliminated only if Europe decides to combine its markets to comprise large areas and to adopt an economic policy similar to that which is being tried in exemplary fashion in the case of the basic industries in the Schuman Plan. Only in this way can an economic area be created which is of a size that makes an economic policy possible, governed by modern, rational and, indeed, economic principles.

The deliberations providing the reasons for combining the defensive forces are similarly cogent. A unified and efficient organisation will increase the value of the armed forces. Standardisation of equipment will facilitate the rationalising of armaments production — quite independent of the extraordinary political advantages which we may anticipate when the populations of different nations coalesce in a uniform army. These are only examples. They could be increased manifold. Only think of the problems of transport, including air transport, of economic problems, of the problems of electrical energy, of agriculture, of scientific co-operation, and many other questions.

The acceptance of the European idea by Germany has not, however, merely the significance of a formal proclamation or of a non-binding programme. Rather is the Federal Government under specific obligation to pursue a policy in conformity with this acceptance. As it is, the Basic Law of the Federal Republic contains a provision making it possible to transfer sovereign rights to larger communities, and this, at the same time, imposes a task on the Federal Government. The German Bundestag again formally confirmed this basic precept one and a half years ago. Finally, only recently, shortly before the present Session of this Assembly, a resolution was adopted by the Bundestag empowering the German Representatives present in this Assembly to co-operate in a high degree in the endeavours to achieve unification. The question as to what our attitude is in respect of the unification of Europe is, therefore, no longer an open question. The answer to it has been given in the most categorical terms.

The European policy of the Federal Government is, furthermore, I say, *active*. In regard to the European question, the Federal Government is resolved not only not to wait for the initiative of other countries to approach it or to obstruct in any way, but it takes an *active* part in these efforts. I must say I think that it is a mistake if the European question is looked at only from the point of view of some compelling destiny impinging upon us from outside, and if it is not regarded as a matter of creative initiative taken by Europe itself.

It is certainly correct that the conditions imposed upon us from outside, which have made Europe create a modern political organisation covering a wide area, are of vital importance. The external threat to Europe is so great because the potential that threatens to be used against us is for all practical purposes concentrated in one hand. Far be it from us, however, to draw the conclusion from this that the constitution of Europe should have to be drafted along the lines of a uniform State. But between this extreme, and that shown by the present state of Europe, intermediate solutions are possible which will meet the need for unity and at the same time preserve the traditional variety of conditions, customs, and legitimate special interests of the individual States. It is just this which we call a federation. We cannot at this stage provide an exact picture of this federation. We only know that it will be a combination comprising all those parts of national activities which admit of combination, and promote it, but permit the member States to lead their own lives, without restrictions, in other spheres.

It is true, I say, that this menace threatening us from without makes us painfully conscious of the fact that the European combination is a necessity and must be achieved speedily. But, nevertheless, it would be quite wrong to see in this compulsion from outside the only, or even the decisive, motive governing European efforts. The deeper and stronger reasons for these efforts to achieve European unification are *internal* reasons. It is the desire of the peoples of Europe to shape their political destiny jointly in future. They are convinced that the historic hour has come to take the decisive steps. They are aware that the age of nationalism is drawing to its close and that the hour of developments has dawned leading towards new and greater unities. The compulsion imposed upon Europe to unite is therefore not a fate which Europe *suffers*. It is rather a creative impulse which is worthy of the magnitude of European tradition, and therefore it is bound to *survive* beyond the hour of acute peril.

Finally, the European policy of the Federal Government is *concrete*. We observe with great respect and with admiration the magnitude of the conception, the *élan* of the idea and the objective passion with which it is elaborated in order to pose with one single effort, and immediately, the *whole* gigantic problem of the unity of Europe. The fact that such unification is postulated in such an unconditional manner is also in our view the surest symptom of the strength of the European idea. But, as *practical* politicians we believe that we have to be more modest. "Politics is the art of what is possible," it is said. This means that actions must be adapted to the facts as we find them. If the whole is not attainable, policy must translate into reality that part which it is possible to realise and may, for the rest, trust to the power of development. A politician would act wrongly if he failed to do what was good because that which was better was not yet attainable, or who disregarded the time factor by not taking the step which he could take to-day because he believed that he might be able to-morrow to take a bigger step.

To proceed step by step therefore seems to us also the correct maxim in regard to the European question. We have hitherto acted according to this maxim. We did not hesitate to join the Council of Europe at a moment when full membership was still denied us. We have taken part in shaping the Schuman Plan, although we were conscious of the problematic nature of this partial solution, which must needs lead to all kinds of difficulties in regard to the relationship between the unified economic policy in respect of the basic industries and the rest of economic policy that remains national. We have not hesitated to participate in the work of the European Defence Community, although this partial solution is precisely what shows particularly clearly how necessary it is that it should be supplemented politically. And we have adopted the same attitude in respect of all the other plans whether the initiative emanates from the Council of Europe, or came from individual European Governments.

I have already stated that we adopted this attitude not because we prefer a patchwork to an integrated, total solution. We acted rather in this manner, because we believe that this inductive method has the advantage of being nearer to realities — and therefore warrants solutions which are feasible; because, too, we are convinced that, with a necessity which I should almost like to describe as being a law of nature, all these separate solutions tend in the direction of co-ordination, and even of amalgamation. Thus we shall continue to support any and every concrete individual effort, no matter how limited the area of its application may be in any given case.

These are the essential features of our European policy. The Federal Government is resolved to continue along these lines, and it is, indeed, resolved to redouble its efforts in continuing along this road. For — and with this remark, Mr. President, let me conclude this statement — the time at our disposal for putting our programme into effect is not unlimited. Things have come to a point when the peoples impatiently demand tangible results from us. Do we not have to ask ourselves whether we have really always done everything that it has been possible for us to do, whether we have really always first thought of the whole, of our common European interests, whether we have really allowed our individual interests to recede into the background in the way that the spirit of a genuine community requires? We must ask ourselves these questions and we must be especially conscious of the fact that the favourable, the historic, hour, will not return.

Let us summarise all the things characterising the present situation: external compulsions, the degree of maturity of the political discussions, as evidenced, above all, by the documents covering the deliberations of this Assembly, the readiness of the Governments. There can be, for us, then, but one watchword: Let us act! Let us act quickly! Tomorrow it might be too late!