

Charles de Gaulle, President of France: Europe and Its Role In World Affairs, July 23, 1964

In discussing Europe and in trying to distinguish what it should be, it is always necessary to ascertain what the world is. At the end of the last World War, the distribution of forces in the world was as simple, as brutal as possible. It appeared suddenly at Yalta. Only America and Russia had remained powers and all the more considerable powers in that all the rest found themselves dislocated, the vanquished engulfed in their unconditional defeat and the European victors destroyed to their foundations. For the countries of the free world, threatened by the Soviets' ambition, American leadership could then seem inevitable. The New World was, of all of them, the great victor of the war. Under the command of the United States, owner of atomic bombs - the Atlantic Alliance ensured their security. Thanks to the Marshall Plan their economics were being revived. Wherever the colonial powers were effecting, under more or less violent conditions, the transfer of their sovereignty to self-governing regimes, there pressure was felt, openly or not, from Washington. At the same time, America was seen to assume the conduct of political and strategic affairs in all the regions where the free world found itself in contact with the direct or indirect action of the Soviets.

It did this either unilaterally or through the channels of regional international bodies which in practice were at its disposal: in Europe, NATO; in Western Asia, CENTO; in Southeast Asia, SEATO; in America, the OAS; or, thanks to its supremacy in the North Pacific, or, finally, through military or diplomatic intervention, in Korea, in the Congo, or during the Suez crisis through the offices of the United Nations Organization which it dominated by its preponderance.

It is clear that things have changed. The Western States of our old continent have rebuilt their economies. They are rebuilding their military forces. One of them—France—is becoming a nuclear power. Above all they have become aware of their natural ties. In short, Western Europe appears likely to constitute a major entity full of merit and resources, capable of living its own life, indeed, not in opposition to the New World, but right alongside it.

On the other hand, the monolithic nature of the totalitarian world is in the process of dislocation. China, separated from Moscow, enters on the world scene by its mass, its needs and its resources, avid for progress and consideration. The Soviet Empire, the last and the largest colonial power of this time, is seeing first the Chinese contest the domination it exercises over vast regions of Asia and second is seeing the European satellites which it had subjugated by force moving further and further away. At the same time the Communist regime, despite the enormous effort it has been making in Russia for

a half a century and despite the results it has achieved in certain massive undertakings, is meeting with failure with respect to the standard of living, the satisfaction and the dignity of men in comparison with the system applied in Western Europe which combines "dirigisme" with freedom. Lastly, great aspirations and great difficulties are deeply agitating the developing countries.

The result of all these new factors, complicated, and interrelated, is that the division of the world into two camps lead by Washington and Moscow respectively corresponds less and less to the real situation. With respect to the gradually splitting totalitarian world or the problems posed by China, the conduct to be adopted toward many countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America, or the remodeling of the United Nations Organization that necessarily ensues, or the adjustment of world exchanges of all kinds, etc., it appears that Europe, provided that it wishes it is henceforth called upon to play a role which is its own. Undoubtedly it should maintain an alliance with America, in which, in the North Atlantic, both are interested so long as the Soviet threat remains. But, the reasons which, for Europe, made this alliance a form of subordination are fading away day by day. Europe must assume its share of the responsibilities. Everything indicates, moreover, that this event would be in accordance with the interest of the United States, whatever may be its merit, its power and its good intentions, for the multiplicity and complexity of the tasks henceforth go beyond and perhaps dangerously, its means and its capacity. That is why the United States declares that it wishes to see the old continent unite and organize itself while many among the Gallic, Germanic and Latin peoples cry out "Let us build Europe!"

But which Europe? That is the question. Indeed, the established conveniences, the accepted renunciations, the deep-rooted reservations do not fade away easily. According to us French, it is a question of Europe's being made in order for it to be European. A European Europe means that it exists by itself for itself, in other words in the midst of the world -it has its own policy. But that is precisely what is rejected consciously or unconsciously by some who claim, however, to want it to be established. In reality, the fact that Europe, not having a policy, would be subject to the policy that came to it from the other side of the Atlantic appears to them, even today, normal and satisfactory. We have seen many people, quite often, what is more, worthy and sincere, advocate for Europe not an independent policy, which in reality they do not visualize, but all organization unsuited to have one, linked in this field as in that of defense and of the economy, an Atlantic system, in other words, American, and consequently subordinate to what the United States calls its leadership. This organization, entitled federal, would have had as its bases: on the one hand, a council of experts withdrawn from the affiliation to the States, and which would have been dubbed "executive," and on the other hand a Parliament without national qualifications and which would have been called "legislative." Doubtless each of these two elements would have supplied that for which it would have been fitted, that is to say, studies for the council and debates for the Parliament. But, without a doubt, neither of the two would have made what indeed no one wanted them to make, that is a policy, for if the policy must take the debates and studies into account, it is another thing entirely than studies and debates.

A policy is an action, that is to say a body of decisions taken, of things done, of risks assumed, all this with the support of a people. The governments of nations alone call be capable of and responsible for making policy. It is of course not forbidden to imagine that a day will come when all the peoples of our continent will become one and that then there could be a Government of Europe, but it would be ridiculous to act as if that day had come.

That is why France - refusing to let Europe get bogged down, becoming bogged down herself in a guileful undertaking that would have stripped States, misled peoples and prevented the independence of our continent - took the initiative of proposing to her five partners of the Rome Treaty a beginning for the organization of their cooperation. Thus, we would begin to live in common, pending the time when habit and evolution would gradually draw the ties closer together. We know that the German Government adhered in principle to this project. We know that a meeting of the six States in Paris, then another one in Bonn, seemed at first on the road to success, but that Rome refused to call the decisive meeting, its objections, joined with those of The Hague and Brussels, being powerful enough to halt everything. Finally, we know that the opponents invoked two arguments, moreover contradictory. The first argument: the French plan, which maintains the sovereignty of the States, does not conform to our conception of a Europe having as its Executive a commission of experts, and as its Legislative a Parliament cut off from national realities. The second argument: although Britain does not agree to lose its sovereignty, we will not enter into any European political organization to which it would not belong.

The French plan for European organization not being adopted by Italy and by the Benelux countries; moreover, integration not being able to lead to anything other than an American protectorate; finally, Great Britain having shown throughout the interminable Brussels negotiations that it was not in a position to accept the common economic rules and, by the Nassau agreement, that its defense force, particularly in the nuclear domain, would not be European for lack of being autonomous in relation to the United States-it seemed to the Government of the Federal Republic of Germany and to the Government of the French Republic that their bilateral cooperation could have some value.

It was then that, on the proposal of the German Government, the French-German Treaty of January 22, 1963 was concluded, which I had the honor of signing right here with Chancellor Adenauer. However, it must be noted that, if the French-German Treaty made possible limited results in some areas, also if it led the two Governments and their services to establish contacts which, for our part, and altogether, we judge call be useful and which are, in any case, very pleasant, up to now a common line of conduct has not changed. Assuredly there is not, and there could not be any opposition, strictly speaking, between Bonn and Paris. But, whether it is a matter of the effective solidarity of France and Germany concerning their defense, or even of the stand to take and the action to pursue toward the East, above all the Moscow satellites, or correlatively of the question of boundaries and nationalities in Central and Eastern Europe, or of the recognition of China and of the diplomatic and economic mission which can be opened to Europe in relation to that great people, or of peace in Asia and particularly Indochina and Indonesia,

or of the aid to give to the developing countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America, or of the organization of the agricultural common market and consequently the future of the Community of the Six-one could not say that Germany and France have yet agreed to make together a policy and one could not dispute that this results from the fact that Bonn has not believed, up to now, that this policy should be European and independent. If this state of affairs were to last, there would be the risk, in the long run, of doubts among the French people, of misgivings among the German people and, among their four partners of the Rome Treaty, an increased tendency to leave things as they are, while waiting, perhaps, to be split up.

But, throughout the world, the force of things is doing its work. In wanting and in proposing the organization of a Europe having its own policy, France is sure of serving the balance, the peace and the progress of the world. Moreover, she is now strong enough and sure enough of herself to be able to be patient, except for major external changes which would jeopardize everything and therefore lead her to change her direction. Besides, at the last meeting just held between the Governments in Bonn and Paris, Chancellor Erhard gave an indication of a forthcoming German initiative. In waiting for the sky to clear, France is pursuing, by her own means, that which a European and independent policy can and should be. It is a fact that people everywhere are pleased with it and that for herself it is not an unsatisfactory situation.

Source:

President de Gaulle's speech was delivered at his tenth press conference on July 23, 1964, made available in translation through the courtesy of the Information Service of the French Embassy, New York.