

ECEC - European Issues - January 1951

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EUROPEAN ISSUES

(A Report of the Ecumenical Commission on European Cooperation^x)

I.

The Present Situation

The peoples of Western Europe are at the moment confronted with a new political situation which demands a complete reorientation of the policy which they have been following for the last five years. The main effort in Western Europe during these years has been directed to economic and social rehabilitation, while at the same time definite attempts were being made to achieve closer European cooperation in order to strengthen the political and economic position of Europe in a world of growing tension between East and West. Economic rehabilitation has succeeded in most countries, thanks to American aid. The idea of European cooperation has met with great response in public opinion and some headway has been made in the attempts at unification, the most interesting of which is embodied in the Schuman Plan. All this work of rehabilitation and political unification was conceived of as a long-term effort, in which full consideration was given to the financial implications and the economic and social repercussions.

In the last few months the pace of history has changed. Europe is now confronted with a growing fear that a show-down between the Western powers and the Soviet Union is imminent, so that we find ourselves in a period of great tension which may lead either to war or in the long run to a modus vivendi. Europe is suddenly aware of its military weakness and is being asked to give high priority to defence. While in the U.S.A. government, congress and public opinion are concentrating on preparations for the emergency and are making great efforts to strengthen their position on a global scale, most of the peoples of Europe are very reluctant to change the priorities in their domestic policies, and to subordinate everything to re-armament. Although there is a growing insight that we are heading for grave political decisions, they have not hitherto taken account of this fact in actual policy. The U.S.A. is aware of the gravity of developments on a world level, but it underrates

^xFootnote. The Ecumenical Commission on European Cooperation is an independent Commission of Christian laymen drawn from various European countries and from different fields of social and political life, who desire to help the churches in the spirit of the ecumenical movement to consider the specific responsibility of Christians with regard to the problems of European cooperation and European unity. This document was drawn up at a meeting on January 13th and 14th, 1951, attended by the following members of the Commission: M. André Philip (France, Chairman), Dr. C.L. Patijn (Holland, Vice-Chairman), Mr. Kenneth Grubb (Britain), Dr. Gustav Heinemann (Germany), Mr. Max Kohnstamm (Holland), M. Pierre Mahillon (Belgium), Professor Mario Rollier (Italy), and Mr. Martin Wight (Britain).

The following members who were not present also recommend the document for serious consideration and further study: M. Jean Rey (Belgium), Professor Ingvar Svennilsson (Sweden), M. Denis de Rougemont (Switzerland), Mr. Eric Fletcher (Britain), Herr Ole Bjorn Kraft (Denmark), Herr Christian S. Oftedal (Norway), Herr Erling Wikborg (Norway), Professor René Courtin (France).

the dilemma in which European countries are placed, as they have at the same time to maintain their economic and social equilibrium and to build up military defence. The European countries, on the other hand, while far better informed than the U.S.A. about the European implications and dangers of the sudden change in the political situation, are too deeply involved in local and domestic problems to take into account the global aspects of the growing tension between East and West.

The sudden necessity for re-armament has profoundly affected political thinking in countries like France and Italy. While governments are prepared to expedite re-armament, and to give priority to the military effort, public opinion in these countries is anxiously wondering whether this will not mean lowering the standard of living. There is a danger that such a lowering cannot be avoided, and that this will play into the hands of political extremists. At the same time a deep mistrust of American military policy and a general fear of becoming the battle-field of a future war contribute to the unwillingness to defend the soil of Europe. This mistrust has been increased in France especially by the American proposal for German re-armament, by the Taft and Hoover declarations suggesting a withdrawal from Europe, and by the new negotiations with Spain.

For all these reasons the idea of neutrality finds today a great deal of popular support, although many people are aware that for Europe to be neutral and independent in the modern world implies some form of political and military unification. But how long will this take? There is widespread frustration and pessimism resulting from the conviction that we no longer have time to build up a strong neutrality on a European scale, that we have to re-arm within national frameworks which are out of date, that therefore, while we have no other choice than to build up some military strength, it will not be worth the sacrifices which will have to be made in the economic and social sphere. Others believe that re-armament, even under these unfavourable conditions, is the only way to attain a lasting agreement with the Soviet Union, since such an agreement can only be expected on a basis of some balance of strength. Still others believe that the only possible answer is a desperate attempt to achieve immediate European union, since re-armament on a national basis would lead to social disturbance and political unrest.

In Germany the plan for re-armament has created strong tension between the political parties, and between various segments of public opinion. Here also the hope of maintaining a neutral position between East and West has emerged, especially since the government of Eastern Germany has propagated the idea of a unified and disarmed Germany. This idea of the unification of Germany without re-armament can obviously arouse tremendous popular response. If German public opinion were confronted with the choice between German unification and neutrality on the one hand and European unification on the other, the West German government would be placed in an extremely delicate position.

A refusal by the Western powers to accept German unification on such terms would have severe repercussions on popular opinion, not only in Germany but also in the rest of Europe, especially in France.

The Western world would be blamed for having prevented the unification of Germany and having maintained the Iron Curtain. At the same time it is clear that a federal German government at the head of a neutral unified Germany would have an extremely difficult task and could be attacked from within by various types of extremist elements. Such a German state might become a new source of trouble and of future clashes between East and West.

So far the idea of the political unification of Europe has been a long-term proposition. Today, however, Europe is confronted with urgent tasks which can be fulfilled only in a really unified Europe such as does not exist and may not exist for a long time. At the same time the new discussion on the future of Germany may upset all the calculations concerning European unification which had counted on Western Germany as part of the European unit. Thus it is not clear whether in a unified, neutral Germany, the industry of the Ruhr would be incorporated in the Schuman Plan. Also an European army would then have to be formed of forces from countries other than Germany and would have to be based on the Rhine. Moreover Great Britain has in no way committed herself to any form of European unity. And the relation between the Continent of Europe and the United Kingdom is still far from clear.

It is, therefore, certain that the next few months will bring difficulties and tense discussions about the merits and implications of a united Europe. Looking at the situation as a whole, one must admit that many calculations have been upset, many hopes dashed and many existing schemes overthrown. But now and urgent tasks are ahead. The peoples of Europe will be under a great strain, and it will be difficult for public opinion to maintain its sense of proportion and to act responsibly.

II.

The Arguments for European Unity

In view of this situation the question ought to be asked, whether European cooperation would be of any help in the solving of today's problems. We believe that this is indeed the case.

In the first place many people on the European Continent have lost confidence in the national states. The creation of a European political community would hold out new hope to them. It would, to a large extent, do away with that sense of frustration, of despair, of not being subjects but objects of international circumstances, which is one of the main causes of Europe's weakness.

Secondly, only an economically integrated Europe will be strong enough to deal with the economic problems of our time, because only mass production can fulfil the promise of greater well-being which is held out by modern technology. More serious still, perhaps, is the fact that all attempts to protect man against economic insecurity are doomed to failure in the European states, which have become too small to achieve a responsible society in the economic field. It is very possible that as a result of the political situation, unemployment due to the difficulty of finding a market for goods will not develop in the near future, but such unemployment will reappear as soon as the demand for armaments diminishes.

In the third place, we need a united Europe for reasons of defence. Defence is in no way different from other products of modern techniques. A good and cheap product can only be manufactured by mass production for a large market. Any serious effort at European defence can only be a joint one. A European defence can only be built by expansion of the economy through integration of production and research. Only if our defence effort is achieved without lowering the standard of living of the workers will Europe be able to support it.

Does this mean that integration of Europe would have to include all European nations? It seems to us that this question can only be answered with reference to specific cases. The decision will depend on whether a country, in refusing to participate, seriously weakens the common effort. It is possible, for example, that cooperation between Britain and a Continent in which sovereignties are merged would produce results as favourable as formal integration of the two. But in making its decision a country ought always to be aware of its responsibility towards itself, its neighbours and the community of nations. A nation's decision to participate or not in a unified Europe must, therefore, take into account not only its own interests but the effects of its decisions upon the urgent need for the unification of Europe.

III.

The Challenge to the Churches

This situation represents a challenge to the European Churches. For as has become clear from the foregoing, the question of European unity is not merely a tactical political problem, but at the same time a moral and spiritual issue of decisive importance. If it is true - and we believe it to be true - that no responsible society can be built in European nations unless the area of cooperation is greatly enlarged, then the Churches must take this question very seriously.

They can exert a creative influence and help governments and peoples to face facts, to accept sacrifices and to seek the common weal, instead of selfish and local interests. They can help to build that indispensable foundation of common conviction concerning the place of man in society without which European unity can have no permanent and stable basis. So far the European Churches have done very little to discharge this responsibility. There is today a great deal of cooperation and contact between European Christians, but these new ecumenical relationships have not yet borne fruit in constructive common thinking about the problem of European common life.

What we need in the first place is a fresh ecumenical conversation about the issues on which we do not see eye to eye. During the coming months and years all of us will have to take important decisions with respect to Europe's future. As Christians we seek to base these decisions on the Will of God. But in fact many secular factors affect our actions consciously or unconsciously. We are far more conditioned than we realise by our national outlook, by our privileges and by our prejudices. And the disagreements between us are largely due to our inability to see ourselves as others see us.

One way in which Christians can help each other to arrive at specifically Christian decisions is to ask critical questions of each other and so help each other to distinguish between what is fundamentally Christian and what is thoughtlessly secular in their attitudes. Therefore we urge Christians, in different countries, to consider seriously the following questions which have been found helpful in our international discussion. In order to speak as concretely as possible we address our questions to different nations or groups of nations. But it goes without saying that many questions concern many others besides those to whom they are immediately addressed.

Questions to France, Italy, and other Continental Countries

1. Is not your enthusiasm for European unity a compensation for a loss of hope in your national institutions which sometimes borders on cynicism? Do you sufficiently recognise that a healthy federation must consist of states with a spirit of confidence in their own national institutions?
2. How far can you in France forget your ancient hatred and fear of Germany in responsible action for the defence of Europe, which may include the re-arming of Germany?
3. If you agree that Britain saved Europe in 1940 by not sending her air force to France, have you sufficiently considered how far this shows that Britain may be strategically separate from the Continent, and that this may justify her hesitancy over joining a European union?
4. Are you conscious in France that your European enthusiasm would be vitiated if it were a new form of the pursuit of prestige?
5. In your criticism of America, do you recognise sufficiently the sense of world responsibility of which the U.S.A. is conscious today, and do you appreciate the world vision which is more apparent in public discussions in the United States than in Continental countries?
6. Do you realise that to be in a state of relative powerlessness does not make it impossible to exercise an effective influence on international affairs, as witness the influence of Britain and India on recent Asiatic policy?
7. Do you recognise that the attempt to avoid war at all costs may mean attaching more importance to the prolongation of life than to the causes that make life worth living?

Questions to Germany

1. Are you prepared to contemplate the possibility that the continued division of Germany is your contribution to the peace of Europe and to such unity as may be otherwise practicable?
2. Is the fear of finding yourselves in opposition to your fellows in Eastern Germany inspired by a genuine sense of responsibility or by the assumption that the unity of Germany is almost a divine ordinance?
3. Is there not a danger that your attitude to the division of Germany is influenced by a nationalist spirit, which does not sufficiently take into account your international responsibility?

4. Is the proposal for a united and neutralised Germany, under international control, really a realisable conception and a workable solution? Do you realise that in the present circumstances a unified Germany, neutral economically, would prevent the further unification of Europe?

5. Will you still favour European unity if you see that your own rehabilitation can be achieved by German effort alone?

6. Are the German people sufficiently conscious that the German problem is part of that great complex of problems which weigh heavily upon the life of many peoples and that it is therefore impossible to isolate the German problem or to solve it by itself?

Questions to Britain

1. Are you in Britain aware of the exceptional privilege you have had, compared with the Continent, in being spared military and political catastrophe?

2. Is the support you are giving to the effort to create a new form of political and economic organisation in Europe substantial enough, in view of this privilege? Are you really fulfilling your responsibility by taking a passive attitude instead of showing active concern for European unification?

3. How far does the British attitude towards European affairs depend upon the existence of the Channel? Are you certain that the Channel may not play in another war the rôle played in the last war by the Maginot Line?

4. Are you sure that the argument about the ties to the Commonwealth is sufficiently valid to justify Britain's detachment from Europe? Have you thought out the relation between your responsibility to the Commonwealth and your responsibility to Europe?

5. Are you prepared to explain more clearly whether you want to unite with the Continent of Europe and, if you cannot unite, will you make clear in what way you are prepared to cooperate with the rest of Europe?

6. Are you prepared to fulfil with more responsibility the promise of international leadership which your admirable defence in 1940 gave to the occupied countries of Europe?

7. Are you prepared to take advice from Continental people as willingly and in as good humour as the Americans from non-Americans?

8. Is your experimental approach to external political questions wholly free from out-of-date 19th century imperialism and political liberalism? Are you sure that the traditional method of procedure, of compromise and day-to-day expediency is adequate for the world of today? Does not this make it difficult for you to perceive clear moral principles?

9. Are you aware that exclusive national loyalty belongs to the past, that many people have already put their loyalties on a higher level than the national one, and that democracy has to be brought into being at that level, at least in Continental Europe?

10. Are you sure that you are not too much preoccupied with domestic problems? Does pride in your social achievements make you look with unjustified detachment at the Continent?

Questions to the U.S.A.

1. Are you ready to accept the international responsibilities commensurate with your new rôle as a world power?

Do you accept the fact of your responsibility with regard to Europe? Have you considered the consequences on European public opinion of the repeated suggestion that America may cease to be concerned with the economic and military problems of Western Europe?

2. Are you willing to support the unification of Europe even if it means that such a united Europe will choose its course of action in full independence?

3. Have you realised that most Europeans welcome American pressure exerted for a constructive purpose such as European unity?

4. Is it understood in America that Europe in its poverty must accept some economic planning, and that this does not mean that Europe has lost its belief in freedom or is on the way to Communism?

5. Is it realised in America that resistance against totalitarianism is not merely a military problem or a question of propaganda, but that constructive and imaginative action especially in the spiritual sphere is required to meet the challenge of the situation?

6. Have you realised that for the impoverished countries of Europe the question of maintaining and raising the standard of living is absolutely vital and that re-armament will make some of these countries more vulnerable if it results in a lowered standard of living?

7. Are you aware of the risk which Europeans take by re-arming, namely that their countries may become a battlefield and be destroyed through a scorched-earth policy and atomic warfare?

8. Is it understood that Western German re-armament must be considered for its effect not only on the military situation, but also on European unity and the future of Germany itself?

9. Have you realised the implication of the fact that the United States has not given support to the creation of an integrated European army, and is basing its plans on national armies, and that this may well prove a further obstacle to European unification?

10. Do the Americans realise that there is a great difference between the political situation in Asia and Europe, and that the rise of China is not merely part of Communist tactics, but also reflects the struggle of Asia against a century of Western exploitation?

Questions to European Churches

1. Have the European Churches taken to heart the great lessons of the war years, and especially the lesson that a Church which fearlessly proclaims the Will of God in all realms of life receives the powerful help of the Holy Spirit?

2. Have the European Churches understood that, if the Christian faith "is unable to interpret historic catastrophes, men are overwhelmed by them and perish spiritually in their confusion?"
3. Have the European Churches understood that "judgment begins at the House of God" and that this means today that the Churches are judged for their lack of active evangelistic and practical concern for the masses in their spiritual and social need?
4. Have Christians in other countries taken into consideration the conviction of many Christians in Germany that the judgment of God upon Germany in 1945 implies that Germany should not take up arms as long as rearmament may mean the return of the national-socialist or militaristic spirit?
5. Do the Churches of Western Europe realise that in their concern for European unity they may forget their responsibility to and for the Churches in Eastern Europe, and that those in the West should therefore make a special effort to maintain and intensify all possible spiritual relationships with those in the East?
6. Are the Churches of Western Europe aware of the danger that their nations, in defending themselves against a totalitarian enemy, may weaken and undermine the foundations of democracy?
7. Should not the European Churches themselves give a clearer demonstration of true solidarity by helping each other more substantially in meeting social and spiritual need and especially in meeting the need of the millions of refugees and homeless?
8. Do the European Churches accept their special responsibility for the creation of a common ethos, that is, common convictions concerning the destiny of man and his relation to society, without which European cooperation and unity has no stable foundation?