

Circular sent to Portuguese embassies and legations (6 March 1953)


Caption: On 6 March 1953, the Portuguese President, Antonio de Oliveira Salazar, forwards to Portugal's Embassies and Legations a circular in which he sets out Portugal's position as regards European policy.

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Circular sent to Portuguese embassies and legations defining the position to be adopted in European affairs (6 March 1953)

CONFIDENTIAL EUROPEAN FEDERATION POLICY

The creation of a European federation is one of the dominant ideas in politics today. The Portuguese Government has therefore given careful consideration to the problems that this raises and to the decisions already taken in this respect.

Since this issue continues to be highly topical, we must set out our position in relation to it.

Our view is as follows:

‘Because of its simplistic attitude and superficial opinions, the United States does not see any political solution for Europe other than unity by means of federation; France, which seems to us to be a country that is tired of war and which appears to view full independence as a heavy burden, is adopting the idea as the easiest way of avoiding unilateral and, in the future, potentially hostile German rearmament; the nations forming a group around France seem to be convinced, although for various reasons, that this is the best way to protect Europe, and perhaps the only way to ensure American support, whether in the form of military might or dollars.

In essence, there are only two realities — an American ideology and a French policy. Possibilities for bringing the idea to fruition, the political or moral environment, the absolute necessity to implement it in order to resolve European economic or political problems — these are all secondary issues, yet they would be the essential factors to be borne in mind.

When I refer above to an American ideology, I should perhaps have said more correctly a party and indeed a government party idea. When I refer to a French policy, I am trying to describe the (albeit not very enthusiastic) adherence of some French politicians, because France, while anxious to ensure that it does not have to fight, also wants to avoid being ruled by others. When I allude to the fear of losing American aid, I think that such fear is groundless, because Europe is as necessary to America as the latter is to the survival of European freedom. And it is on such fragile foundations that a European federation would be constructed.

While there is no denying that it is logically possible to federate Europe, there are, in my opinion, only two viable ways to do so — an act of force by a federator, or a slow evolution that might take centuries. The first, however, does not exist: if Russia could, perhaps it would do so in the Danube countries under its protection; had Hitler won the war, he might have obliged Europe to federate under German hegemony; and no one wants to wait for the fruits and procrastination of evolution.

The economic and political situation and the difficulties of the problems to be resolved by agreement exceed the capabilities of men and of negotiations between states. If there is a winner, it imposes the victory, and with the power of that victory it may not resolve the problems but it may suppress them. Abandonment of land, organising or concentrating industries, population displacement, economic imbalances, loss of interest and capital — it would impose all of this, creating different constraints on the life of the subject nations. More, perhaps even much more than this was seen during and after the last war. Endless suffering, profound changes in ways of living and thinking, but life begins again on new foundations, and in the (very distant) future it may even be better for everyone who was alive at the time.

What a conqueror does in the name of and by dint of force, politicians cannot do, at least from one minute to the next, when faced with important and irreconcilable interests and the people's very strong feelings.

Europe was born in a specific way, and its process of formation stamped its character upon it. While on the one hand its diversity is a source of weakness, it has on the other been a source of universal illumination. This bloc includes nations of such long-standing independence that invidious nationalism is almost confused with the sentiment or instinct of ownership and non-transferable ownership (Portuguese case —

Constitution, Article 2). In these circumstances it is doubtful whether a European state could be established by agreements or treaties. Or rather, governments may agree to it, but the people will find it very difficult to accept.

This point is very important because, while federation is coveted in order to increase and reinforce European defence capacity, we must not lose sight of the fact that such a European state will be devoid of true cohesion and effective force for a very long time. The best moment for Russia to attack, if Russia were thinking of attacking the West, would be precisely at the time of the establishment of the European federal state.

There are two aspects of particular interest to some states — the political system and the overseas colonies or dominions.

There seems to me to be no doubt that this federation, which would initially be formed by three large republics and three small monarchies, would or will be established under Republican auspices. The power represented by Germany, France and Italy and the difficulty of choosing a ruling house would not allow any another solution, and the United States would not understand anything else. The idea of the two systems coexisting must also be set aside. Belgium, Holland and Luxembourg would therefore have to discard their institutions. In Belgium, however, the monarchy is the factor that integrates different peoples in which strong elements of differentiation exist, such as language, religion and even political views. This means that, by force of events, Belgium will be unable to survive, even as a province or secondary state of the federation, since it will soon have to dissolve in the whole.

I have some doubts as to whether the colonial issue might not be at the root of some of this enthusiasm to federate. There are sectors which exhibit an immediate concern (and a concern which is more profound than that of ensuring more effective defence) to open up the overseas territories to the peoples and trade of some European states.

Germany and Italy were dispossessed, one in the First World War, the other in the Second, of all their colonial dominions. In Europe, not even possibilities of more amputations within the territory of either nation can be envisaged: they have nothing to lose. According to the facts, and because of the impossibility of doing otherwise, the overseas dominions of the federated states will be integrated into the federation. The latter will then inherit the Belgian, Dutch and French colonies for collective benefit. In such an agreement, the ones that have nothing to lose are the ones that have everything to gain. Belgium and France, however, certainly do not belong to that group.

In conclusion and in summary, it therefore seems to me that:

In its intended form, the European federation will create more problems than it solves, and it does not embody the strengthening of defence capability that is required for the immediate future; it will, on the contrary, be a fragile political edifice for some time. In economic terms, setting aside the sacrifices and suffering to be imposed upon present generations, the federation will appear as a vast area in which the various production sectors can be more easily rationalised, and it will have overseas territories that will expand its economic base. Monarchies will be proscribed. As the strongest element in terms of its size, its population, its qualities and its industriousness as a whole, it will be Germany that will effectively have to lead the federation towards all its aims. Fighting the war was therefore perhaps not worth the effort.

If it were to join the federation, could not Britain change the elements of the problem to some extent, and the conclusions set out above?

The invitations to Britain to take further its cooperation with the present embryo of the European federation and then with the federation itself seem to ignore the reality of the British political system. Because we are

similar in some respects, we Portuguese perhaps have a better understanding of the impossibility arising out of a structure such as Britain, which is more a product of a succession of historical events than the vision of men in government.

I do not know whether it is by awareness or by instinct that Britain has been against joining the European Defence Community, although it assures it full support and cooperation — and quite rightly so, to my mind. Britain is not just one state; it is an association of states, which as a whole represent more than the Europe to be federated. In Europe it is only the head of that Commonwealth; its members are spread throughout the world. While in the insular European territory the British state can already be said to function like a federal state to some extent, this is not quite the case globally, as it resembles a free association of states and territories with the same head of state. How could Britain join a European federation: only with its head, or with the British Commonwealth? The question is enough to render an answer impossible. If Britain were to commit itself totally to Europe in such a way that it was unable to lead and strengthen the defence of the Commonwealth, the latter would be likely to collapse: the various states, deprived of the point of support that they wish Britain to be, would turn to other sources of attraction (as they already unfortunately do), and through various conventions and agreements would eventually destroy the links that unite them at present. It seems senseless to contribute towards the disappearance or the risk of disappearance of a unit which is so complex but which has such genuine value precisely when, because of the weakness of states considered individually, the formation of other large units is being promoted or it is at least felt that such large units will simplify the world's problems.

I should add that, irrespective of the old alliance and considering only the play of the global forces being formed, we are happy with the existence of an independent Britain and the British Commonwealth, if they can sustain themselves — their complex empirical structure challenges the harmony and logic of systematic constructions — but only if Britain can continue to be a balancing factor between the United States of America and a European federation in which Germany is the dominant element.

In conclusion:

We are facing an impossible situation, and we must therefore move towards the European federation without Britain as a member, although it will be an ally. The Britain that can give everything to Europe in the event of war cannot undertake to give it everything in peace time.

If I may interpret the feeling of the Portuguese nation, I have to say that its love of independence and of its overseas territories is so entrenched, as an important and essential part of its history, that the idea of federation to the detriment of both is absolutely abhorrent to it. We must furthermore be aware that the overseas territories have always been of more interest to it than continental Europe: Portugal has rarely taken part in its disagreements, and whenever it has done so it has been to the detriment of other higher interests. Overseas expansion — discovering, evangelising, building nations overseas such as Brazil — is the most striking feature of its history and is plainly its vocation. If as part of the Atlantic Alliance we undertake to help the other nations of Europe with all our forces in the event of an attack by Russian imperialism, it is because there is a clear understanding that such imperialism brings with it the destructive elements of our own reason for being. In other words, avoiding the attack through organisation or defeating it by force is a necessary condition for pursuing our mission in the world. Besides this, however — what is in essence the peace, freedom, character and spirit of the Christian civilisation of Europe — in political terms Europe has nothing more of substantial interest to us: we are more interested in Angola and Mozambique, even in Brazil, which has been an independent nation for over a century but which was part of us for three centuries. Our Atlantic outlook therefore imposes limits on us as regards European cooperation, when such cooperation embodies the destruction of what we are and our integration into what we are not interested in being.

Fortunately, the Pyrenees are such a geographically significant feature that, rather than allowing the peninsula to be absorbed or decisively influenced by the weight of the new organisation, they allow it to

wait and see. And Spain is a nation with such links to the nations that it created in Central and South America that I am certain it sees a brighter future in a Hispano-America relationship than in the European federation. If the federation does come into being, and if, as seems likely, the policy of the large blocs continues to prevail, the possibility may be envisaged of the links being strengthened between Portugal and Brazil and Spain, and between Spain and the republics of Central and South America. In this way, a large Iberian–American bloc, alongside the British Commonwealth, and even without attaining its level of constitutional structure, would be a very important political factor because of its population, its potential or existing wealth and its Western culture. This is a possibility that would offer the advantage of not allowing us to become distant — either from ourselves or from others — from what is most sacred in our upbringing and enshrined in our history.

In these circumstances, the question of the federation that it is intended to create in Central and Western Europe is only of interest to us to the dual extent that it may reduce European defence capacity and, with the aim of expanding beyond its original boundaries, may hinder us or prevent us from following the path that we have chosen. This would not occur until very much later, however. We have therefore refrained from taking part in public discussions on the matter, and we have also refrained from allying with certain bodies, such as the Strasbourg-based Council of Europe and other institutions inspired by the same way of thinking. This is because, at the same time as we are witnessing efforts being made towards the direct creation of a federal state, we note that various bodies, as if they did not believe in it, are proposing to engage in federalism in stages or by sectors of activity, from the steel industry to agriculture and from defence to education and health. If such an approach, despite what has been said, could resolve Europe's problems, particularly those between France and Germany, it would be a matter of pure delight for us, just as we delight in the fact that our sacrifice would therefore not be necessary.

I have addressed the issue of a federation rather than a confederation, which appears to be a lesser evil, not only because the idea of confederation now seems to me to be outdated in some areas but also because it is a slippery slope that will soon and ultimately lead to federation, as tends to happen through the march of time towards the unitary state.

These matters are of the utmost gravity and delicacy, and we cannot hope to exert any influence at all on the development of the ideas and events that are unfolding so rapidly; but we must not avoid saying quite sincerely what we think about any of them.

At least, our representatives must be aware of the reasons underlying their government's attitudes.

6 March 1953

(a) Oliveira Salazar'

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