

Dirk Stikker, Men of Responsibility

Caption: In his memoirs, Dirk Stikker, Netherlands Foreign Minister from 1948 to 1952, describes how, despite the signing of the Treaty establishing the European Defence Community, there was no real will to create a supranational structure for defence policy.

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On the signing of the EDC Treaty I had few illusions about the real will of the members to build a supranational structure and to work for federation. I still had vividly in my memory our last, and very disappointing, meeting in 1951 on the Coal and Steel Community. For many months we had based our discussion on high principles of supranationalism and the exclusion of selfish, purely nationalistic interests. The last meeting, held in the Quai d'Orsay, had before it only decisions to be reached on the composition of the different institutions we had agreed to establish, and on the seat of the Community's headquarters. The meeting began at nine in the morning. When we came to the question of the seat, the fight began. Questions of national prestige began to rise in importance. Proposals began to wander ever farther afield. No one was prepared to give way on any point before he had obtained another advantage. Europe was lost sight of. I recall Monnet saying to Schuman, during one of the breaks, apropos of one proposal, "When you accept that proposition you have killed Europe." Adenauer commented, "You are quite right, Monnet." As the confusion grew, the discussion dragged on to midnight. At that point I rose in my place, ostensibly in wrath, told my colleagues in no uncertain terms what I thought of their high supranational principles, declared that I renounced any special position for the Netherlands and walked out. As I went through the door, I glanced back. Adenauer, imperturbable, was watching my departure. Before closing the door — as Adenauer always likes to remind me — I winked at him. In a gesture scarcely visible on his impassive face, he winked back. After some hours I returned, but it was still four o'clock before every national desire was satisfied. (After innumerable peregrinations the seat went — on, as I insisted and it was agreed, a purely temporary basis — to Luxemburg. And there it stayed, temporarily, until 1965 and its merger in Brussels with the other supranational executive authorities.)

If this experience were to be repeated in the EDC, with its far-reaching and vastly more complex problems, NATO would be in very serious difficulties.

Looking back now at these eighteen months of negotiations on the EDC, which I unintentionally launched with my improvised appeal in New York in September, 1950, for a forward strategy, several reflections come to mind.

When, hesitating between fear and self-confidence, Schuman, Monnet and Plevin came up with the brilliant conception of the EDC, they were each of them convinced that only a united Europe could dissipate their fears. They had, however, miscalculated, and did not foresee that precisely in the field of defense nationalistic passions would result in bringing together a strange combination of Gaullists, Communists, neutralists, anti-Germans, anti-Europeans and all-out supporters of an Atlantic policy, which would in the end prove decisively hostile.

When the "Schuman period" came to an end in 1952, and his policy was taken over by men of lesser stature, the future could be foreseen. Schuman was a great and wise man. Always courteous and frank, he was the perfect chairman for the Paris Conference — but he was not sufficiently aware of the psychological effects of his ideas on French public opinion, and thus on the National Assembly.

Adenauer was, I think, at his best during that period. He showed great dignity, imperturbability and patience. When France surprised him with awkward decisions or maneuvers, such as the sudden appointment, while no solution for the Saar had yet been agreed upon, of a French Ambassador to the Saar, he remained a staunch Francophile. For Germany he wanted political rehabilitation. He sought to dispel the atmosphere of distrust which was embodied in de Gaulle's Franco-Soviet Treaty, the Dunkirk Treaty and the original Brussels Pact. His moderation brought him well-deserved results in 1954, when Germany finally obtained full rehabilitation.

De Gasperi was a much more impatient man. Once he had fully accepted Europeanism as the solution both for Italy and for Europe, he pressed for it with great vigor. (I always enjoyed the story of De Gasperi's first call on Schuman, in Paris. As the Italian who had been, just after the First World War, a member of the

Austrian Parliament, struggled along in his heavily accented French, the Alsatian, educated in Imperial Germany, spoke to him in German. “Shall we try it in the mother tongue?” asked Schuman.)

Spaak’s role at that time had been taken over by van Zeeland. From Luxemburg, the Foreign Minister, Bech, whose long experience was unrivaled, helped us over many a hurdle.

For myself, I watched carefully to be sure that the ideals and illusions — which were so much in the air and permeated all our viewpoints — were translated into solid, realistic, legal language. My doubts about EDC as the best answer to the problem of strengthening NATO were unaltered. My main fear was that we were trying to do the impossible, and foreign policy is still *l’art du possible*.

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