INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

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Some Observations
About the European Scene

13 Thurloe Place
London, S.W.7
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Mr. R. H. Nolte
Institute of Current World Affairs
366 Madison Avenue
New York 17, N.Y.

Dear Mr. Nolte,

With General De Gaulle inducing maximum uncertainty about Europe's future course, March and April seemed inauspicious months for visiting the Common Market countries. For my purposes were to gather impressions of what the EEC countries thought about the building of Europe and about British participation in the existing community; these two related but distinct subjects will be treated separately in these letters. It was like observing one nurse counting a pulse beat as another solemnly jabs needles into the patient's anatomy.

France's experiments with an unusual form of acupuncture -- relieving one's own pain by needling others -- were causing alarmed and confused reactions in many governmental quarters. In particular, a good deal of hand-wringing was going on among officials at the EEC institutions in Brussels. It nevertheless was possible to stand back and take a sketchy reading of the status of the movement for European unity, especially when compared with the position a decade ago.

A striking aspect of the current scene is the number of people who assert very positively that Europe already has been built; that it no longer is a question of "whether Europe" but of "whither Europe." One's first reaction to this attitude might be to ascribe it to bravado in the face of growing difficulties -- a kind of whistling in the graveyard -- and there may be an element of truth in such a reaction. It tends to be forgotten, however, as the strength of the attachment to this sanguine view is experienced.

Ten years ago, in the aftermath of the EDC failure, there was fervent debate about the best means of pursuing European unity. Some dedicated Europeans despaired of the so-called "sector" approach elaborating on the Coal and Steel Community pattern, and wanted to build upon the looser and broader framework of the OEEC. There were those who believed that the Council of Europe might be made into a more meaningful instrument for cooperation, if not unity. Among those who retained their faith in the necessity of full-scale supranationalism there was still argument about which sphere of activity should have priority.

Today, these particular questions are considered resolved -- at least for the present. Europe in large measure is the Economic Community in the eyes of many Western Europeans. Despite its great value as an instrument for analysis and consultation among the Western countries, the OECD is little known to the public and is seen more as an Atlantic than as a European body. The Council of Europe continues to operate much as it has done in the past, making modest progress toward relatively modest goals and gaining limited popular attention and appreciation along the way. With a certain amount of justice, the European Free Trade Association is regarded as an unsuccessful British tactic to counter the impact of the EEC, and thus as a negligible diversionary path leading rearward. Finally, it is clear that political and defense concerns have had to give way before the primacy of economic issues. The prosperous Western Europe of today seems concentrating -- perhaps to excess -- on the preservation and expansion of its material well-being.

In contrast with 1956, there is little mention of supranationalism or federation in conversations these days when one travels in the EEC countries. There are still many strong advocates of the original Monnet theses, but they seem to sense an unresponsiveness in the atmosphere and to moderate their voices accordingly. Much of the eager idealism of the early postwar days has ebbed with the passage of time, the growth of prosperous conditions and with the experience of making the Common Market operate in the face of serious obstacles.

This is not to say that idealism cannot be found or could not be aroused in the Western Europe of today. Rather, it is to recognize that substantial changes have taken place over a decade, and not least among the people. A new generation has grown up which knows little about World War II and is relatively unaffected by the ideological divisions of the years before and after the war. Perhaps the single-minded drive toward prosperity has been the most influential factor in its formative years. The young people of Europe to an unusual degree seem pragmatic, skeptical and uncommitted to political and philosophical doctrines, while appearing surprisingly naive or ignorant concerning the realities of politics and power in the nuclear age (the phrase deserves a deep bow to Uncle Screwtape). Whether it is merely the outward appearances of ubiquitous Western "pop culture" or whether they share more profound attitudes, it seems increasingly difficult to differentiate among these young people. They may not be able to define in positive terms the Europe that they want in the future, but they appear quite certain that they feel at home in the Europe that exists.

At the same time, not far beneath the surface there is a general sense of uneasiness and uncertainty which involves even the new generation. It stems from this very lack of definition. Unquestionably, Europeans can live without blueprints more easily than can Americans, but the current confusion about future aims is breeding hesitation and introspection.

Alongside the feeling that Europe somehow has been "made" is a growing quandary about its permanence, its physical limits and its direction. Most important, there is increasing skepticism about what has actually been achieved to date. Strictly within a European context internationalism in a tentative pragmatic way has been increasing in potency over the past several years -- but so has nationalism. There is widespread recognition of the "inward-looking" character of present-day Europe and a certain amount of dissatisfaction with that condition. The German problem continues to defy solution at the heart of political Europe. Even though wealth and political independence have been on the increase in Western Europe, the area finds itself little or no more influential vis-à-vis the United States and the Soviet Union; indeed, in fields such as overall technological advance there is a sense of slippage, of a gap which is growing rather than closing.

It is this sense of relative inferiority, as well as the global responsibilities and preoccupations of the United States, which continues to complicate and plague relationships between Western Europe and the United States. One curious by-product of this tension concerns the use of the word "community." When applied to the EEC or broadly to European moves toward unity in general it is an eminently good word here. When prefaced by the term Atlantic, however, more often than not it is coolly received by what may be a majority of Europeans. Rightly or wrongly -- and the evidence to support such a distinction seems pretty thin -- they choose to believe that President Kennedy's call for Atlantic partnership represented a signal change in American policy, which after his death reverted to the earlier formulation. The community thesis is seen as one which through institutional methods would bind Europeans into their postwar position of inferiority with respect to the United States. The partnership concept, on the other hand, is interpreted as calling for a free association between roughly equal power centers. To some extent this distinction derives from the continuing mystique surrounding President Kennedy's name in Europe; this in turn owes much to the belief over here that the late president was more European, or less American, in character and outlook than any occupant of the presidency at least since Franklin Roosevelt. General De Gaulle's exaggerated preachings doubtless constitute another stimulant to such thinking about Atlantic ties, but it would be quite wrong to believe that the French President alone invented this theme and single-handedly made converts all

over Western Europe. Without the added distortion it is one which can easily be traced back to the eminently respectable Jean Monnet.

Whatever the reasons for the emphasis on partnership thus defined and as opposed (whether artificially or not) to community, it has the effect of obstructing efforts toward closer relations being made on both sides of the Atlantic. For it is clear that if something approaching equal strength is a prerequisite for Western Europe entering into a more meaningful relationship with North America, then Atlantic partnership is a fairly distant prospect. Indeed, it could prove a mirage.

Again it would appear that a lack of definition is one root of the trouble. There is a considerable difference between Europe wanting to be independent from the United States on the one hand, and wanting to improve its strength and standing with respect to the United States on the other. But this distinction has become badly blurred over the last few years, largely because of the growing gulf between the opposing views of the Western alliance exemplified by the French and American positions.

The closed ranks presented to the French by the fourteen NATO countries does not obscure the fact that a great many Western Europeans feel caught in the middle of an argument in which they do not fully identify with either side. Despite what they see as a greatly diminished Soviet threat, they still regard the alliance as essential protection and, to a lesser degree, as a positive instrument to help determine the unknown future shape of Europe. But then even General De Gaulle apparently does not dispute these points. Below this rarified but important level of agreement there is great confusion and restiveness about a whole range of strategic and political questions; ironically, a number of these originated in the Kennedy years. There is some valuable middle ground to be occupied if the more theological aspects of the great dispute can be muted in favor of identifying such ground.

One point perhaps may be drawn out from the enormously complex net of interconnected issues and considered more in its psychological than its concrete aspects. It concerns this crucial question of Western Europe's relationship to the United States. Most alliance members -- perhaps even France after a time -- may be able to continue to reconcile themselves to the fact that the United States for the indefinite future will have a heavy preponderance of strength and will play the principal role in NATO. There is a vital reservation to be stated here, however. For this to happen means must be found to give the European allies a true sense of participation in alliance policy decisions, and specifically a role in the

shaping and direction of deterrent strategy. There are those in Washington who would regard such a statement as monumentally old hat, and would wearily say they had been working on the problem for years with little or no help from Europe.

Seen through European eyes the issue looks rather different than it does in Washington. For one thing, informed people here generally agree with the French point that the United States in 1962, whether inadvertently or not, revised NATO defense policy unilaterally and without adequately convincing explanations to its allies after the fact. If it was identifiably an inadvertent action, it would make the Europeans feel even more a negligible quantity in the alliance. Secondly, while the MLF concept was presented by Washington as an answer to what the Europeans wanted, it is regarded by a large majority here as having been the U.S. idea of what Europe should want -- and didn't. In any case, few people believe that it responded at all to the central focus of interest in a policy voice. Admittedly, Washington can fall back on the seemingly logical position that the NATO allies should get together and agree on what they want. But there is neither the necessary cohesion nor, as Raymond Aron stressed years ago, sufficient knowledge of nuclear intricacies for Western Europe to initiate a concerted fresh policy approach. There is also the consideration that U.S. policy at least in theory is directed toward helping create the cohesion which is a prerequisite. In the circumstances it becomes something of a chicken-and-egg proposition almost dictating stalemate.

Most of all, there is continuing dismay in Western Europe that the United States absorption in the Vietnam War has seemed to result in European affairs being placed on the back burner. I met a number of people who believed that the "McNamara Committee" approach might by now have produced an answer to the problem of West German association with nuclear policy had it not come about in the context of a requirement for a palliative, rather than as a fully developed and determined policy response. On a broader scale, it is felt by many Europeans that the United States has done itself a grave disservice in standing pat on its alliance policy, then grudgingly admitting that NATO requires updating to meet changed conditions and finally stating that it could all wait to be discussed in two or three years' time. It is not that anyone really believes General De Gaulle would have acted differently had the U.S. tried to convene such discussions several months ago. But many people think that the seeming rigidity of the U.S. position played into the General's hands to some degree; it allowed him to appear as the champion of active response to the generally agreed shifting movement in the international scene, and to ring changes on the independence theme. In neither

case do most Europeans agree with the overall Gaullist position as they understand it. Still, there are a great many who make no bones about their belief that the General is far from being completely in the wrong. And to the extent that they consider the United States wholly preoccupied with Vietnam and clinging to a supposedly antiquated policy in NATO and Europe at large, that belief is more likely to grow than to subside. Much will depend on whether the various committees now set up within NATO have the mandate and power to do more than patch up the alliance for a time.

Another upsetting aspect of the Vietnamese war as seen in Europe is the setback it is believed to have dealt the development of detente between the United States and the Soviet Union. Because of all the discussion about the prospects for Western and Eastern Europe drawing together -- murky and confused though much of the talk may be -- this view and the consequent resentment are making substantial inroads in European thought. Again, General De Gaulle by creating the biggest noises in this field has gained an expanding audience which pays less heed to the contradictions in his policies. Although it is recognized that the United States Government has been trying to arrive at a new policy toward East-West trade, its inability to implement this process tends to confirm the suspicion over here that the United States will subordinate everything to the fighting in Southeast Asia.

This issue of relations between Western and Eastern Europe seems in danger of falling into a doctrinal pit; into the sort of "either-or" attitudes which for so long have accentuated the problems of NATO. As there basically has been for years, there is general agreement in Western Europe that the Little Six should not form a closed but an expanding unit. On the Continent for the most part Prague, Warsaw, etc., are considered as much European capitals as Madrid or Athens. Interest in mutually profitable trade between the still largely complementary divisions of Europe certainly has not diminished. And the view is slowly taking hold in many areas, including West Germany, that German reunification is most likely to be achieved through a positive policy of developing links with Eastern Europe.

However, having noted these factors favoring the creation of closer East-West ties, it is also worth noting that the most knowledgeable Western Europeans I have met regard this as a necessarily slow process which could take a generation before it produced the kind of results now being considered. They stress not only the fundamental differences in state systems which make even economic dealings difficult, but also the fact that the collective experience of the Eastern European

countries has made them among the most nationalistic ones in the world. These by and large are people who favor opening as many doors as possible to the Eastern Europeans, but who see no reason why the process of building the strength and cohesion of Western Europe in concert with North America should not go forward simultaneously. In case of either a temporary or lasting incompatability between the two objectives they would unquestionably choose the latter course -- but they see no such choice required at present.

Yet there are those who seem to over-emphasize the changing attitudes toward Eastern Europe as the wave of the short-term future. They see a necessity for NATO to be reoriented so that it is primarily directed toward achieving a new relationship between Eastern and Western Europe. Some believe that a policy of firmly integrating the West is actively inimical to a policy of encouraging East-West ties within Europe. Thus far, despite a number of lively journalistic accounts, a tide of popular sentiment does not seem to have set in that direction. So long as there is flexibility in policy circles and full, uninhibited public discussion of alternatives on their merits, it appears unlikely that any mutually exclusive paths will be followed. The antithesis of this outcome is exemplified by those British journals which hastened to attach a "Gaullist" label to Mr. Edward Heath when he tried to sharpen debate on European questions. There may be no better way to recreate the Europe of 1939 than by so inflating the significance and leadership of General De Gaulle (especially in the sphere of developing links between Eastern and Western Europe) -- unless it might be for the United States to take out its irritation with France on the rest of Europe, or to turn its back on efforts to find middle ground.

In any event, there are so many cross-currents in Western European thought at present that there is perhaps more danger of confusion and immobility than of precipitate action in the immediate future. A case in point is the nature of Common Market negotiations at Brussels. Even though a general agreement on agricultural policy was hammered out, an atmosphere of bitterness and pessimism seems to linger. The interaction of NATO and other problems could not be prevented from complicating the task, and the resentment and distrust felt toward the French representatives could not be confined to a single direction. There is a pervasive feeling that, with the foothills successfully climbed, it is only now that the dimensions of the mountains ahead for the EEC are being clearly seen. In these circumstances, it would be at least tidy to envisage two opposed trends of thought taking shape: one inclining to the belief that the time has come for the Community to broaden its ranks, despite the risks to the supranational concept

behind its creation; the other holding fast to that original concept, either because of genuine federalist belief or because of sheer distaste for rocking the boat. In fact, the situation is far too complicated to be warped into such patterns. It looks as if there may be quite a bit of milling around under the heights before a decision is reached either to attempt to scale them, to by-pass them or to take some middle path that may be discovered.

All the themes touched on above, and a number still to be examined, enter into the potpourri of Continental attitudes toward the British -- which will be the subject of my next letter.

Sincerely yours,

D. G. Henderson

Donald G. Henderson

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