Julian Amery, The Eden Plan

Caption: In 1952, Julian Amery, a Conservative MP and British delegate to the Consultative Assembly of the Council of Europe, summarises the origins and objectives of the Eden Plan designed to confer on the Council of Europe political authority over the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) and over the European Defence Community (EDC).

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The Eden Plan

by Julian Amery

Conservative Member of the House of Commons
British Representative in the Consultative Assembly of the Council of Europe in 1951 and 1952

From the outset, British Conservatives were at the forefront of the movement for unification in Europe. Mr Churchill's speech in Zurich in 1946 set the tone. It was he and his colleagues who were responsible for the establishment of the European Movement. They played a leading role by paving the way for the Hague Congress. In the Consultative Assembly in Strasbourg they were involved in all the major initiatives, and it was Mr Churchill himself who first proposed the creation of a European army. Despite all this, since these same Conservatives have taken over in government, they have often given the impression of seeking to delay, or indeed impede, the process of European unity for which they once campaigned so ardently. What are the roots of this apparent contradiction, and how can it be resolved?

The Conservative Party leaders made it clear right from the start that Britain could not, in their view, be part of a European federation. The united Europe that they sought to achieve was not a federation but rather a confederation, or union of sovereign states, working together according to what might be termed Commonwealth principles. What they envisaged was the following: frequent intergovernmental consultations via interministerial committees; a process whereby public opinion could be formed at European level through the Consultative Assembly; closer economic cooperation between the sterling area and the European currencies; and the introduction of a comprehensive system of preferential tariffs. They also accepted the idea of cooperation via specialised intermediary authorities and the concept of a European army, provided that control remained in the hands of the international governments as it does with the OEEC and NATO. Had they been in power and able to put their ideas into practice, this type of confederation or commonwealth might well have existed by now. In the event, Mr Attlee and his colleagues were not prepared to go along with the kind of European unity envisaged by the Conservatives. They refused to set a course for Europe, and because nature abhors a vacuum others were obliged to do it in their place. To its great credit, the French Government shouldered this heavy responsibility even though France was only just getting back onto its feet after the ravages of war. It brought forward the Schuman Plan for coal and steel and the Pleven Plan for European defence.

The Labour Government refused to take part in discussion of the plans, and as a result the particular interests of the UK could not be taken into account.

Negotiations on the Schuman and Pleven Plans were well advanced when the Conservative Party returned to power in October 1951, but the new Government was not prepared to accept them as they stood. It could not ask that two years of talks be set aside and that the six governments concerned reopen the negotiations purely in the hope of securing British participation. To have done so would have created an unacceptable delay and might have scuppered the process. The British Government therefore had to accept the fact that a section of Europe was ready to follow a federalist, or semi-federalist, policy while other countries, including the UK, were not. The split into federalists and functionalists was already a *fait accompli*. In these circumstances the British concept of a European Commonwealth, which the UK could have joined, was no longer feasible. That being so, the Conservative leaders opted for the best possible solution: an arrangement whereby the UK and the other countries not ready to join a federation could be associated with the six powers of the continental Communities and their various institutions — and they made their intentions in this regard plain from the outset. Sir David Maxwell Fyfe announced in Strasbourg in November 1951 that the British Government had decided to appoint an ambassador to the High Authority of the Coal and Steel Community in order to conduct negotiations with it. In relation to the European army, Mr Eden undertook to give the Defence Community a guarantee and stated that he was prepared to envisage cooperation on technical matters. On 5 February he delivered a speech in the House of Commons that was reported right across the world.

However, an associative arrangement between the continental federation on the one hand and the UK and

Scandinavia on the other could not be effective so long as it was restricted to purely technical matters. It was therefore important to find a means of raising the arrangement to ministerial and parliamentary level, and such is the aim of the Eden Plan. The plan as it stands is a logical extension of the British Conservatives' initial approach to European unity.

What the British Minister for Foreign Affairs has proposed is that the six member powers of the European Coal and Steel Community and the European Defence Community should develop these and other specialised institutions under the umbrella of the Council of Europe in Strasbourg. They would refer to the Council of Europe as much as possible, in relation to both current issues and matters that might arise in the future. In this way those Council of Europe member nations not part of the continental Communities would nonetheless be placed in close contact with them. Under such an associative arrangement the continental Communities on the one hand and the UK and Scandinavia on the other could exchange and harmonise their plans, and the various countries could remain in contact with one another on an ongoing basis.

Precise details of the type of association proposed in the Eden Plan remain to be fixed. It is conceivable, for example, that the Committee of Ministers for European Defence might meet in Strasbourg as a sub-committee of the main Council of Europe Committee of Ministers. Obviously only the representatives of the countries participating in the Defence Community would be entitled to direct the work of the sub-committee and to vote there. The Ministers from the other countries could, however, if they so wished, take part in the committee meetings as observers, with the right to speak but not to vote. Their colleagues within the continental Communities would thus have a continuing insight into their special interests and particular points of view.

Progress towards European unity has been complicated from the start by a natural reluctance on the part of France to recognise any agreement with Germany to which the UK is not also a signatory. This was the main obstacle to the establishment of the European Defence Community. Indeed, there is no guarantee that the French Parliament will be persuaded to accept a European Defence Community with which the UK is not effectively associated. The technical details of such an association are a matter for the General Staffs but it is up to the Consultative Assembly to explore how it might develop at a political level. Let us hope that, by working along the lines proposed in the Eden Plan, the Assembly will turn the Council of Europe into a practical tool for reconciling the British point of view with that of the continental Communities, and that, in so doing, it will save the united Europe from the many perils that it faces.