

'Eurocorps: a welcome catalyst' from La Libre Belgique (5 April 1993)

Caption: On 5 April 1993, the conservative daily newspaper La Libre Belgique discusses the issues of European defence as the Eurocorps experiment gets under way.

Source: La Libre Belgique. 05.04.1993, n° 95; 112e année. Bruxelles: Edition de la Libre Belgique S.A. "L'Eurocorps: la chance d'un catalyseur", auteur:Cremer, Pierre , p. 1; 4.

Copyright: (c) Translation CVCE.EU by UNI.LU

All rights of reproduction, of public communication, of adaptation, of distribution or of dissemination via Internet, internal network or any other means are strictly reserved in all countries.

Consult the legal notice and the terms and conditions of use regarding this site.

URL:

http://www.cvce.eu/obj/eurocorps_a_welcome_catalyst_from_la_libre_belgique_5_april_1993-en-e506bb21-6431-4523-a25a-1e1ba4570107.html



Last updated: 05/07/2016

Eurocorps: a welcome catalyst

By Pierre Cremer

It is not because the aftermath of Maastricht is becoming a long period of deflated enthusiasm that Europe can give up on its destiny, which lies in political union. On the rich keyboard of Europe's organ it needs to change the register of its long symphony as new opportunities arise, since, as paradoxical as it might seem, just when Europe's economies are losing steam and the European political ideal appears to be waning, there is a greater need than ever for an integrated European defence instrument.

Three facts underpin this thought: sudden crises or potential crises such as Yugoslavia, sometimes bordering so closely on the European Community (soon to be the 'European Union'); the general dropping of our guard after the collapse of the Warsaw Pact; the need, both economic and military, for an effective defence mechanism at the European level of a kind that our states are incapable of supplying individually. Sooner or later Europe will have to have its own secular arm, one that is dissuasive, in other words strong enough to avoid war while being able to control potential conflicts. To paraphrase Clausewitz, in the future Europe will be the continuation of the nation-state but with other means. It will therefore need a sword.

But don't we already have the means to guarantee our own security and assume our own defence if necessary?

Until now, NATO, with its well-oiled wheels, was a convincing deterrent with unequalled and effective structures. It still has one great weakness: the absence of combined logistics, which renders the interoperability of units difficult. But while it serves the entire West, does it adequately serve Europe and Europe's own plans? In the long term, NATO's basis will be a political one, that of European and US transatlantic mutual interest. In military terms, the Allies, like all allies anywhere, will remain what they are: guests in a boarding house. So is Western European Union (WEU) the dreamed-of instrument, dedicated to the defence and security of the future Europe? One would like to think so, but only if — let's be frank — we ignore the visceral feelings of one of its members, Great Britain. In reality, we find it hard to envisage Albion merging its military capability with any purely European military structure, at least not yet. It will take decades for it to deign to forget the past glories of its Empire and the venerated tradition of its regiments and its navy. It is the economic Europe, the Europe of traders, that interests London, and not at all that of political and military union, where it would no longer be the 'holder of the balance' in relation to the continent.

This is why we believe that we need to start with countries on the continent that already want to integrate their forces, and progressively build a military instrument serving the future European Union. Yes, we favour a staged approach to European defence. Unlike economic and monetary spheres in which integration efforts have to be synchronised, an army can be built without everyone being involved from the start. What matters is establishing a 'hard core' playing the role of a catalyst. This being the case, the Franco-German 'Eurocorps' seems to us to be the way to go. Typically continental and bringing together, as in the past, some or all of the six first European Community members, this Corps should usefully serve as a laboratory for a fully-fledged European army. Some could easily object to the cost of this integration or the political intentions of its founders. Eventually, though, military integration must in any case bring benefits, with the standardisation of equipment manufacture and logistical infrastructure, the rationalisation of training and the deployment of units, etc. Also, such a Eurocorps as part of and in addition to NATO forces, as planned, can only serve to strengthen the latter, in terms of an integration of units down to the lowest ranks. This would provide welcome, new strength at the exact moment when we are seeing a noted decline in America's contribution to Europe's defence.

Finally to those who suspect that the creation of a Eurocorps conceals some desire by France to create a counterweight to a Germany that was becoming far too powerful and was also suspected of wanting to have France return to NATO's military structures, we would be so bold as to reply that they view the new relationships within Europe with the reluctant eye of a nationalism that has since become outmoded and been rejected, both by new generations and by the military class who have long been used to international

cooperation.

Political realism quite rightly rejects any starry-eyed idealism. But it cannot ignore one particularly desirable idea. We know how Belgium is convinced of the timeliness of pushing forward with the military integration of Europe. This is an excellent test pad, and, what's more, one at little cost. So what is the government waiting for before taking a decision? Politics, just like leadership, is first and foremost the art of foresight.

Pierre Cremer