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Aims and prospects of European policy

Report

Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy

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1. PART I

1.1. Aims and Prospects of European Policy

The very full discussion which took place within the Committee on General Affairs at its last two meetings brought to light a measure of agreement on certain general conclusions, while revealing, nevertheless, the profound lack of agreement which persists as to the means to be employed in achieving the aims of the Council of Europe.

The Committee was unanimous in its view that the Council of Europe was passing through a period of crisis ; that it had not produced the results which its sponsors had expected; that little progress had been made in building a • united Europe, and that both public opinion and national Parliaments were beginning to show a certain amount of weariness and of disappointment at what was being done—or perhaps more accurately, at what was not being done—at Strasbourg.

The Consultative Assembly is a body which owes its existence to a joint decision reached by the Governments and Parliaments of its Member States.

In opposition, however, to the physical law which asserts that a natural function tends to create its specific organ, we are here faced with an organ which is seeking its natural function.

Past experience—although it has doubtless been too short for us to derive from it lessons of uncontested value—seems clearly to show that the general principles upon which the Consultative Assembly was originally based must themselves be re-examined.

For the past three years the Assembly has devoted itself to the study of the most varied questions. It has initiated debates of a far-reaching character. It has published reports and listened to speeches, of which many were of great interest, and some of which have had important repercussions.

On the whole, however, its activity has been confined to voting on numerous—indeed, too numerous—Resolutions and Recommendations, on which for the most part no subsequent action has been taken.

It is inevitable that an Assembly without any real powers should find itself becoming an object of diminishing public interest, with the result that it has finally, in the eyes of many of its critics, been relegated to the same category as the numerous meetings and international conferences of a private character which by their very nature can do no more than give expression to pious hopes.

Lack of interest has become all the more pronounced, in that experience has shown that the way in which Representatives to the Assembly have cast their votes has sometimes been at variance not only with the views of their respective Parliaments, but even with the attitude which those Representatives have subsequently felt it incumbent upon them to adopt within those Parliaments.



The spirit of realism which prompts such reflections should not, it is true, be allowed to engender undue pessimism.

It is only fair to recall that in the absence of any real powers the Assembly has, in certain fields, created a favourable atmosphere for the development of plans, some of which are on the verge of realisation.

The Schuman Plan on the Coal and Steel Community may not owe its origin to the Assembly, but it is not too much to suggest that, had it not been for the Assembly, the Plan would never have seen the light of day.

There is in any case no doubt that it was in Strasbourg that was made the first appeal for a European Army. It is, nevertheless, true that an Assembly cannot hope to play an important part, and accomplish effective work, so long as it remains a purely consultative body without any real power.

It is for this reason that the Committee has considered it its duty to propose a fundamental revision of the Statute of the Council of Europe. This matter is the subject of a separate Report, but it merits incidental mention in the present Report—for it is difficult to see how the Council of Europe can pursue a European policy worthy of the name if its methods and machinery are not revised.

A second conclusion was also reached as a result of the Committee's deliberations.

There are at present a large number of organisations and European institutions, each of which was established for special and specific reasons, but whose activities inevitably overlap, and sometimes even conflict with one another,

The Brussels Treaty, the Organisation for European Economic Co-operation, and the Assembly of the Council of Europe are in danger of finding themselves to-morrow in the company of new "Assemblies", one for the control of the High Authority for Coal and Steel, and another for the consideration and adoption of the European budget for joint defence.

Similarly, the establishment is contemplated of a number of European Courts of Justice, each possessing a strictly limited authority.

There is no doubt that this introduces a grave risk of confusion, of incoherence and, at best, a number of complications likely to slow down the working of the "European machine" to the point of preventing it from serving any useful purpose.

It is imperative that some effort at unification, or at least co-ordination, should be made.

The Committee took the view that, in order to achieve something practical, and to escape from the beaten track of academic resolutions on questions of abstract principle, the Assembly might usefully request the Governments of Member States to convene, in the early months of 1952, a European Conference bringing together representatives of Governments, of Parliaments, of the Council of Europe, and of other existing European institutions, as well as of the leading economic, trade union, employers' and legal organisations for the purpose of studying the changes and reorganisation which should be effected in the sphere of European co-operation.

The Committee recalls that when, as a result of the "clarion call" sounded by the Hague Congress, the idea of European unity first began to take shape, the Brussels Treaty Powers decided to set up a Committee for the Study of European Unity.

This Study Group, composed of Members of Parliament and of personalities from the five Brussels Treaty Powers met in Paris on 30th November, 1948 and remained in session for over two months.

It was this Study Group that laid the foundations of a draft agreement between the five Governments, which, after having been put into final form, found expression in the text of the Statute governing our activities to-day.

So many events have followed during these last four years, so many plans have been drawn up, so many new needs have come to light, that this appears to be a particularly appropriate moment to renew and carry a stage further the work begun by the Study Group in 1948, and to try, in the light of experience, to lay the foundations of a new organisation of Europe.

Naturally,; however, the convocation of such a conference should not be allowed to deflect the Assembly as at present constituted from its appointed task.

The Committee cannot emphasize too strongly that the fundamental aim of the Council of Europe should remain the creation of a European political authority with limited functions but real powers.

The Committee wishes to emphasise once again that the differences of opinion which may still exist with regard to the methods of creating a political union must not be allowed to divert the Assembly from its immediate task seeking to unite the Member States—all the Member States—in the economic, financial and social fields.

Since these problems fall within the scope of other Committees, the Committee on General Affairs has confined itself to this simple reminder.

To return to the political field, the Committee has explored at length the possible ways and means of strengthening the position of Europe on the international chess-board.

Naturally, no one in the Committee has dreamt of questioning Europe's need for a policy based on a close association with the United States.

Joint defence requires American aid. The spiritual and moral heritage which—all questions of material destruction apart—would be at stake in a third world war is common to Europe and America.

Co-operation between Europe and America is therefore axiomatic, and no member of the Committee has advocated a "neutral" European Third Force.

These principles must be unequivocally reaffirmed, it remains nevertheless true that this vitally necessary association between the United States and Europe can assume its full proportions only if Europe is regarded as a partner, no longer merely a juxtaposition—one might almost be tempted to say a "dust-cloud"—of separate States, but as one single entity, more capable of dealing both with America and with the Eastern bloc on equal terms, or at least on more evenly-balanced terms.

Was it not General Eisenhower himself who, in the course of a speech delivered in London on 3rd July, 1951, stated that Europe would never attain the dominant position to which the talent, ability and intelligence of her component nations entitled her, as long as her territory remained divided, and who emphasised that if the European countries could only unite, they would soon become independent of American aid and of that of other Atlantic countries?

This is the reason for the continually-repeated idea of establishing in some form a European Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

This formula appears tempting at first sight. But it seems clear that if it were one day to become a practical reality it would constitute rather the final stage of European unity already existing than a first step towards this unity.

At all events, it is evidently premature at the present time.

Does this mean, however, that no progress can now be made towards co-ordinating the foreign policy of the Member States of the Council of Europe? This is not the view of the Committee. On the contrary, it considered almost unanimously that an important step might be taken through the creation of a "College" of Ministers for European Affairs.

We all know that the Assembly has already pronounced itself in favour of the formation of a Ministry of European Affairs within all the Governments of the Member States (Recommendation No. 9 adopted by the Assembly on 18th August, 1950, by 94 votes to 0 with 12 abstentions—quoted in Recommendation 54, para. 5 adopted by the Assembly on 23rd November, 1950, by 73 votes to 7 with 16 abstentions).

But it follows that it would not be enough to appoint Ministers for European Affairs who would remain each in his own capital in charge of a Department. These Ministers would have to meet regularly in a quasi-permanent "College" in order to follow and co-ordinate day-to-day European problems as they arose.

The responsibility for each country's policy would remain in the hands of the Ministers for Foreign Affairs. Their task would however be greatly simplified and facilitated if matters of essentially European policy could under their authority be kept constantly under review by the "College" of their colleagues for European affairs.

The duties of Ministers for Foreign Affairs are to-day so wide in scope and so arduous; they involve such frequent journeys abroad, and such constant attendance in their respective Parliaments, that the Ministers can only meet together at intervals which are necessarily infrequent.

A certain Foreign Minister in fact recently informed his Parliament that for some months he had been waiting for a meeting which had not been called, not because of any lack of goodwill on the part of his colleagues but simply because of the practical difficulties which were involved.

Such difficulties would not exist for a "College" of Ministers for European Affairs whose responsibility would be limited to questions of this nature.

The existence of such a "College" would in itself result, first of all, in a compulsory mutual consultation of the Governments concerned on all European problems at all stages of their development; and contact between the Governments and the Council of Europe would thereby be notably improved.

The "College" of Ministers for European Affairs might endeavour, as far as possible, to delegate a Representative or Joint High Commissioner to represent Europe in international negotiations or in the management of some international institutions.

Considerable progress would have been made if a point were reached which would allow for the expression of European opinion, even if it were only on certain official occasions, through an official spokesman of the Council of Europe.

Nor should such a development be regarded as a minor reform which would simply add one more Committee to the many already in existence.

It should be remembered, on the contrary, that, although what the Council of Europe has chiefly lacked hitherto has undoubtedly been effective power in the theoretical and legal field, it has also, on the practical side, lacked a permanent consultative and co-ordinating body capable of accomplishing a task which would be a physical impossibility for the Committee of Ministers for Foreign Affairs or for the Members of Parliament who are Representatives to the Consultative Assembly.

Another advantage in the creation of such a "College" would be that no Member State could object on grounds of principle to collaborating in its activity, since such participation would not imply any abandonment of sovereignty nor any relaxation of the special links which one State may have with another.

The normal activity of the "College" would, moreover, make it impossible to revive those methods which some members of the Committee have vigorously opposed and which at present enable the Governments of large States to present the small countries with a sort of "fait accompli," by taking action, or making statements, which give these small States the discouraging impression that something is being imposed upon them which they have not the right to alter.

It is quite obvious that the proposed reform, which is modest in scope, but which has the merit that it can be immediately applied, will not solve the problem of the European continental community, raised in the joint statement by the Foreign Ministers of the United States, France and the United Kingdom in Washington on 14th September, 1951, and again quoted in M. Robert Schuman's suggestions to establish a supranational political authority, whose present role would be essentially to complete the European Army, by adding to it a "political superstructure" or agency empowered to supervise its budget and to decide, should the occasion arise, how the European armed forces should be used.

The Committee has not yet reached agreement on this crucial point;

The position of the United Kingdom could not be defined, in view of its domestic political situation. But, on the basis of information which has so far not been contradicted, the Committee has reason to fear that, in relation to the European Army, as in the field of foreign policy, the United Kingdom while encouraging the formation of a continental community and promising to collaborate with it as closely as possible, will persist in its refusal actually to take part in it.

The discussions within the Committee leave no doubt as to the attitude of the Scandinavian States, which refuse to be associated more closely with continental Europe than is Great Britain.

The least that can be said of the attitude of the Benelux countries is that it reveals anxiety and apprehension. Many of those in the smaller countries who would agree, or who actively desire to unite in a genuinely European political community—which, incidentally, would raise for most of them very serious constitutional problems—can only conceive such a union on the basis of British participation, which they consider an essential counterbalancing factor to a Franco-German combination.

The conclusion which seems to emerge from the preceding remarks, and which, moreover, corresponds to the general wishes of the members of your Committee, is that the Assembly should be asked to make a fresh effort to achieve a real European Union, even if the bonds holding it together are to be looser than those which might, perhaps, be adopted for a purely Continental community; even if it assumes the shape of a new Commonwealth rather than of a true Federation or political Confederation.

It may, perhaps, be in order to recall that it was as the result of a British initiative that the Assembly, in August, 1950, adopted a motion calling for a European Army, which it was said, should be created immediately, should be placed under a unified command, and in which we were all to "bear a worthy and honourable part." This, therefore, seems to be the moment to address a new and urgent appeal to the United Kingdom, without whose participation the Continental community can never be described, without misusing a term whose meaning is perfectly clear, as European.

If, however, Great Britain—which, as we all realise, is in a special position owing to its traditional links with the Commonwealth countries—is unable to respond to this appeal, are we to undertake the formation of a purely continental political community, which seems likely to be limited to France, Italy, Western Germany and the Benelux countries?

Several members of your Committee emphasised that, although, at first glance, the creation of such a community would represent an important step towards a better organisation of Europe, inasmuch as a certain number of European States would thus to some extent be welded into a single unit, it would, nevertheless, represent a distressing withdrawal from the original ideas which inspired the creation of the Council of Europe. It would give concrete proof of the divorce between Great Britain and the Continent of Europe, and would be regarded in many quarters as signifying the breakdown of the whole European idea.

Other members were of a different opinion. They maintained that if Great Britain and the Scandinavian States were to persist in their abstention, a resolute advance should be made towards what has been called a "little Europe."

They persist in hoping that the constitution of a Continental political community would represent a first stage, and would not rule out the possibility of Great Britain's accession to such a community, after the latter had taken definite shape and had proved its value.

Among those who support this opinion, there are some who favour the constitution of a Continental Parliamentary Assembly, whose members would be chosen by "some form of universal franchise, for example a restricted, or second degree franchise." This Assembly would exercise "a democratic control" over "the European Political Executive" which the Continental States would establish among themselves.

Your Rapporteur can do no more than to indicate the two points of view expressed, since it seemed inadvisable to take a vote thereon in Committee, which would have revealed the existence of majority and minority opinions.

Neither did the Committee think it advisable to submit to the Assembly a draft Resolution or a Recommendation which might appear to anticipate the Assembly's decision on so delicate a matter. It authorised its Rapporteur simply to introduce the debate which it hopes will take place in the Assembly, and to enumerate the following principles or suggestions which, in the unanimous, or, at any rate, the almost unanimous, opinion of those members present at its last two meetings, should form the basis of the European policy of the Council of Europe :

1. Reaffirmation of the fundamental aim to be pursued by the Council of Europe—the constitution of a European political authority, endowed with limited functions but real powers.
2. Renewal of the urgent appeal to the United Kingdom, without whose participation Europe would, it seems evident, be so mutilated as no longer to be worthy of the name.
3. Recognition of the imperative necessity, not only for close collaboration with the United States, but also for the simultaneous strengthening of the European Union, which is an indispensable condition for the normal and balanced extension of such collaboration.
4. Establishment of a "College" of Ministers for European Affairs, which would meet, at frequent and regular intervals, under the authority of the Ministers for Foreign Affairs, in order to provide, on the basis of obligatory consultations and in close liaison with the Commonwealth, for the co-ordination of the foreign policy of Member States, more especially in their relations with the United States of America. A factor of this co-ordination would be the nomination of a permanent Delegate of the Council of Europe, whose duty it would be to represent Europe, to the fullest extent possible, in international negotiations, or in the administration of certain international institutions.

5. Fresh impetus to be given to the «économie» financial and social unification of the Member States.
6. Co-ordination within the framework of the Council of Europe of the many existing intra-European institutions.
7. The convocation for this purpose, in the early part of 1952, of a European Conference, consisting of representatives of the various Governments and Parliaments, of the Council of Europe, of existing European institutions, and of the principal economic, workers', employers' and legal organisations. The aim of this conference would be to re-group, co-ordinate, and re-organise European institutions in the light of experience and having regard to the present situation.