

Letter from Jean Rivière to Georges Bidault (The Hague, 25 April 1947)

Caption: On 25 April 1947, Jean Rivière, French Ambassador to the Netherlands, informs Georges Bidault, French Foreign Minister, of the substance of the debates at the Congress held in the Hague by the Union of European Federalists (UEF) and the main positions adopted by its leaders on the issues involved in European unity.

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Letter from Jean Rivière to Georges Bidault

Telegram No 289

The Hague, 25 April 1947

(Received: 2 May)

My report No 263 (Conference Secretariat), dated 14 April, provided an account of the opening, in Amsterdam, of the Congress of the Union of European Federalists (UEF).

The speeches made by the French representatives at the various sessions were noted. According to Alexandre Marc, Secretary-General of the UEF, the UN was not strong enough to prevent war, hence the need to unite. In Father Pierre Chaillet's view, the Allies talked without proposing any solutions to international problems. No one should be accused of imperialism, and it was vital that an understanding be reached between Eastern and Western Europe. Anne-Marie Trinquier likewise called for wisdom and mutual understanding: 'Peace to men of goodwill,' she concluded. Her speech made a deep impression, commented the Catholic newspaper *Nieuwe Dag*. Robert Aron, Director of the literary review *La Nef*, pointed out that, from a social perspective, Europe should be the centre of the world. Without federalism, he added, there would be only chaos, and war would ensue.

The German question was considered by the conference participants. A solution would only be found, it was claimed, in a federal Germany, itself integrated in a federal Europe; the German people could, through their accession, contribute to peace. However, Europe should not constitute a bloc; it should be equidistant from 'the two blocs', or else risk being 'squashed' between the two superpowers in the conflict that was felt to be imminent.

A British participant, Frances Josephy, made clear that if the UEF did not join forces with Mr Churchill's United Europe Movement, they would nevertheless be very close allies, whilst advocating a federation of independent states rather than a union of countries united by a constitution similar to that of the United States of America.

At the end of the Congress, which lasted three days, the participants adopted two resolutions, copies of which I enclose for your Excellency's information. The first lays down the overall aims of the Union of European Federalists. The second concerns the German question. In particular, it states that: 'The practical organisation of the future of Germany will be possible only within a federated Europe ...' It continues: 'Nothing would be more dangerous or more wrong than to offer the federalist solution (within Germany), as is too often the case, as a punishment inflicted on the vanquished or as an arrangement that is beneficial to the victors.'

It cannot be said that the Dutch press was enthusiastic about the conference.

I noticed, moreover, that as long as the speakers kept to issues of a general nature, they enjoyed great support from the participants. However, once they began discussing practical solutions or addressing sensitive issues, the audience would remain silent. Accordingly, although Dr Schuyt, a Dutch representative and former Editor of *Christofoor* (a publication with a left-wing Catholic tendency, currently banned on the suggestion of the Episcopacy) may have secured full support for the general part of his statement, the deepest reservations were expressed once he got to the heart of the matter. Henri Brugmans received the same kind of response.

Many attendees — several of our compatriots in particular — are said to have complained that the meeting had been poorly organised and that its work was of very little interest. They regretted the futility of the discussions, which were said to be lacking in spontaneity and practical application. Finally, they openly expressed their dissatisfaction at an outcome that they felt was a failure.

In an article published in the *Vrije Volk* on 12 April, Mr Brugmans, former Head of the Information Services for the Presidency of the Netherlands Council of State and President of the UEF, stated the organisation's aims. In substance, he wrote that we are aware that the era of sovereign states in Europe is coming to an end. It is impossible to reach decisions with so many small countries whose borders are so complex. We must therefore seek the establishment of a federalist system. There is no reason, moreover, why we should adopt the system of the Soviet Union, no more than we should that of the United States of America. There may be others to choose from, just as the world is not obliged to choose between Capitalism and Communism. In addition, we must overcome nationalistic tendencies and, from an economic and technical point of view, allow the various countries 'room to breathe'. Finally, the world does not have to be controlled by the two superpowers, and states should not feel obliged to lean towards one or the other. Therefore, it is through the establishment of a group of states wishing to cooperate closely with each other that we will succeed in preventing the emergence of two all-powerful blocs.

I have, moreover, had the opportunity to talk at length with Mr Brugmans, who is a personal friend of mine. He explained to me that he could not agree with the principles espoused by the federalist movement led by Paul van Zeeland. This movement believed, in particular, that efforts currently being undertaken should focus only on the economic aspects of the matter. However, Mr Brugmans is convinced that it is impossible to address an administrative or economic issue without the political aspects immediately coming into play.

In addition, Mr Brugmans renounces the concept behind the plan proposed by Churchill for a federal Europe, since it intentionally provides for the establishment of a Western bloc inevitably opposed to an Eastern bloc. Mr Brugmans recognises that the supporters of Mr Churchill's idea deplore the fact that their federation would take the form of a bloc, yet they believe this to be unavoidable. In Mr Brugmans' view, this sense of being unavoidable is not definitive. In his own remarkably subtle words, he claims that 'A kind of central empire must be established as a buffer between the Soviet Union and the USA to which the Soviets and the Americans could not object, since it would be solidly structured and comprehensive guarantees would be given to the Russians.'

Finally, Mr Brugmans presented me with a rather rough outline of the proposal referred to above: that a German federalist structure could only come about as part of a federalist Europe.

(Europe Directorate)