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Definition of the policy of the Council of Europe in the light of recent developments in the international situation

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1. Need for the debate

To hold a public debate on the international situation in the Consultative Assembly may be difficult and to some extent dangerous. It may give rise to vehement controversy between countries and between parties. Such a debate, difficult as it may be, must, nevertheless, be held, since the Assembly will certainly not enhance its reputation by shirking its responsibilities.

As it has not real powers of its own, the Assembly must, in order to justify its existence, fulfil to the utmost its consultative rôle, and, if the major European problems are not submitted to it for his opinion, it must, within the limits of its competence, itself place them on its agenda.

There is no question but that the important events which have taken place within the past few months have, if not thrown everything once more into the melting-pot, at least slowed up the development of a policy to which the great majority of European countries had given their support. Both the unity of the Western world and the unity of Europe are affected by what has been called the relaxation of international tension. What appeared to be essential only a few months ago is to-day open to discussion. Doubts have arisen. The whole complex and costly process of Western recovery is to some extent compromised.

An honest and thorough review of the whole situation is therefore essential. And it is in the Consultative Assembly that this review can most suitably and satisfactorily be made.

We must have the courage to make it.

2. Soviet Policy

The cause of the recent changes in the world situation is to be found in the new policy adopted by the Soviet Union.

The greater part of the world has, in recent years, lived in fear of a third world war. The Soviet attitude at Berlin and in Korea; its aggressive attitude in the United Nations; its obvious lack of good-will in the search for a reasonable solution to the Austrian and German problems, and its thinly-disguised interference in the internal affairs of a number of countries have all contributed to create an atmosphere of " cold war ".

Certain more conciliatory statements and more friendly gestures which have been made since the death of Stalin, or since the period which coincides with his death, have given hope to the more fearful but have at the same time perturbed the more resolute. The question is rightly asked whether the Soviet Union has genuinely decided to alter its foreign policy and is sincerely seeking an honourable compromise with the West on which a lasting peace may be founded.

The most important aspect of the problem which we are called upon to consider is therefore the question of what are the real aims of the Soviet Union and the means whereby it hopes to achieve them.

It must be recognised fully that it will be extremely difficult to find the answers to the various points that arise. It is always difficult, in matters of international policy, to find clear confirmation of one's assertions, and this is especially true when it is a question examining the policy of a totalitarian country entrenched behind an iron curtain.

Our opinions must therefore inevitably be based on certain tmproven hypotheses and to some extent even on our intuition in seeking to form them. We shall be indulging in guesswork, in some respects, which means that there will be an inevitable margin of error. The effort must, however, be made. Only thus can we hope to work out a long-term policy to which we can adhere and avoid finding ourselves at the mercy of events and circumstances, an easy prey for a determined adversary.

We must therefore seek to understand the chief characteristics of the Soviet Union, and it must first of all be emphasised that the policy of the U. S. S. R represents the sum of a number of different influences, chief among which are a purely Russian tradition, a distorted form of Communism, and the Stalinist technique, all of which together form a highly complicated picture.

This picture has not always been readily understood by our peoples in the West. Many of them seem to have underrated the importance of the Russian revolution.

Stalinist Communism is by no means a political theory of the " extreme Left ", in the sense in which we parliamentarians interpret that expression. Stalinist Communism does not lie to the left of socialism. It claims to represent something more than a mere economic and social doctrine. It is presented as being a now civilisation which has deliberately broken away from the fundamental ideals, the moral precepts and the political principles which go to make up the Western tradition.

All this makes our relations with Stalinist Communism extremely difficult. How can we reach agreement when understanding has become so difficult? How can we understand each other when we have nothing in common, not even a common vocabulary?

This point being fundamental, it is surely not possible to seek peace between the East and the West on the basis of certain principles recognised by both parties or to build a world governed by rules accepted by all, but only on the basis of concrete facts, of which the most important is the balance of power.

Furthermore, the long-term policy of the U. S. S. R. seems to be dominated by the idea that the Western world is inevitably doomed to decay. By exaggerating and distorting the systematic aspects of Marxist theory, Lenin, and later Stalin, arrived at an interpretation of history which points to a final victory of Communism, whatever may be the reactions of the Western world and its efforts to escape its fate.

If this doctrine is accepted as the truth, then clearly it is in the interests of the Soviet Union to wait until the balance of power between itself and its opponents has turned to its own favour before embarking on any decisive action. Why, after all, attack a still powerful enemy when you feel certain that he will one day be weak?

This does not, of course, mean that the Communist world remains inactive while wa -iting what it believes to be this inevitable process of decay. On the contrary, its appointed task is to hasten and precipitate it. That is why the U. S. S. R. fosters difficulties and foments disorder wherever it can do so, so long as it can be sure that its policy will not lead to the outbreak of a third world war which it is not at all sure of winning.

Is this not the explanation of its attitude in Persia, Greece, Berlin and even in Korea?

Does it not also explain its obvious efforts to-day to prevent a union of the West by exploiting the divergences between the United States and Europe and doing all it can to hamper a European union which it rightly regards as providing its adversaries with the means of resolving their present difficulties?

This analysis of some of the directing principles behind the Soviet Union's international policy does not at first sight offer much hope of reaching genuine agreement and it diminishes any illusions we may have as to a real change in Soviet intentions.

One important reservation should, however, be made.

It must be recognised that we know little of the real state of the Soviet economy and of the social development of Russia in the last thirty years. We have perhaps been too ready to believe that totalitarian countries do not evolve. Even in present-day Russia, new classes are developing; there is a slow but steady withdrawal from

the original revolutionary ideas; there are new social needs which must be met; there have been material changes which necessarily affect the view that Soviet leaders take of the world and of the objectives to be obtained, or at least what they conceive to be their most immediate problems.

May it not be that this development, hampered by the personality of Stalin and the despotic power which he wielded, suddenly became apparent as soon as he had disappeared? There is here a series of questions suggested by events, but to which, unfortunately, no final reply can be found which is based on fact.

It would appear that the conclusions to be drawn from this argument may lead us to adopt two entirely different hypotheses.

The first, which is somewhat unlikely, and which is at present not supported by any concrete facts, is that the Soviet Union, rejecting the doctrine and teaching of its leaders, has abandoned its deep-rooted hostility towards the West and has accepted the idea of " coexistence ", not as a temporary compromise for reasons of expancliency, but as a permanent basis of its policy.

The second, which is far more probable, is that the slackening of tension in recent months is merely a change of tactics, due either to the fact that the Russians have come to realise that the trials of strength which took place in Greece, Berlin or Korea, far from weakening the West have encouraged it to organise itself, or to the fact that the U. S. S. R. is obliged for domestic reasons to slow down the efforts required of it (as of all countries) to maintain its all-out rearmament policy, or again to the fact that in order to obtain its first immediate objective-—-a rupture between the United States and Europe and disunion between the European countries themselves— it appears wiser to seduce them one by one rather than threaten them en bloc.

A choice must in any case be made between these two hypotheses, which would lead to the adoption of very different policies, and it must be made unambiguously and without delay.

A Four-Power Conference thus seems essential.

So long as the West remains in the dark about the real intentions of the Soviet Union, its will is likely to be paralysed. Its desire for peace is so great and so wholehearted that certain of its leaders are reluctant to let slip even the smallest opportunity of reaching agreement. The masses, moreover, will only accept a vigorous, costly, and difficult policy if they are convinced that there is no other easier and fundamentally safer way

It now seems probable that this Conference will take place, which is all to the good. The Conference must nevertheless be carefully prepared. The Russians have indicated clearly their hope that the United States, Britain and France will attend as separate and individual countries. Their point of view can readily be understood, but it would on our side be fatal to fall into so obvious a trap.

The unity of the Western world is to-day more necessary than ever since through it, and through it alone, can it be hoped that the balance of world power will be maintained. Without it, it is certain that the Soviet Union will achieve the domination over Europe with all that that implies, including an inevitable increase of tension between the Russians and the Americans and very probably at a later date a third world war.

The Western countries should therefore present a united front at this Conference, but without imposing prior conditions, which the Russians could not accept, and without adopting an intransigent attitude which would wreck all chances of success.

All that is necessary—but it is vital—• is that the Western countries should reach definite agreement beforehand on certain principles and decide upon a line behind which they will not retreat.

It may be asked whether the Conference should deal with all the points at issue, or only with certain specific questions. Logic indicates the first alternative, practical experience the second.

It is clear that all the questions which might arise are to some extent interdependent, and it might appear somewhat arbitrary and unreasonable to try to build peace in Europe while allowing war to continue in Asia in its various forms. It is also clear that it might be dangerous to accept certain compromises in some parts of the world while leaving the Soviet Union a free hand in the other parts.

On the other hand, if everything is to be discussed at once, it is doubtful if practical results can be achieved. Our experience at previous conferences has shown that, even when the agenda was strictly limited, progress was extremely difficult. It is therefore hard to understand how this Conference should be likely to succeed unless careful restrictions are laid down.

What should figure in the agenda? This will depend on which of the hypotheses developed above is to be adopted.

If it were true that the Russians, for one reason or another, were sincerely anxious to reach a fundamental agreement with the West, then the first question to be tackled would be that of disarmament.

It is clear that the solutions adopted for the various problems will vary according to whether the present vast re-armament effort is to be pursued unremittingly or whether, on the contrary, the Governments will revert to the only really wise policy of deciding resolutely to limit their armaments in accordance with the deep-rooted desire of their own peoples. The periodic explosion of atomic bombs is after all hardly the most fitting accompaniment to peace negotiations.

The only form of disarmament worth considering is a process of disarmament which is general, progressive and above all controlled. All efforts in this direction will be futile unless the idea of control is accepted with all its consequences. As it hardly seems likely, however, that the Soviet Union is prepared to accept such a policy, it will be necessary to fix a somewhat less ambitious target and, bearing in mind the delicate nature of the task undertaken, to try to achieve it by less direct methods.

For the moment the agenda of this Conference should be limited to more specific and urgent problems. In this respect the questions of Austria and Germany should take priority over all others. On the other hand, these two problems should not be linked, but be considered separately according to their own peculiar features.

Neither Austria nor Germany can be regarded as objects of barter nor used as compensation for the interests of other Powers.

At first sight,' the Austrian problem would appear easy to resolve. Negotiations have already reached an advanced stage and initially it might seem that the only questions still outstanding were concerned with procedure. Unfortunately, the latest Soviet Notes give little hope of any such speedy solution.

The German problem is quite different, calling as it does for fundamental solutions concerning which there are the widest possible differences of opinion.

An attempt must be made to reduce the various aspects of the problem to some kind of coherent order, and to proceed, by a system of elimination, to indicate clearly, on the one hand, what is wanted, and, on the other hand, what will not be accepted.

The problem of Germany is dominated by the question of that country's unity. So far as the Germans are concerned, re-unification is the most important objective. It is also one of the principal aims of the policies of all free European countries and of that of the United States. Apart from the sentimental and juridical aspects, upon which there is no need to dwell, everyone has understood that a divided Germany would be a permanent source of unrest in the world and a serious obstacle to a stable peace.

That is therefore clear. The question is not : " Should Germany be re-unified? " but : " Should Germany be re-unified, regardless of conditions?" or, indeed : " Should the Russians be paid an exaggerated price for the re-unification of Germany ? " or even : " Should the satisfactory solution of all other problems be sacrificed to the re-unification of Germany? "

To this we should, of course, reply " No ",. and we can find both comfort and encouragement in the fact that a similar reply is made by clear-sighted Germans.

It was Chancellor Adenauer who declared " I want a united Germany, but I do not want it to be isolated " and it was one of our colleagues in the Assembly who used the following particularly happy and striking phrase : " The Russians must not leave the Elbe to-day under such conditions as will allow them to be on the Rhine to-morrow. " The principle of German unity being thus admitted, it remains fur us to gauge and to discuss the conditions in which it can be achieved.

We cannot allow our adversaries to place us on the horns of a dilemma : the re-unification of Germany, or European unity with a mutilated Germany.

To accept that such a choice should be forced on us would at one and the same time be to bow to coercion and to acknowledge our diplomatic and political defeat, even before negotiations had begun.

It must be affirmed, on the contrary, that there is no conflict between the idea of German re-unification and that of European integration; that the two concepts are, indeed, complementary, and, what is more, that they are closely linked together, since both ideas constitute essential factors in a just and lasting peace.

We cannot accept the idea of the neutralisation of Germany, whether a partial and purely military neutralisation or, a fortiori, a total neutralisation. The Russians have never clearly expressed themselves with regard to the concept of neutralisation. (It appears evident, however, that their real aim is to force Germany to

break all links with the West as completely as possible. This position is quite logical, as it is difficult to imagine the Russians accepting that even a de-militarised Germany should continue to be a member of the European Coal and Steel Community and should become a member of the European Political Community, as this would mean Germany's active participation in the entire life of the West, where it would necessarily play a leading rôle.) Such total neutralisation would in the long run inevitably drive Germany into the Communist camp and, by destroying the world balance of power definitively, would most probably be the cause of a third world war.

But we are no less unshakeably hostile to a militarily neutral Germany than we are to a completely neutral Germany.

There is no shadow of doubt that the idea of disarming Germany is well received in certain circles, both in Germany and in the other European countries, and the sentimental reason for this is only too easy to understand.

Such an idea is nonetheless both dangerous and ill-conceived.

All military experts have declared for several years past that the effective defence of Europe without German participation is impossible. It is a question at once of the comparative strength of the Western world and of the U. S. S. R., and of strategic questions, which are, readily understandable even to tyros in military matters.

If Germany refuses to participate, or allows itself to be prevented from participating, in the defence of Europe, how will it be possible to ensure that the necessary but costly military effort in other countries be maintained at a sufficient level, when the authorities themselves declare that even these painfully achieved results are rendered inadequate ipso facto by the absence of a German contribution? How can it be hoped that the United States will accept participation in such defence under these conditions?

The failure or the desertion of Germany must inevitably lead to a general breakup. No military machine can be built up if at the same time the conviction exists that it is inadequate. Responsible statesmen have, moreover, no right to do so. It is impossible to create an army against a background of certain defeat. Can the great and small countries of Europe, and even Germany itself, accept such a situation, such an abdication, such a renunciation?

The solution of a disarmed Germany would no doubt have prevented the events of 1914 and 1939 : but it is entirely unreasonable in a world whose problems have wholly changed in character and where the perils with which we are faced are completely different.

The disarmament of Germany to-day is the classic example of the solution which settles already-resolved problems, but which provides no answer whatsoever to future problems and leaves all Europeans, of whatever species, at the mercy of the same perils.

We must wait and hope that the Germans in their wisdom will refuse such a solution. That is why the future fate of Germany must not be imposed upon it from without but must be left to its own free choice, the choice of a Government democratically elected by the entire German people.

There is, however, nothing to prevent the necessary agreements being made with Western Germany, it being always understood that once Germany is re-unified, the Government of all Germany would remain master of German destinies.

But these considerations are perhaps too general in character, and an attempt must be made to establish a more positive policy around the guiding principles enunciated.

The core of this policy is to be found in the notion that a re-unified Germany, as an integral part of a United Europe, represents for the U. S. S. R. itself a greater factor for peace and security than an isolated Germany living on and for itself, and thus running the risk of a fairly rapid fall into the path of aggressive nationalism because of this very isolation.

All those who know Western Europe are aware that the European community cannot be any other than a peaceful one. The idea of an offensive war, of a war against the U. S. S. R. in order to contest its place in the world, is wholly unreal, not only because Europe is well able to gauge its dangers, but also because the very idea of such a war is profoundly contrary to the whole of its present mentality, feelings and psychology.

Europe asks only to live free from continual menace, and to develop its economic activities and social institutions in peace. It has no idea of conquest or of war.

If the Russians are haunted by certain memories and by the fear of Germany, they will find a serious guarantee against those very dangers which they fear in the integration of that country into an essentially peaceful community. It will be easier for them to conclude a peace with a European Community in which Germany participates than with an isolated Germany, and such a peace is more likely to be lasting.

Pursuing this idea, it would seem that the European Community can offer to the U. S. S. R. not only the moral guarantees already mentioned – which are far from being ineffectual – but also certain more material advantages.

The European Community will and must remain an active member of the Western Community, but it will be infinitely more independent and mistress of its own destiny than is each one of the European countries taken individually at the present time.

In opposing a United Europe, the U. S. S. R. is acting against its own interests for, in their present weakened state, the countries of Europe have no alternative to calling upon the assistance of the United States and allowing the latter to hold a completely dominating position within N.A.T.O.

Whereas a western union should be balanced and made up of partners of equal strength, the present division of Europe makes this impossible.

The existence of a European Community, including Germany, would be a real force in the world and would allow closer economic ties and less strained political relations with the U. S. S. R.

It would be possible to conceive, within the framework of the United Nations Organisation, of multilateral non-aggression pacts between the U. S. S. R., the European Community, the United States and the United Kingdom, to which other States could associate themselves.

Furthermore, although the de-militarisation of frontier zones is no longer of great value under conditions of war such as we know them to-day, its psychological impact is so great that it would be both useful and possible to create a de-militarised zone on each side of the Eastern frontier of the European Community.

Thus the very existence of the European Community would alter some of the fundamental data of the problem of peace, and would permit effective solutions of a completely new kind.

3. Conclusions

A positive policy for Europe at the present juncture must be based on the following principles :

1. We must realise clearly what Russia stands for and what Russia is aiming at, recognising that Russian policy to-day is an admixture of traditional Russian policy, of distorted Marxist theory and of Stalinist practice.
2. We must show firm determination to maintain the unity of the Western world and to incorporate within it a United Europe, which would be mistress of her own destiny.
3. We must propose a quadripartite conference to the U. S. S. R., at which the Austrian and German problems would be the chief items discussed. These two problems would, nevertheless, not be linked with each other.
4. We should affirm that the re-unification of Germany is essential for world peace and that the demilitarisation or complete neutralisation of Germany cannot be accepted.
5. We should acknowledge that it is for Germany to choose its own course, and to that end support free elections in a United Germany, in order to enable the Government resulting from those elections to take its own decisions.
6. We must emphasise strongly that the integration" of Germany in a European Community is the surest guarantee of a lasting pact for Russia, for America and for Europe.
7. We should offer to conclude, within the framework of the United Nations, a multilateral security pact between the U. S. S. R., the United States, the United Kingdom and the European Community, which would be open to the accession of other States.
8. We should propose the creation of a demilitarised zone on each side of the Eastern frontier of the European Community.

Discussion in Committee

The Committee on General Affairs discussed the general lines of this Communication on 14th September, 1953.

It was agreed by the Committee that the Rapporteur present the Communication to the Assembly at the opening of the general discussion of the future policy of the Council of Europe in the light of recent developments in the international situation, and that it thereafter be referred back to the Committee so that the latter might draft a Resolution in the light of the debate in the Assembly.