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Author(s): Martijn LAK

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HOW TO DEAL WITH THE GERMAN MENACE? WEST GERMAN REARMAMENT, PROPOSALS FOR A COMMON EUROPEAN ARMY, AND THE DUTCH AND WEST GERMAN RESPONSE, 1949-1955**Martijn LAK, PhD**

Lecturer, Faculty of Management & Organisation European Studies,
The Hague University of Applied Sciences, The Netherlands
m.lak@hhs.nl

Abstract: *At the end of the 1940s and the early 1950s, the question whether or not to rearm West Germany was a fiercely and hotly debated topic in Europe. The Americans suggested doing this by integrating the Federal Republic in NATO. However, many Europeans feared the resurgence of German militarism. Nowhere was this more true than in France. Therefore, the French Foreign Minister René Pleven launched the so-called Pleven Plan, designed to allow West German units to be established, but only in small units. That way, Europe could profit from West Germany's manpower, without the country becoming a military threat. Discussions on the European Defence Community were tough, but in the end was signed by the six Founding Fathers. The Dutch did so reluctantly, especially because the Americans were left out, favouring security arrangements in NATO and rearming and incorporating West Germany in the Western alliance. To the Netherlands, it was essential to incorporate the British and especially the Americans in the Western defense; the Dutch always favoured an Atlantic alliance, opposing too much supranationality in the European integration project. The Federal Republic of Germany on the other hand, saw it as an opportunity to regain sovereignty. In the end, the French National Assembly did not ratify the EDC-Treaty, opening the way to rearming West Germany and making it a full member of NATO.*

Keywords: The Netherlands, West Germany, West German rearmament, NATO, Pleven Plan, EDC.

Introduction

In late 1951, Siewert Bruins Slot, journalist and member of the Dutch parliament for the Anti-Revolutionary Party and later on MP of the European Coal and Steel Community's parliament,

addressed the Plevén-Plan, the French prime-minister's proposal for a common European army of October 1950. According to Bruins Slot, in principle this plan was a good idea. However, he stated: "The endeavour for a European defense community should not, in any way, interrupt or delay the normal progress of the Atlantic rearmament and build-up of the Dutch army" (Handelingen Tweede Kamer (HTK), 475/2300, 'Vaststelling van Hoofdstuk III (Departement van Buitenlandse Zaken) der Rijksbegroting voor het dienstjaar 1952', 29 November 1951). Bruins Slot's statement was characteristic for the Dutch response towards Plevén's proposal: it above all wanted the Americans and NATO to be responsible for the security of Western Europe.

Emmanuel Macron's recent call for a EU army and a shared defense budget are nothing new. Already during the 1950s, with the Cold War arguably at its peak, a plan was launched for the European Defence Community (EDC). Initiated by the French prime-minister Plevén, it envisioned the resurrection of a force of forty divisions, which should replace the armies of France, the Federal Republic of Germany, Italy and the Benelux countries.

Every bit as revolutionary as Robert Schuman's proposal to supranationally pool European coal and steel, the EDC basically had two goals: to defend Western Europe against the perceived threat of the Soviet Union, and, secondly, to incorporate West Germany in the European defense community without allowing it to have its own army. The re-armament of West Germany had been a hotly and fiercely debated topic since the late 1940s. France resisted West Germany to be part of NATO, and welcomed the Plevén Plan. The EDC-treaty was signed on 27 May 1952, but never came into force as, ironically, the French parliament voted against it in August 1954. Soon afterwards, in May 1955, the Treaty of Paris stipulated that West Germany would indeed be part of the Western European Union (WEU) and NATO, which automatically meant re-arming the country.

This article analyses the thoughts on and initiatives for a European army in the 1949-1955 period. This time-period is chosen, because already at the end of the 1940s such ideas came to the fore, especially in the light of strong and emotional discussions on a possible re-armament of West Germany. Although much has been written on France's role in the design and eventual refusal of the EDC, this article particularly focuses on the Dutch and West German reactions to these ideas and plans, more explicit on the EDC. The Hague and Bonn both supported this idea and were among the signatories, but from different points of view and with varying enthusiasm. The Netherlands, for example, did join the negotiations for the ECSC, but initially denied the invitation

of the same partners to investigate the establishment of the EDC (Segers, 2013). As such, this article can tell us more on the early European integration process and how two of its Founding Fathers responded to it.

The fear of a resurgent German army

When the Treaty of Versailles, which formally ended the First World War, was signed on 28th June 1919, French Marshal Ferdinand Foch stated: “This is not peace; it is an armistice for twenty years” (cited in Murray, 2009). Indeed, with the benefit of hindsight, he was right. Between the start of the First World War in 1914 and the end of the Second World War, referred to by some historians as the Second Thirty Years’ War, Germany plunged Europe and in its wake the world in two devastating world wars. Unlike after the ‘Mutterkatastrophe’ of 1914-1918, when the guns fell silent in Europe on 8 May 1945, the former Third Reich was occupied by the victorious allies. In fact, Germany now no longer existed as an independent and sovereign nation. It was split up in four occupation zones, almost hermetically sealed off from each other, hindering a rapid post-war (economic) recovery of Germany. The Potsdam Conference of 17 July – 2 August 1945, although installing the Allied Control Council (ACC) that was supposed to rule occupied Germany, above all showed, however, that the Americans and British on the one hand and the Soviets and French on the other, had many disagreements. Soon, cracks began to appear in the former wartime alliance, which had, basically, been “a shotgun marriage forged upon them by World War II” (LaFeber, 2006).

Strictly speaking, the British and Americans on the one hand and the Soviets and to a lesser extent French, held totally different views on Germany’s future. Whereas the former, despite early policies that focused on punishing the former enemy, already soon after the end of the Second World War started to focus on integrating Germany in the Western alliance, Moscow and Paris wanted to keep Germany as weak as possible, quite understandable given the events of the Second World War, with France being occupied for four years and the Soviet Union, although it in the end succeeded in decisively defeating the *Wehrmacht*, losing something between 25 and 30 million people, while the whole western part of the Soviet Union was basically one large ruin.

This in practice meant that from its inception, the ACC was incapable of action. As the commanders of the various zones of occupation in practice held a veto in the ACC, “the inherent differences in views concerning occupation objectives could undoubtedly sabotage uniformity of

action between the occupying powers that would and in fact became one of the causes of the division of Germany as early as the summer of 1945” (Szanajda, 2015). Although there is still much debate on when the Cold War actually started, it is clear that relatively soon after the Second World War animosity and suspicion between the Soviets on the one hand and especially the Americans and British on the other strongly increased.

As historian Hans-Peter Schwarz has stated, Walt W. Rostow, the future national security advisor to US President Lyndon B. Johnson in the 1960s and who had been involved in planning US policies towards Germany in 1946, was aware of “the fear, the despair, and the hatred that German warfare, German occupation of Europe, and German atrocities had stirred up. But by 1947 most American decisionmakers had shifted their worries from Germany to the Soviet Union” (Schwarz, 2010). As soon as the White House was convinced that there was no future for cooperation with the Russians, a West German state “would have to be integrated with western Europe in order to succeed” (Westad, 2017).

The impact of the Korean War

When it became clear that the Soviet Union and the United States could not agree on the future of Germany, the division of the country became inevitable, making it the main battle ground of the early Cold War, that began in earnest in the summer of 1947. With the further widening and sharpening of the Cold War as of 1949, the establishment of the Federal Republic of Germany in May 1949 followed by the birth of the German Democratic Republic in October that same year, and especially after the invasion of North Korea of South Korea of June 1950 – which, according to some, offered a possible striking resemblance of the situation in Europe – Western Europe was ever more confronted with the question what to do with West Germany. Without the Federal Republic, there was a huge hole in the Western defense, as by the early 1950s relatively little US and British forces were present in the FRG. For example, only after 1950, when relations between the United States and the Soviet Union further deteriorated, did US troop levels triple between 1950-1953, reaching approximately 250.000 troops in West Germany (Kane, 2004).

In 1950, however, the Western allies united in NATO had nowhere near the 54 divisions estimated to be necessary to defend Germany and in its wake Western Europe from a possible Soviet attack. Between them, the three occupying countries in West Germany – the United States, France and Great Britain – had fewer than 10 division available, with the Americans having

roughly the equivalent of only two divisions, as well as two fighter-bomber groups. In fact, “secretly, American planning for a possible conflict with the Soviet Union assumed that its occupation troops would have to evacuate the continent, returning only at a much later stage of the war” (House, 2011). The Soviet Union, on the other hand, the CIA estimated, had around 3.700.000 men available in its armed forces, with an additional 6.750.000 trained reservists (CIA, 1950). At the same time, in 1949 the CIA did not see signs of the Soviet Union preparing an attack on Western Europe. It above all feared the “increasing danger of an undesired outbreak of hostilities through miscalculation by either side. Such miscalculation could occur in underestimating the determination of the opposing side or in exaggerating its aggressive intentions”. To American planners it was obvious that in one way or another, West Germany would have to contribute to Western Europe’s defense.

In that respect, the Korean War was a decisive moment in the early Cold War, as well as serving as a cataclysm in thinking about Western European security and defense. The conflict, which lasted three years and claimed almost as many American lives as the Vietnam War would in the 1960s and 1970s, also changed opinions on the position of Europe, (West) Germany and possible West German rearmament. The conflict in Korea, combined with the communist coup in Czechoslovakia in 1948 and the Berlin blockade of June 1948 – May 1949, accelerated a shift in the public opinion in Western European countries with regard to the willingness to integrate the Federal Republic so that the economic relations of West Germany – as of the late nineteenth century the dominant European economic (and military) power – with the rest of Europe could be strengthened (Kleßmann, 1991).

As such, the Korean War was not only a turning point in the history of Southeast Asia; the conflict also had important consequences to Europe and the rest of the world: “The conflict militarized international politics far beyond previous levels” (Stueck, 2010; Halberstam, 2007). It stimulated the French and the British to expand their forces considerably, and NATO – until then little more than an American guarantee to interfere, even though Washington had little actual troops deployed in West Germany – became an organisation with a formidable military striking power (Malkasian, 2001). In the early 1950s, for a short time there was even talk of an integrated NATO army (Reynolds, 2006).

Many analysts saw striking resemblances between the situation in Korea and divided Germany. North Korea had attacked the capitalist south; the same could happen in Europe, i.e. a communist

attack from Eastern Europe and an invasion of the western part of the Continent. An attack by the Soviet Union was seen by many as a very real option (Jervis, 1980; Hoffenaar, 2004). It was an important reason that an opinion poll of September 1950 showed that 63 percent of West Germans was prepared to accept West German military forces as part of a European defense system (Jarausch, 2006; Seipp, 2011). The US government now also started thinking about rearming West Germany (Judt, 2007). As early as September 1950, Dean Acheson, the US Secretary of State, proposed to rearm the Federal Republic and make it a full member of NATO.

The European Defence Community

Acheson's proposal came as a huge shock to the Europeans, although Winston Churchill had already suggested that Western forces should include German soldiers (Herbert, 2014). Acheson's initiative caused a hotly and very emotionally laden debate. Many European countries, especially France, rejected the rearmament of West Germany, fearing a renewed German military aggression. Although the Americans had started to increase, by the fall of 1950, their number of divisions in West Germany to five divisions, at the same time "earmarking 3.5 billion dollars in additional defense aid to the Europeans" (House, 2011). Still, the question if and if so how to deal with the military participation of German forces in the Western alliance, remained. It would start a "long, painful and ultimately fruitless debate about German rearmament and how to best effect it while not recreating a sovereign German army" (Hitchcock, 2004). To Paris, the idea of West Germany joining NATO was a phantom, and had to be avoided at every cost (Judt, 2007).

France above all wanted to prevent the establishment of an independent West German army. Therefore, the French came with a solution of their own, very much in line with the earlier initiative for the European Coal and Steel Community, the brainchild of Jean Monnet (Lak, 2016). He wanted "to submerge Germany in international structures, thus providing the stability and prosperity in Western Europe and simultaneously ensuring France's security" (Stone, 2014). The ECSC "would offer an olive branch to Germany while placating French anxieties over German recovery" (Hitchcock, 2010). As the historian Jonathan M. House has stated: "It was no surprise that Monnet should quietly suggest to Plevin [the French minister of Foreign Affairs, M.L.] that France use the model of the Schuman Plan to create a pan-European army" (House, 2011).

What the French and in their wake other European countries were searching for, was an alternative for the creation of an independent West German army. As such, Europe would have to

create its own conventional military forces and integrate German troops in them in one way or another. As stated by historian Tom Buchanan, this was problematic to say the least: “Not only was this economically unpalatable, but it also raised the spectre of the rearmament of West Germany at a time when many still feared German militarism” (Buchanan, 2012).

To find a way out of this dilemma, on 24 October the French launched the so-called Pleven Plan, partially also because the Americans became ever more impatient about rearming West Germany within NATO. Core of the Pleven Plan, also referred to as the European Defense Community (EDC) was to place national units of about 900 men under a supranational organ, which would be governed by a European minister of Defense who was responsible to a European parliament, which at that time did as yet not exist. As the Dutch historian Mathieu Segers has written: “European integration could be the way to control future German forces. As the recovery of the former war industry via the Schuman Plan was embedded in the ECSC, the Pleven Plan should make possible a German rearmament under European auspices” (Segers, 2013).

That way, German forces could participate in a European army, but only with small units: the largest purely German unit would be a battalion of 1000 soldiers. Moreover: these German units were “integrated within multi-national divisions and corps” (House, 2011). There would be no separate German headquarters. However, “other participants in the new army would retain control of those portions of their military forces that were not assigned to the new European army” (House, 2011). To allow the other countries some room to manoeuvre, they kept control over those parts of their armed forces that were not assigned to the European army.

Responses to the Pleven Plan were mixed to say the least, also in France itself. Immediately, a difference emerged between European states that focused more on the Continent and those that looked across the Atlantic for security. The Americans and British preferred Atlantic cooperation. The former, for example, had at least partially backed the Pleven Plan “in the hope of reducing the costs of keeping its troops on the continent” (Hopkins, 2018). Even in France itself, opinions were mixed. The Communists and Gaullists strongly opposed it. Public opinion was divided; polls showed “that 64 percent favored European unity while 57 percent viewed the arming of German troops as a threat to France” (Bronson, 2015). According to historian House, “from the very beginning, French politicians were sceptical of Pleven’s idea. Even Monnet and other supporters of European integration wanted to complete the negotiations for the ECSC before focusing on the military issue” (House, 2011). The German historian Ulrich Herbert agrees to House’s

observation: “In France, the idea of equal membership of the Federal Republic in the EDC from the start met with little approval” (Herbert 2014).

Despite strong opposition, from February 1951 negotiations on the EDC started under the supervision of Schuman in Paris. At first, only France, Italy, Belgium, Luxemburg and West Germany actively participated in these negotiations. Of the six Founding Fathers of the ECSC, only the Netherlands lacked: it followed the British example and only sent an observer to Paris. The negotiations were tough, representatives often being on the brink of despair as agreement seemed impossible. For example, “military envoys suggested that because of language barriers it was far more efficient to use national units of divisional size, around 13.000 to 16.000 soldiers per unit” (Van Dieren, 2013).

Predictably, the French strongly opposed this. In line with the Plevin Plan, they would only agree to smaller units. The issue dragged on endlessly, only to be ended by Dwight D. Eisenhower, supreme commander of NATO forces in Europe, in July 1951. To him, the whole issue was a semantic one. Therefore, he suggested changing the word ‘division’ for ‘groupement’. Curiously enough, the unit size of the latter was the same as the division size proposed earlier. However, ‘for France this new terminology was more acceptable, and the Germans were satisfied, because with these ‘groupements’ they would have at relatively larger military independence’. Despite the tough negotiations, eventually the European Defence Community Treaty was signed on 27th May 1952, “along with contingent documents affirming that once all the signatory countries had ratified the Treaty, the US and Great Britain would cooperate fully with an EDF and that the military occupation of Germany would come to end” (Judt, 2007).

Dutch reactions to the EDC

The Netherlands was the first of the Six Founding Fathers to ratify the EDC-Treaty (Hellema, 2001). However, the Dutch did so very reluctantly, above all because the British and Americans were not formally part of the EDC. Partially on Dutch initiative, the bond between the EDC and the non-participating United States and Great Britain was formally stated. What caused the Dutch reservation and hesitation? One of the main reasons was the fact the United States – seen by the Dutch as the main defender of European security – was basically kept out of the EDC, although they later were enthusiastic about it (Lak, 2017). Indeed, John Fuster Dulles, the US Secretary of State, during a closed session of the North Atlantic Council of 14 December 1953 claimed that the

EDC was a test of Western Europe's ability to bury past differences and build a peaceful future. If this test was not passed, "it would force from the United States and agonizing reappraisal of its foreign policy" (Ruane, 2002), although Dulles did not make explicit what he meant with that. Another important reason for the Dutch hesitation towards to the Pleven Plan – which came as a shock to the Netherlands, as het the Schuman Plan of May 1950 – was that the Dutch government resisted supranational and political integration.

Therefore, in the beginning, the Netherlands refused to participate in the EDC negotiations: it preferred cooperation in security with its British and American partners in NATO. The Dutch government 'was unhappy with the French plans for a European Defence Community and for integration of West Germany's armed forces into a European army [...] At first, the Netherlands only participated in the EDC negotiations as an observer' (Hellema, 2009). On 21st February 1951, the Dutch minister of War and Navy, Hendrik 's Jacob, stated: "The Dutch government has the intention of being represented by a delegation, the character of which will be determined at a later date when concrete proposals have been formulated. Only then will the Dutch government decide if it will join the negotiations in the form of observer or if the delegation will be authorized to actively participate in the discussions" (HTK, 'Aanhangsel tot het verslag van de Handelingen der Tweede Kamer. Vragen, door de leden der Kamer gedaan overeenkomstig art. 116 van het Reglement van Orde, en de daarop door de Regering gegeven antwoorden', 21 February 1951). Especially under strong American pressure did the Dutch government eventually decided to join the EDC-negotiations (Vollaard, Van der Harst, Voerman, 2015), although Dutch historian Duco Hellema has labelled this as "a gesture to please the United States" (Hellema, 200).

In the Dutch case, there was a remarkable difference between the government and the parliament when it came to the EDC-Treaty. With the exception of the orthodox Christians and the communist party – which referred to it as "a Nazi treaty" and "provocation to add fuel to the flames of international tensions" (Brouwer, Van Merriënboer, 2013) – the majority of Dutch parliament strongly supported European integration and the EDC. However, the Dutch government was less enthusiastic. For example, the Dutch minister of Foreign Affairs, Dirk Uipko Stikker, was reserved to say the least. He showed himself to be more in favour of an Atlantic federation. As the Dutch historians Jan Willem Brouwer and Johan van Merriënboer have shown, Stikker feared that the limited geographical scope of the EDC would undermine Atlantic unity (Brouwer, Van Merriënboer, 2013). The minister of Foreign Affairs was of the opinion that the Western alliance

should be as strong as possible, pleading for closer cooperation in the Atlantic alliance (Brouwer, Van Merriënboer, 2013). He also feared dominance by France and Germany, a continuous fear in Dutch European and foreign policy.

When it came to defense, security and foreign policy in general, the Netherlands almost always opted for, as Hellema has stated, “an Atlanticist stand. Successive Dutch cabinets were of the opinion that Dutch interests were best served by the formation of a political and military alliance that would link the United States to Western Europe. This was considered of vital importance, not only as a counterweight against Soviet expansionism but also because American hegemony would stabilize political relations within Western Europe itself” (Hellema, 2009). This became clear during the negotiations on the EDC, in which it was very obvious that the Dutch strategy was one of limiting European political and military integration as much as possible, and involve Great Britain and the United States closely in the Western European defense (Hellema, 2001).

The strong Dutch support for West German rearmament should also be seen, at least partially, in this light. When Acheson launched his plan for rearming the Federal Republic and include it in NATO, the French rejected it fiercely, as they saw this as “a stalking horse for the remilitarization of Germany” (Judt, 2007). The Netherlands, however, warmly welcomed the American proposal, showing itself a strong proponent of West German rearmament and full integration of *Bundesrepublik* in NATO. Already soon after the end of the Second World War, The Hague was convinced of this, or at least of an active West German role in the Western defense. As the Dutch historian Friso Wielenga has stated, pragmatism was the leading element. This was not to say that “discomfort, mistrust and vigilance towards the Federal Republic did not remain strong. But a Western defense demanded that the Netherlands accepted the former enemy as an ally in the East-West conflict” (Wielenga, 2001).

The Dutch cabinet and especially Stikker supported Acheson’s proposal. To start with, it would be beneficial to the Netherlands if they were separated from the Soviet Union by an area that was defended as strongly as possible, instead of a zone in which a military vacuum existed, which would be the case of the Federal Republic remained unarmed. A West German rearmament would shift the frontline hundreds of kilometres to the East, from the river IJssel to the Elbe. However, West German rearmament was only acceptable to the Dutch within an Atlantic framework, i.e. under American guidance (Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amts (PA AA), Berlin, Bd. 93, Microfiche 93-2; Letter Du Mont to West German Ministry of Foreign Affairs, ‘Die niederländische

Haltung in der Frage eines Beitrags der Bundesrepublik Deutschland zu der europäischen Verteidigung', 8 November 1950). At a meeting of the NATO Council in September 1950, the Netherlands indeed was the first member state to officially address the question of West German rearmament (Hoffenaar, 2004).

As of 1948-1949 there was little doubt among Dutch politicians that it was vital to have the FRG as an ally in the Cold War. Already at the end of the 1940s, the Dutch 'German trauma' – caused by the German occupation of the Netherlands during the Second World War – was overshadowed by the fear of communism (Beunders, Selier, 1983). The various postwar Dutch cabinets were utterly convinced that the Federal Republic should be integrated in the Western alliance and be rearmed.

There were also less moral reasons for the Dutch support of West German rearmament. One of them was money. After the start of the Korean War, the Americans pressured the Dutch to increase their defense budget (Brouwer, Megens, 2003). As this was a considerable burden to the Dutch budget, including West Germany in the European defense could ease this burden, in itself a good reason to support West German rearmament. In the words of historian William Mallinson: "Despite their general dislike of the Germans, the Dutch knew that they needed them for economic reasons – since around 1850 Germany had been the Netherlands' most important trading partner – and because the more Germany was brought into Western European Defense, the less they, the Dutch, would have to spend" (Williamson, 2010). Finally, integration of the Federal Republic meant "the necessary Western reinforcement against the Soviet Union. Moreover, West German integration meant that Western Europe could without risk continue the West German recovery, while at the same time profiting from its potential" (Wielenga, 1999; Lak, 2015).

The Dutch position towards the Pleven Plan and the EDC – "an integrated pan-European military" (Hyde-Price, 2018) – should be seen in this context. It also feared French dominance, which was also partially the reason why the Dutch wanted Great Britain to be involved in the EDC. In its opposition towards the EDC the Netherlands joined forces with Belgium. Both opposed a common European budget and armament programs. Moreover, they wanted the bond between the EDC and NATO to be as strong as possible. The Belgian-Dutch tandem had success: there would not be a European minister of Defense, the authority of the EDC would be far less restricted than that of the ECSC, and "EDC-forces would be subordinated to NATO" (Segers, 2013). That the Netherlands in the end decided to join the EDC Treaty had mostly to do with American

pressure, especially when they saw the formation of a European army, without the as yet possibility of the FRG becoming full member of NATO “as the only way to involve Germany in the defense of the West”, as the Dutch Defense Minister Kees Staf stated (cited in Mallinson, 2010). In the words of Mallinson: “The Dutch joined the talks unenthusiastically, with the aim of doing their best to ensure that the European Army idea would not detract from NATO, which was more important to them” (Mallinson, 2010).

Paradoxically, the EDC Treaty was not ratified by the French, as on 30 August 1954 the National Assembly refused to do so. The EDC, “a watershed for the political and military landscape of Europe” (Dwan, 2001), was dead. With it went the idea of a rearmed Germany in a European army. The Netherlands was not unhappy about this, as it reopened the way to full inclusion and rearmament of West Germany in NATO. Rapidly afterwards the United States, Britain and France met in London and Paris. This resulted in the so-called ‘London Agreements’, which “were to form the basis of European defense policy for the next half century” (Judt, 2007). In short, the 1948 Brussels Treaty was extended into the Western European Union (WEU), of which West Germany also became member. The newly established West German army – the *Bundeswehr* – would only be 500.000 men strong, and the FRG joined NATO as a sovereign state in 1955. This defense constellation would last until the end of the Cold War in Europe.

The EDC and West Germany: a chance to regain sovereignty?

Like in the case of the Netherlands, West Germany initially also responded quite reserved to the Plevan Plan, although it did not reject it outright. However, the FRG approached the whole question of a possible European army and West German rearmament from a radically different point of view than did the Dutch government. Whereas the Dutch most of all approached the question from the point of view of security and including the British and especially the Americans in the Western alliance, to the *Bundesrepublik* these questions above all evolved around the possibility to regain parts of its sovereignty. The first *Bundeskanzler*, Konrad Adenauer, initially saw little in an autonomous German army, “fearing a resurgence of militarism [...] Adenauer opposed either an autonomous Federal Army or the service of Germans in other armies [...] Thus, while the possibility of German troops was openly discussed in 1949-50, there was too much opposition (and German reluctance) to resolve the issue” (House, 2011). In fact, in a speech to his CDU/CSU in January 1949, Adenauer had stated: “Should, in due time, German units be

established, these cannot be German forces, but ‘European’ forces, in which German forces are integrated” (as cited in Ebert, 2013). This all changed with the outbreak of the Korean War, which made the possible rearmament of West Germany ever more urgent.

Adenauer saw a chance of taking a leap forward in regaining German sovereignty. He saw the EDC as a way to do so, and perhaps via this institution also achieve membership of the FRG of NATO (Ebert, 2013). He declared himself to be willing to contribute to a European army with German troops, but in exchange demanded the end of the Occupation Statute and full sovereignty of the Federal Republic (Herbert, 2014). From the birth of the *Bundesrepublik* in 1949 onwards, this had been the main goal of Adenauer. However, he had little room to manoeuvre because of restrictions imposed by the Allied powers. Nevertheless, the Chancellor had two, partially overlapping goals. Via ‘Westbindung’ and ‘Westintegration’ the FRG should be integrated in the Western bloc (Kitchen, 2000).

In practice this meant integrating West Germany in European and Atlantic organisations by reaching agreements with the Western allies. As such, Adenauer endeavoured for a recovery of West German sovereignty and an equal place in Europe (Boterman, 2005). The Chancellor was heavily criticized, both externally as well as internally. A member of the communist party labelled him “nothing but an American general” (cited in Van Clemen, 2009), while Adenauer’s main rival, Kurt Schumacher, the leader of the social-democrats, referred to him as “Chancellor of the Allies” (cited in Kleßmann, 1991).

Nevertheless, the Pleven Plan opened new possibilities for improving West Germany’s sovereignty. As had been the case with the ECSC, the Pleven Plan was above all of importance from a political point of view (Lak, 2016). Even though the French proposal was in fact discriminatory towards West Germany – after all, Germany could not have units larger than battalion size and there was to be no separate West German military headquarters, for example – Adenauer was prepared to approve the proposal.

In a discussion in the West German parliament – the *Bundestag* – in November 1950 he stated that he saw the Pleven Plan as an essential contribution to the integration of Europe. In his words: “We are of the opinion, that the establishment of a European army – possible including Great Britain – is an important step on the way to the end goal: European integration” (Deutscher

Bundestag, 98th Meeting, Bonn, 8 November 1950).¹ Adenauer's statement was strongly criticized, especially by Schumacher, who stated that "the spirit of the Pleven Plan is not that of reconciliation" (Deutscher Bundestag, 98th Meeting, Bonn, 8 November 1950).² Adenauer was prepared to agree to the Pleven Plan, but only under the provision that West Germany would have the full and same rights. As Adenauer stated in the West German parliament: "A European defense community is impossible when one of its members is occupied. Therefore, the end of the Occupation Statute is a precondition for the EDC-Treaty" (Deutscher Bundestag, 221st Meeting, Bonn, 9 July 1950).³ As Herbert has stated: "To him, it was decisive that the establishment of a European Defence Community and the revision of the Occupation Statute were linked" (Herbert, 2014). However, this would not be the case. Although West Germany would have to form an army of around 400.000 men, revision of the Occupation Statute was as yet out of the question to the Allies, let alone give the FRG full sovereignty. In short, "one needed the Germans, but they were not trusted" (Herbert, 2014). Adenauer resented this. For example, in an interview with CBS in December 1950, he had stated that only if the German forces were considered equal and treated as such in a moral and material way, they would be useful and reliable ally (Interview Adenauer with CBS, 22 December 1950). At the same time, the fact that no state could have more divisions than France – i.e. at the most four – led Adenauer to claim to the Belgian Foreign Minister Paul Henri Spaak that this would make the combined strength of the EDC "militarily worthless" (Conversation Adenauer with Spaak, 18 August 1954; <https://www.konrad-adenauer.de/dokumente/gespraeche/1954-08-18-gespraeche-spaak?highlight=Truppe> [Accessed 28/11/2018])

Adenauer's main opponent in parliament, the social-democratic SPD, opposed the EDC, like it opposed most attempts at European integration as well as NATO membership in the 1950s (Bootsma, 2017). Schumacher and his immediate successor Erich Ollenhauer had different views on Adenauer's strategy of *Westbindung* and especially the West German contribution to defense alliances that might be the result of it (Hanke, 2005). Above all, the SPD rejected the EDC as it saw such a West German contribution as, in the words of Ollenhauer, "incompatible with the

¹ The original reads: "Wir betrachten den Pleven-Plan als einen wesentlichen Beitrag zur Integration Europas [...] Wir sind der Auffassung, daß die Schaffung einer europäischen Armee – möglichst unter Teilnahme Englands – einer sehr wesentlichen Fortschritt zu dem Wege zur Erreichung des Endzieles: Integration Europas, bedeuten wird".

² The original reads: "Denn der Geist des Planes Pleven ist nicht der Geist der Aussöhnung".

³ The original reads: "Keine Europäische Verteidigungsgemeinschaft ist möglich mit einem Staat, der unter Besatzungsstatut steht. Daher ist die Aufhebung der Besatzungsstatut Voraussetzung des Vertrages über die Europäische Verteidigungsgemeinschaft".

German reunification” (Deutscher Bundestag, 47th Meeting, Bonn, 7 October 1954).⁴ When the French National Assembly voted against the EDC Treaty, shortly afterwards Ollenhauer sneered: “All doubts of the SPD on the establishment and workability of the EDC were seen as ‘un-European’ and put aside as pure ‘no-politics’ [...] The social-democratic assessment of the continuation of the integration policy has shown itself to be far more realistic than that of the government and governing parties” (Deutscher Bundestag, 47th Meeting, Bonn, 7 October 1954).⁵

In fact and somewhat cynical, the French refusal to sign the EDC Treaty in August 1954 offered a far better chance to Adenauer for regaining sovereignty. With the failure of a European army, the British and American returned to their original plan of an independent West German army integrated in NATO. For the West German government this was far more beneficial, as it gained for more sovereignty here than it would have in the EDC. Churchill, the one who had opened the whole discussion on West German rearmament, had referred to the EDC as “a sludgy amalgam”, and told Eisenhower that he did not blame the French for refusing the plan, only for inventing it (Lundestad, 1998). In Bonn, these remarks likely met strong approval. The rearmament of West Germany could now, finally, start in earnest.

Conclusions

When, in October 1950, French Foreign Minister René Pleven launched his plan for a European army, including West German units, he left many in Europe completely stunned. Every bit as revolutionary as the Schuman Plan launched in May that year, Pleven’s plan proposed an alternative for including national German units in NATO, at a moment in time when the Americans had begun suggesting rearming West Germany to strengthen the Western defense against a possible and highly anticipated attack by the Soviet Union. The question prevalent at the end of the 1940s, with the Cold War reaching boiling point after the Berlin Blockade, the definitive division of Germany in the FRG and GDR and the Soviet Union’s for explosion of an atomic bomb, became even more urgent when the Korean War started in June 1950.

However, the French strongly opposed the resurrection of an independent West German army. The Pleven Plan was basically designed to profit from West German manpower, but limiting independent German units to at the most 1000 men. There was to be no separate German

⁴ The original reads: “Hier lag einer der wesentliche Gründe für unsere Ablehnung der EVG”.

⁵ The original reads: “Alle Zweifel der Sozialdemokratie an der Möglichkeit des Zustandekommens und an der Wirksamkeit der EVG-Lösung wurden als Ausdruck einer uneuropäischen Einstellung und als eine reine Verneinungspolitik beiseitegeschoben [...] The sozialdemokratische Bedeutung für die Durchsetzung der Integrationspolitik hat sich als weit realistischer erwiesen als die Vorstellungen der Regierung und der Regierungsparteien”.

headquarters, and in many other respects the Pleven Plan was discriminatory as well. The proposal for the European Defence Community (EDC) met with strong opposition and criticism. Nevertheless, in 1952 the EDC-Treaty was signed by the Six Founding Fathers of European integration.

Both the Netherlands and West Germany joined the negotiations about the EDC, but for very different reasons. The former at first only joined as observer, only later, under strong American pressure, did it, paradoxically as the first, sign the EDC-Treaty. The Dutch reservations were above all caused by the fact that Great Britain and the United States were not part of the plan, and the fear of French dominance. The Netherlands were of the opinion that Western European security could only be achieved if the British and above all the Americans were part of the common European defense. Therefore, the Dutch tried to prevent, in tandem with Belgium, the EDC getting a too supranational and political character. In this, these countries succeeded. In the end, the French National Assembly did not ratify the EDC-Treaty, much to the relieve of The Hague, which had always preferred security cooperation in NATO and making a rearmed West Germany a fully-fledged member of the organisation.

The Federal Republic of Germany also signed the EDC-Treaty, but for different reasons. To Adenauer, joining the EDC would offer the chance of regaining (parts of) West German sovereignty, so severely restricted by the Western allies. Although the West German forces were not treated on equal footing in the EDC, it did offer prospects in that direction. Moreover, Adenauer – who initially had been reluctant to establish an independent German army – saw the Pleven Plan as a further step towards European integration, although certainly not all in West German politics agreed to that. With the failure of the EDC-Treaty in August 1954, the British and Americans returned to their old plan, i.e. the rearmament of West Germany and incorporating it in NATO. This indeed allowed the FRG to regain much of its sovereignty, which had after all been the main of Adenauer's 'Westbindung' and 'Westintegration'.

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