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The appeals for a European defence coming from various quarters, and in particular from French president Sarkozy, provide a reminder – should one be needed – of the fact that, as yet, such a defence does not exist, and that no European country is in a position, by itself, to guarantee its own security or to help promote peace. However, these appeals present a serious flaw: they do not see, or feign not to see, that the question of Europe's defence cannot be solved without first overcoming the problem of the national sovereignties, and their aim is to conserve, or at best to deepen, the level of cooperation among the European states in the ambit of the traditional international treaties.

In July, 1951, addressing the Europeans, still reeling from the disasters of the Second World War, Eisenhower (then General Eisenhower) urged them to lose no time in becoming "truly a unit", in creating "a workable European federation". Indeed, in Eisenhower's opinion, it was illusory and misleading to talk of European security and defence purely in terms of cooperation, since cooperation was bound not only to be inadequate in the long term, but also to be mistrusted by the very peoples called upon to support it, and would only encourage Europe's enemies in their intention to infiltrate and overpower. Now, more than fifty years on, Eisenhower's appeal still goes unheeded; and yet the reasons he gave the Europeans for creating a true federation remain historically and politically valid and as urgent as ever. People nowadays tend to forget that the situation in Europe, where war is impossible, at least within the EU, is not only the fruit of European integration and of its undoubted successes, but also the consequence of the progressive downsizing, during the last century, of the power of the European states vis-à-vis the USA and the USSR. As the power of the Europeans dwindled, they found themselves forced by the turn of events to launch the era of cooperation and integration, geared towards unification, that they had proved unable to start of their own spontaneous and rational volition. However, they also became hostage to a highly fragile world order which today faces difficult and testing situations that, in their gravity and extent, are every bit as dangerous as those of the past.

The hope of many Europeans that, following the collapse of the USSR, a multinational army under America's leadership would be enough to guarantee security in and outside Europe soon proved unfounded. In the space of just a few years, the fear of global war was replaced by the fear of growing instability. This instability was reflected in a rapidly increasing number of more limited wars that, while circumscribed, are now widespread in almost all the continents and there seems to be no way out of them. These are wars that have devoured and are continuing to devour more and more human, material and financial resources. According to numerous studies conducted on behalf of different governments, this situation, worrying enough in itself, looks set to become, from a security point of view, even more fragile, due mainly to the pressure exerted by three new phenomena. First, there is the overstretching of the US army, which is now present in well over a hundred countries and is exhausting its capacity to engage in any other tasks of international policing or control. Second, there is the predictable accentuation of the imbalances between world regions due to the negative effects of climate change on the environment and on the economies, an accentuation bound to draw a growing number of states into situations of tension and disorder. Finally, there is the contest – already under way – between the states to gain or remain in control of the supply of increasingly scarce raw materials, which is threatening to trigger dangerous re-armament policies, defensive in their intentions but bound to have untoward effects on the evolution of international relations.

There is a further, crucial aspect of international security that puts the Europeans in an increasingly vulnerable position and it is that of the risks linked to the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and the use of the nuclear deterrent. Not only does the proliferation of nuclear weapons look set to extend to other countries within missile range of Europe, but the situation is also aggravated by the persistence of the Russian-American nuclear threat, which,

according to the agreements between Reagan and Gorbachev, should have been eliminated by the end of the last century, but instead looks likely to re-ignite, as is shown by the current dispute over the installation of the American anti-missile shield and Russia's parallel programme to update her nuclear arsenal. It should not be forgotten, moreover, that Russia and the USA together have an arsenal of over twenty thousand warheads – around half of which are operational – and that the possibility of this being reduced to just “a few” thousand by the end of 2012 seems to be becoming increasingly remote. Europe bears much of the responsibility for this new military escalation. It was to compete for Europe that the USA and USSR first embarked on the arms race, while today it is on account of Europe's permanent weakness that Russia and the USA are once more facing each other down over the chessboard of Europe. The fact is that the Europeans, by opting not to turn EURATOM into the embryo of an efficient supranational European agency in the nuclear sphere (which is what Monnet advocated), but, above all, by failing to build, even though it was within their possibilities to do so, a supranational continental government equipped to rise to the challenges of the nuclear era, have made two damaging mistakes: on the one hand they have created a dangerous power vacuum, and on the other they have failed to show the world the way of peace and failed to prove that, even after centuries of conflict, states can unite.

Today, in these conditions, the Europeans are unable to assume and maintain an autonomous and authoritative position vis-à-vis the national policies of other states in the nuclear sector and every time the problem of the proliferation of nuclear weapons starts looking as though it could provoke a crisis, as in the case of North Korea or of Iran, they are forced simply to align themselves with the positions of the dominant power. Furthermore, the question of Europe's implementing a policy of nuclear deterrence, which would be a central pillar of its independent defence, continues to be taboo. Germany, first and foremost, rejects absolutely the prospect of becoming involved in an ambitious common project of this kind. Meanwhile, Great Britain's power of deterrence is so deeply integrated with that of the US that it cannot really even be thought of as European. Finally, the present French deterrent, which, were it already under the control of a European power would probably on its own be great enough to fulfil a global function, being geared solely to the purposes and protection of French national interests, is simply anachronistic.

In conclusion, where should the Europeans start in an attempt to build, in a truly independent fashion, their own defence? In the light of what we have said, there seem to be three problems that can no longer be avoided: first, there is the problem of *defining the power* that would have to be created in order to affirm in actions, and not just in words, Europe's independence in the sphere of security, in full awareness of the fact that it is only once they are truly independent that the Europeans will be in a position to decide what type of relationship and what policies they intend to establish, as *equal partners*, with the USA and with the world's other poles of power; b) second, there is the problem of identifying the *framework* in which the creation of this power is possible and thus pursuable, accepting that, just as a 27-state European defence is currently inconceivable, so too is a common European defence that includes Great Britain – to mention the main, but not the only, country opposed to such a development in European politics; c) third, there is the problem of creating a *General Staff of the combined European forces*, which will have operational capacities in both the conventional and the nuclear sphere, and which will be directly answerable to a sovereign European power.

Only if a serious debate on these issues can be entered into will it become possible to bring the question of Europe's defence out of the sphere of rhetoric and into that of concrete political initiative. Only then will the uncomfortable truth over Europe, which today many fail to recognise, become patently clear: until such time as France and Germany renounce *together* their ambiguous national policies and launch *together* a campaign to enter into, along with other European founder member states, a federal pact that will give rise to the first core of a European federal state, any ideas Europe may have of becoming independent and of cooperating on an *equal footing* with the other powers are destined to remain in the realm of fantasy.

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