

A union, not a unity: The Briand Memorandum

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[...] No one today doubts that the lack of cohesion in the pooling of the material and moral forces of Europe does in fact constitute the most serious obstacle to the development and efficiency of all political or judicial institutions on which the foundations of any universal organisation of peace tend to be based. Neither does this dispersion of energy limit less seriously, in Europe, the possibilities of enlarging the economic market, the attempts at intensifying and ameliorating industrial production, and thereby every guarantee against labour crises, which are sources of both political and social instability. Moreover, the danger of such division is still further increased by the extent of the new frontiers (more than 20,000 kilometres of customs barriers) which the peace treaties have had to create, in order to satisfy national aspirations in Europe.

The very activities of the League of Nations whose responsibilities are made all the more heavy by the fact that it is a worldwide organisation, might meet with serious obstruction in Europe if these territorial divisions were not counteracted at the earliest moment by a bond of solidarity enabling the nations of Europe to realise at last the geographical unity of Europe, and to bring about, within the framework of the League; one of the regional understandings which the pact has formally recommended.

That is to say, that the search for a formula of European cooperation in conjunction with the League of Nations, far from weakening the authority of that body, should not, and could not, tend but to increase it, for it is in close keeping with the ideals of the League.

It is proposed in no way to form a European group outside the League of Nations, but, on the contrary, to bring European interests into harmony under the control of, and in conformity with, the spirit of the League of Nations, by creating within its universal organisation an organisation which, for being limited, would be all the more effective. The creation of a federal system in Europe would always be placed to the credit of the League of Nations as bringing about progress of which even nations outside Europe could reap the benefit.

Such a conception can leave no room for ambiguity, any more than that which, in an even more limited area, gave birth to the collective negotiation of the Locarno agreements¹ which inaugurated the real policy of European cooperation.

There are, in fact, certain questions of particular interest to Europe for which, in the interests of peace itself, the European States may feel the need of special, more immediate and more direct action, and with which they are, moreover, especially competent to deal, because of their racial affinities and their common ideals of civilisation. The League of Nations itself, in the general exercise of its activities, has

more than once had to take into account this geographical unity which Europe represents, and for which common solutions may be found which could not be imposed upon the whole world. To prepare and facilitate the coordination of those activities of the League which are essentially European would be one of the tasks of the proposed association.

Far from constituting a fresh tribunal for the settlement of disputes, the European association, which could not be called upon in such matters to use its good offices except in a purely consultative capacity, would not be competent to deal fully with particular problems for the settlement of which a special procedure of the League of Nations or some other expressly defined procedure has been laid down by the Covenant or by treaties. But even in matters involving a task essentially reserved for the League of Nations, the federal bond between the European States would still play a very useful part in preparing an atmosphere favourable to a peaceful settlement by the League, or in facilitating, in practice, the execution of its decisions.

Accordingly, the French representative was careful, from the beginning, to avoid all ambiguity when, taking the initiative at the first European reunion, he expressed the opinion that it should include only the representatives of the States which are Members of the League of Nations, and should meet at Geneva on the occasion of the Tenth Assembly - that is to say, in the atmosphere and within the framework of the League of Nations.

The proposed European organisation could not be opposed to any ethnographical combination outside the League, either in Europe itself or in other continents, any more than it could be to the League itself.

The work of European coordination meets requirements so immediate and so vital that it seeks to be an end in itself, by doing positive work which can in no way be directed or allowed to be directed against anyone. On the contrary, this work will be carried on in complete and friendly trust, and even often in collaboration, with all other States or groups of States which are so sincerely interested in the organisation of universal peace as to recognise the advantage of a greater homogeneity in Europe, and which, in addition, understand sufficiently clearly the modern laws of international economy to seek, in the better organisation of a Europe which has been simplified and thereby freed from the constant menace of conflicts, the conditions of security indispensable to the development of their own economic intercourse.

The policy of European union, towards which must tend the present search for the first link of solidarity between the governments of Europe, implies, in effect, a conception absolutely contrary to that which formerly led to the creation in Europe of customs unions, tending to abolish internal customs barriers in order to erect on the boundary of the whole community a stiffer barrier - that is to say, in order to create, in practice, a weapon against the States situated outside these unions.

Such a conception would be incompatible with the principles of the League of Nations, closely bound as it is to the ideal of universality which remains its aim and end, even while it seeks or promotes partial results.

Lastly, it is necessary to make the proposed study very clearly subject to the general principle that in no case and in no degree may the formation of the Federal Union desired by the European Governments affect in any way any of the sovereign rights of the States which are members of such an association.

It is on the level of absolute sovereignty and of complete political independence that the understanding between European nations must be brought about [...]

It is in the light of these observations and inspired by the general anxiety mentioned at the beginning of this Memorandum that the government of the Republic, in conformity with the procedure laid down at the first European meeting of 9 September 1929, have the honour to submit today for consideration by the governments concerned a statement of the different points on which they are invited to give their opinion.

The need for a general agreement, however summary it may be, to affirm the principle of the moral union of Europe and to place formally on record the existence of the solidarity established between the states of Europe [...]

The need for machinery which will secure for the European union the organs essential for the accomplishment of its task.

The need for a representative and responsible body in the shape of a regular institution known as the 'European Conference' composed of the representatives of all the European governments that are Members of the League of Nations. This body would remain the primary directing body of the European Union in conjunction with the League of Nations
.....

The need for an executive body in the form of a permanent political committee composed only of a certain number of members of the European Conference, which would act both as the research committee and as the executive body of the European Union. [...]

The need for a secretarial staff, however small it may be at the outset, in order to ensure the administrative execution of the instructions of the President of the European Conference or of the European Committee, communications between governments parties to the European Pact, the summoning of the conference or committee, the preparation of their discussions, the registration and notification of their resolutions, etc.
[...]

The need for laying down in advance the essential principles which shall determine the general conceptions of the European Committee and guide it in the inquiries which it makes for the purpose of preparing the programme of the European organisation. [...]

The general subordination of economic problems to the political problems: - all possibility of progress on the road to economic union being strictly governed by the question of security, and this question itself being intimately bound up with that of the progress possible on the road to political union, it is essential to bring on to the political plane at the outset a method of development that will tend to give Europe an organic structure. It is on this same plane that the broad lines of the economic policy of Europe as well as the tariff policy of each individual European State should be elaborated.

To do the opposite would not only be fruitless, but would appear to the weakest nations, left without guarantees or compensation, as liable to expose them to the risks of a political domination resulting from industrial domination by the most powerfully organised States.

It is thus logical and natural that the economic sacrifices to be made to the commonwealth should find their justification only in the development of a political situation permitting confidence between peoples and the true pacification of minds. Even after the realisation of such a state of affairs guaranteed by the establishment of a close and permanent pacific union between the peoples of Europe, there would still be a need for the introduction, on the political plane, of a heightened sense of international requirements which would oblige members of the European commonwealth, for the common good, to elaborate in all sincerity and to pursue effectively a truly liberal tariff policy.

The principle that European political cooperation should be directed towards the following essential object: a federation based on the idea of union and not of unity - that is to say, a federation elastic enough to respect the independence and national sovereignty of each State while guaranteeing to all the benefits of collective solidarity in the settlement of the political questions affecting the destiny of the European commonwealth or that of one of its members. [...]

The principle that the economic organisation of Europe should be directed towards the following essential object: a rapprochement of the European economic systems effected under the political control of the governments acting in concert.

For this purpose, the governments might themselves settle, definitively, in a document confined to general principles which would constitute a simple pact of economic solidarity, the objective which they intend to define as the ideal of their economic policy (the establishment of a common market which shall raise to the maximum the standard of human well-being in all the territories of the European commonwealth). In the favourable atmosphere of such a general orientation could be begun the immediate practical construction of a rational organisation of production and of European exchanges, by means of the progressive liberation and the methodical simplification of the circulation of goods, capital and individuals, due account being taken of the requirements of each State as regards national defence [...]