De Gaulle’s audacious "Fouchet Plan", a blueprint for tomorrow's political Europe

By Karel Vereycken, December 2019.

With the Brexit and the political discredit resulting from the moral bankruptcy of European institutions, paradoxically, the time has come to reopen the great construction site of *"European construction"*. Far be it from us to believe that this false "Europe" of stateless bureaucrats, which has become a mere relay for predatory financial globalization, coincides in any way with the real Europe, that of peoples, nations and states. If Europe is an undeniable geographical and civilizational entity, the political understanding of European states remains one of the great challenges of our time.

A veritable legal dictatorship at the service of counterfeiters, today's Europe smells of pine trees, but the morticians seem to be in no hurry, and the date of the funeral has yet to be set. Long before that, it will be up to us, as the Conseil National de la Résistance did during the war, to bring to the baptismal font a coherent project that will allow us to take over.

We can't go back in time, but it's important to know at what crossroads our leaders took the wrong path. This text summarizes the history of the Fouchet Plan for a Europe of States. Championed by De Gaulle, its rejection in 1962 explains many of today's woes. However, because of the clarity of the principles it sets out, it remains a possible and promising starting point for thinking about tomorrow.

De Gaulle and Europe

Contrary to the myths spread by his enemies, De Gaulle was a great European. He had not waited

for what he called *"the illuminati of The Hague [the Dutch capital where, in 1948, the congress of the European Movement was held under the benevolent eye of the Anglo-Americans] to discover that there was a Europe, and that it could and should be organized"*.

"I have always advocated the union of Europe. I mean the union of European states (...) I want Europe, but the Europe of realities! In other words, a Europe of nations - and of states, which alone can answer for nations."(Quoted in *C'était de Gaulle, p. 75,* by Alain Peyrefitte, Gallimard 2002)

Akin to cardinal Nicholas Cusanus (NOTE 1) in the XVth century, De Gaulle understood that the legitimacy of power derives from the people: *"The French people are sovereign. Sovereignty comes from them. They hold it in its entirety. They may delegate it, but they possess it. When it comes to making a political choice that may affect its destiny, it is essential that the country itself makes this choice. Instinct and common sense urge it to do so."* (Id., p. 228)

The sovereign rules, but above all he is the one who helps the people to realize their sovereign power. And any purely political, theoretical or intellectual construction that runs counter to this approach cannot stand the test of time. For history is the history of the people, and it is they who form nations and states in response to it. Thus, for De Gaulle, it was out of the question, and even suicidal, in the name of European *"integration"*, to seek to erase the specific particularities of each people, language, nation and state.

Principles

General de Gaulle's "patriotic" and "world citizen's" European policy was summed up in four major principles, which he enunciated to Alain Peyrefitte in January 1960:

1) *"The first idea,"* said De Gaulle, *"is that Western Europe must organize itself, in other words, that its States must move closer together, from Amsterdam to Sicily, from Brest to Berlin, so as to become capable of acting as a counterweight to the two mastodons, the United States and Russia. As long as our countries remain dispersed, they are easy prey for the Russians, like the three Curiatii arriving separately to face Horace; unless the Americans protect them. So they have a choice between becoming Russian colonies or American protectorates. They preferred the latter, and understandably so at first. But that can't last forever. It is therefore urgent that they unite to escape this alternative. We need to start with these five or six countries, which can form the hard core; but without undertaking anything that might block the way [of entrance] to others – Spain, Portugal, England if it manages to break away from the Commonwealth and the United States, Scandinavia one day, and why not Poland and the other satellites when the Iron Curtain finally rises?"* (Id., p. 76)

2) *"The second guideline is that Europe will either become a reality or not, depends on whether France and Germany reconcile or not. This may be done at the level of leaders; it is not done in depth."* (Id., p. 76)

3) *"The third guideline is that each people is different from the others, incomparable, unalterable, irreducible. It must remain itself, in its originality, as its history and culture have made it, with its memories, its beliefs, its legends, its faith, its will to build its future. If you want nations to unite, don't try to integrate them like chestnuts in a chestnut mash. You have to respect their individuality. You have to bring them closer together, teach them to live together, get their legitimate rulers to consult each other and, one day, to confederate, i.e. to pool certain skills, while remaining independent for everything else. That's the way to build Europe. We won't make it any other way."* (Id., p. 77)

4) *"The fourth idea is that this Europe will come into being the day its peoples, in their depths, decide to join it. It won't be enough for parliamentarians to vote for ratification. It will require popular referendums, preferably on the same day in all the countries concerned"*. (Id., p. 77)

These were the philosophical and political underpinnings of the "**Fouchet Plan"**, initially the fruit of a commission made up of representatives of the six countries (France, Germany, Italy, Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg) that had signed the Treaty of Rome in 1957.

The aim was to turn the "European Communities" into a **Europe of States**. And to win over the other partners, De Gaulle was counting on the driving force of the Franco-German couple. The first negotiations between the States followed, despite the Chancellor's reserved welcome and the Six's divergent views on British participation.

It was De Gaulle who proposed regular meetings between ministers, heads of state or government of the Six and senior officials, to discuss specific political, economic, cultural and defense issues. This was to be the embryo of the European Council. He suggested adding to it, not a European Parliament, whose supposed legitimacy would come from a non-existent "European people", but a consultative assembly made up of national parliamentarians. Ultimately, what De Gaulle proposed to Adenauer was nothing less than the formation of a European confederation.

At a summit in Paris on February 10 and 11 1961, the Six agreed to develop their political cooperation. President De Gaulle proposed to his five partners that they set up a study commission, made up of representatives of each government, to examine the modalities of possible diplomatic and political cooperation. The commission was chaired by **Christian Fouchet (1911-1974)**, French ambassador to Moscow after 1944. A loyal supporter of the General and friend of Pierre Mendès France, this high-ranking diplomat had joined the ranks of **La France Libre** (french Resistance under De Gaulle's leadership) in London just hours after Pétain's surrender.

Between 1961 and 1962, the commission's work was presented in several versions of the Fouchet Plan, which only France made public. The proposed "Union of States" was later described by French Prime Minister Michel Debré as a "Europe of Nations".

This was the period when assassination attempts against De Gaulle multiplied: September 8, 1961, May 23 and August 22, 1962, July 31, 1963 and August 14, 1964.

The Preamble

In its first version of November 2, 1961 (NOTE 2), with 18 articles on barely six pages, this text laid the foundations for European political unity. The five preambular paragraphs summarize the principles. Their dense wording requires careful reading, and one is struck by the very different and radically opposed tone of all recent European treaties.

For the sake of clarity, I've taken the liberty of numbering them:

--The first paragraph states that for the contracting parties, this organization of Europe *"in a freedom respecting its diversity, will enable their civilization to flourish even more" and "will protect their common spiritual heritage"*. A wonderful **coincidence of opposites**, perfectly capturing the European reality from a superior point of view that transcends the subject matter! This highly ambitious project, in the midst of the Cold War, aims to contribute *"to the maintenance of peaceful relations in the world".*

--The second paragraph, by affirming that the Union seeks *"to safeguard together the fundamental dignity, liberty and equality of men, whatever their condition, race or religion"*, clearly distances itself from the totalitarian regimes reigning in the East, as much as from the segregation and colonialism still in force in the West, in Europe as well as on American soil.

--Paragraph three establishes a strong and indissoluble link between our commitment to "the principles of democracy and human rights" and *"justice in all areas of social life"*. In short, the demands formulated by Franklin Roosevelt and the Conseil National de la Résistance (CNR) for a Social Security system offering sickness and old-age insurance for all, thus articulating domestic and foreign policy by translating at the level of each country what we wish for the world.

--Paragraph four stresses that this Union is not "a club" of countries granting each other privileges, but an initiative open to any European country ready *"to accept the same responsibilities and the same obligations"*. Implicit in this paragraph is the fact that no one will be excluded, and that when the time comes, Russia or other Eastern European countries will be free to join the Union on the basis of these shared principles and responsibilities. It was also in this spirit that De Gaulle twice vetoed Britain's entry into the EEC, because it clearly refused to submit to these principles and rules.

--Finally, paragraph five states that member states will continue to reconcile *"their essential interests"* (in the fields of coal, steel and civil nuclear power) within the common market, *"so as to prepare for a destiny henceforth irrevocably shared"*. Instead of maintaining geopolitical conflicts over the control of these essential resources, the Union proposes that, by common agreement and in a spirit of mutual development, each should develop its resources and share them for the benefit of all and in the service of a shared future.

“Empty chair" policy

The plan goes on to define the institutional instruments essential to this Union, and the way in which any disagreements between member states are to be managed:

Article 2 begins by stating that the Union's objective is:

-to *"arrive, in matters of common interest to the Member States, at the adoption of a common foreign policy"*. In other words, this foreign policy does not automatically cover all areas, but only those *"of common interest"*;
--to ensure, *“through close cooperation between the Member States in the fields of science and culture, the development of their common heritage and the safeguarding of the values which give their civilization its value"*. Science and culture are rightly recognized here as the lifeblood of European civilization and the basis of its prosperity;
--to strengthen, in cooperation with other free nations, *“the security of member states against aggression by adopting a common defense policy”*. It's a policy of European non-alignment, opposed to the logic of blocs, which allows dialogue with everyone, including Russia, India and China. Above all, it means the end of a Europe under the leadership of NATO and the Anglo-Americans.

Article Four goes on to define the Union's three main institutional pillars:

--a **Council**, made up of heads of state and government, will have the final say over all issues;
--A **European Parliamentary Assembly**, made up of national parliamentarians (not MEPs), will *"deliberate"* (not decide) on all matters concerning the Union;
--a **European Political Commission**, based in Paris and made up of senior officials from the

foreign ministries of each member state, will prepare Council meetings and provide advice and assistance.

However, as with any commitment among partners, there are constraints. To manage decision making, the Fouchet Plan provided the famous "empty chair policy", which allowed states of being not automatically submitted to policies adopted by others. By not sending a representative to the European Council meeting, the absent country was not blocking everything. It simply left those present free to take decisions that applied only to themselves. In this way, it would be enough for two member states to agree on a common policy, for example in terms of their defense or foreign policy, in order to be able to implement it among themselves. This policy of "enhanced cooperation" would only be binding for those states having adopted it, without being binding for the others. Added to this is stood the veto right. If one State would consider a proposed policy to be detrimental to its interest or to all member states it could veto the policy.

On top, any policy designed *"to achieve the aim of the Union"* required complete unanimity. This is specified in Article 6: the Council *"shall unanimously adopt the decisions necessary to achieve the objectives of the Union. The absence or abstention of one or two members shall not prevent a decision from being taken. Council decisions are binding on the Member States which took part in their adoption. Member States for which a decision is not binding by reason of their absence or abstention may accede to it at any time. The decision becomes binding on them as from their accession".*

So, contrary to what people have been led to believe, when De Gaulle practiced the empty chair policy, he was not automatically blocking the whole of Europe, but simply allowing the other members to adopt, by a unanimous vote of the countries present, decisions that applied only to them. Admittedly, given France's size and global stature, without it’s participation these decisions would have lacked credibility to claim to represent the will of Europe. Hence, in the following decades, the Anglo-American obsession to increase the number of EU member states as much as possible, in order to marginalize those they saw as irreducible opponents to their worst policies.

Sabotage of the Fouchet Plan

Among Anglo-American geopoliticians and imperial nostalgists, the Fouchet Plan was essentially considered as a *casus belli*. For it would have enabled a reconciled Franco-German couple, at the heart of a powerful Europe with no hegemonic ulterior motives, to uphold its ideals of freedom, social values and humanist culture. And by taking charge of its own defense, it would have put an end to NATO's presence in Europe. It's clear, then, that the Fouchet Plan represented a threat to the Anglo-American goal for NATO, described by Lord Ismay, of *"keeping the Americans in, the Russians out and the Germans down".*

While Italy showed interest and Germany was divided on the issue, the other European partners, fearing French domination of the Six's external relations, rejected the Fouchet Plan. Above all, the Netherlands and Belgium, who did not want to "complicate" the accession of their trading partner Great Britain which refused to break away from the Commonwealth, nor threaten discussions on the future of NATO, were strongly opposed.

On May 15, 1962, General de Gaulle officially recognizes the failure to create a political Europe. At a resounding press conference, he blames the European federalist theories and openly denounced the Anglo-American game.

Just before the conference, answering Peyrefitte who asked De Gaulle what would be the substance of his statement, the french President replied: *"I'll be talking about the project for a political*

organization of six European states, which Spaak [the Belgian Foreign Minister] and Luns [the Dutch Foreign Minister] have just scuppered. I'll explain France's position. To want to create a 'supranational Europe' without the nations, or even more so against the nations, is absurd! The only international reality that exists is that of nations. The only institution that can answer for a nation is the state that runs it. The only organization that can exercise legitimate authority is the increasingly intimate concert of states..." (p. 135)

And at the end of the next Council of Ministers meeting, De Gaulle stated: *"The Europe of nations is the only one possible. There is no other, at least until the next century. So why not do right away what is feasible? (...) We must build it not on myths, but on realities, by bringing states closer together, which will bring nations closer together. It's absurd to want to give supranational powers to a commission of stateless civil servants. The Council of Heads of State and Government and the specialized councils of six ministers must be given increasing powers within their respective areas of competence. The Commission should do nothing more than provide the secretariat for these councils. This is what the Fouchet Plan envisaged. It's a pity it was rejected. The day will come when it will be found very audacious. So much the worse for those who call themselves 'European'! It's a missed opportunity for Europe."* (p. 147)

Franco-German alliance

A combative fighter, De Gaulle felt that if he had lost a battle, he still had to win the war !

At the Council of Ministers meeting on May 24, 1962, he returned to the essentials: *"The United States understands that our conception of Europe, which is based on Franco-German mutual understanding, may have the effect of undermining American hegemony in the Western world. They react to the idea that their preponderance might be challenged. They put pressure on political circles in Bonn, so that Germany would refuse to join forces with us. And they are pushing Great Britain to join the founding countries of the Common Market, so as to strengthen their leverage over the Six... (...) Nothing will come out of this. But the talkers in Strasbourg are having a field day; it's the Europe of foie gras [fat liver, the wealthy]. What we've been able to say upsets myths and habits. We can't stand it."* (p. 165)

At the end of the same Council, De Gaulle tells Peyrefitte: *"You'll see that in the end, we'll do the Fouchet plan with the Germans. Too bad for the Belgians and Dutch, who refused it; too bad for the Italians, who make too much fuss. That'll teach them not to misbehave."* (p. 165)

Towards the end of the same year, in the spirit of enhanced cooperation, De Gaulle imposed the **Common Agricultural Policy (CAP)**, ensuring Europeans' food security and independence from the Commonwealth.

The following year, on January 4 1963, once again confiding in his Minister of Information, De Gaulle told him: *"We have carried out the first decolonization until last year [Algeria, etc.]. We will* ***now move on to the second. After giving independence to our colonies, we're going to take our own.*** *Western Europe has become, without even realizing it, an American protectorate. We must now rid ourselves of their domination. But the difficulty here is that the colonized don't really want to emancipate themselves. Since the end of the war, the Americans have subjugated us painlessly and without much resistance."* (p. 603)

Three weeks later, on January 22, 1963, despite enormous pressure from both inside and outside Europe, de Gaulle and Adenauer signed the Elysée Treaty, a treaty of friendship between France and West Germany that put an end to centuries of animosity.

This agreement, conceived as the implementation of the Fouchet Plan between two states, organizes inter-state relations with a view to deepening cooperation between France and Germany. In particular, it covers defense, foreign affairs, education and youth. From an institutional point of view, the treaty stipulates that the two leaders of France and Germany must meet at least twice a year, the foreign ministers at least three times a year, while their senior officials must hold monthly meetings, alternately in Bonn and Paris. The agreement formalizes enhanced cooperation on defense, education and youth issues, as well as the coordination of cooperation to be defined in terms of development aid to countries in the South. It will *"enable our nationals to benefit, if they wish so, from the nationality of both our countries".*

The Empire strikes back

The counter-offensive was quickly launched. **US Deputy Secretary of State George Ball** was dispatched to Germany. For him, the Elysée Treaty was *"a conspiracy"* and De Gaulle threatened the existence of NATO. Sent to the United States to discuss the matter, German Secretary of State Karl Carstens was lectured by the Americans. President J.F. Kennedy, annoyed that France was now demanding to be paid in gold rather than dollars, made it clear in a threatening letter to Adenauer that if De Gaulle persisted, the United States would drop Germany.

As Benedikt Schoenborn recalls in his book (NOTE 3): *"When the treaty was ratified by the German parliament on May 16, 1963, the Bundestag added a preamble (NOTE 4) which ran counter to the intentions of January 22. In particular, the preamble states that the application of the treaty will be directed 'towards the principal aims' of the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG), namely 'a close association between Europe and the United States (...), the integration of the armed forces of the member states of the (Atlantic) Pact, the unification of Europe (...) with the inclusion of Great Britain'. In short, the preamble contains a list of everything Charles de Gaulle disapproves of."*

Behind closed doors, De Gaulle reacted with fury to the adoption of this preamble, which he described as a *"horrible hat". "The Americans are trying to empty our treaty of its content,"* he fulminated. "*They want to turn it into an empty shell. Why? Because German politicians are afraid of not kowtowing sufficiently to the Anglo-Saxons! They're behaving like pigs! They deserve it if we denounced the treaty and reversed our alliance by coming to terms with the Russians"* (Idem, p. 823).

Conclusion

As we've already said, for most of the mainstream media and many university professors from the Sixties, de Gaulle was nothing more than a vile anti-European populist, increasingly anti-American and pro-Russian.

Worse still, while the Plan Fouchet clearly represents a source of inspiration for tomorrow, most desperate nationalists, any return to its spirit seems like a tasteless fable. They forget that after a dissolution of both the euro and the EU, a new Europe could be created following these principles with the historical core.

What they really hate is the optimistic philosophy that underpins yesterday's Gaullist vision, like today's Chinese New Silk Roads initiative, or any similar hand extended by patriots from other civilizations.

The philosophical pessimism in which they wallow will, if they persist, serve as a comfortable cushion at the bottom of the coffin of misconceptions.

It's up to us to remind them that the master of time is not the master of clocks. For the perilous moment will soon come when financial tsunamis, wars inside our borders and waves of anger will sweep away this Brussels sandcastle built in vain for eternity.

But it's not enough for us to avoid being dragged into their downfall; our challenge is to build, on a European and world scale, an order of détente, understanding and cooperation between nations, towards which our country France must be mediator, catalyst and inspirer.

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NOTES :

1. For the German cardinal-philosopher **Nicholas Cusanus (1406-1467)**, the legitimacy of all forms of earthly power comes primarily from God, but God manifests himself through the collective will. The divine will is therefore the *"causa remota"*, and the free consent of the subjects (the people) the *"causa proxima"* of all authority, ecclesiastical or otherwise.

2. On October 19 and November 2, 1961, in accordance with the mandate given on July 18, 1961 by the Conference of Heads of State and Government of the Six Nations meeting in Bonn, the Fouchet Commission presented a first draft treaty for European political union (Plan Fouchet I). https://www.cvce.eu/obj/projet_de_traite_plan_fouchet_i_2_novembre_1961-fr-485fa02e-f21e-4e4d-9665-92f0820a0c22.html

3. Benedikt Schoenborn, in *La mésentente apprivoisée, De Gaulle et les Allemands, 1963-1969*, Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies (IHEID), Geneva, March 2007. https://books.openedition.org/iheid/1069

4. The **interpretative resolution**, which soon became the castrating **preamble**, was introduced at the request of the US Security Council, a request relayed by Vice-Chancellor **Ludwig Erhard** and German Foreign Minister **Gerhard Schröder**, and passed on by **Carstens** (claiming it was his own idea...).