The Testing Ground for Postwar European Integration: the 1950s

The European integration process in the 1940s focused on the establishment of the framework upon which postwar European integration was to be built. There were two choices: either to create a pan-European federalist third force independent of the US and the USSR, or to confine the integration process to Western Europe under the limitations imposed by the Cold War policies of the two superpowers. The latter won. Once the framework of postwar European integration as a whole was established, the next phase involved the nature in which the various fields of integration, such as economic, security and political, would proceed. It was a question of whether they would be part of one overarching process of integration, or separate processes in their own right, totally divorced from each other. Just as the 1940s determined the framework for postwar European integration as a whole, the 1950s determined the framework for postwar European security cooperation in particular.

There were two periods as regards European security cooperation in the 1950s. In the first period, European security cooperation was pursued as an integral part of the European integration process, as the next logical step following the establishment of the European Coal and Steel Community. Within this framework, security and defence cooperation as well as economic cooperation were to form part of a larger structure of federal political union. In the second half of the decade, European security cooperation emerged as a means of achieving other goals which were not necessarily linked to the goal of European integration as a whole. These other goals included the incorporation of West Germany into Western defence, and seeking ways to overcome the financial and technological constraints on the independent nuclear programmes of Britain and France. The turning point which divided the first period from the other was the failure of the European Defence Community initiative in 1954. This was followed by the establishment of NATO as the main security-defence forum for Western Europe. This had the effect of severing Western European security cooperation from the wider process of European integration.

In both the first half and the second half of this decade, a major precipitance for European security cooperation was the requirement for incorporating West
Germany into a Western European security framework. Closer European integration, expanding to the area of defence, provided an alternative means of accommodating this problem. Since German rearmament remained a sensitive issue for most, a practicable solution seemed to lie in integrating Germany’s contributions to Western defence within a larger, closely integrated European framework for security and defence.

The 1950s also became a testing ground for postwar European integration. Attempts at European integration within this decade led to a discovery of the boundaries imposed on European security integration. For example, the failure of the European Defence Community proved that within this postwar framework, Western Europe could not integrate to the extent of forming a federal establishment dealing with high politics such as foreign policy and defence matters, or a European army independent of NATO. However, closer integration proved possible in the economic field, and the initial success of the European Coal and Steel Community proved that federalism was not such a taboo subject in narrow technical fields, as opposed to foreign policy and defence issues. This decade also established the norm for European security to be the subordination of collective Western European defence efforts under US leadership.

As in the previous decade, the dynamics of Western European security integration within this period were largely governed by external variables. These became evident with the limits imposed on European security cooperation through the norms of the Cold War, and through the role of the Alliance, which by the middle of this decade emerged as the main security forum in Western Europe. Even the question of German rearmament was precipitated by external dynamics – the outbreak of the Korean War which brought home the urgency of credible defence in Western Europe, and signified the requirement for a German contribution to Western Europe’s defence. Within this background, Western European security cooperation began to take place as an effort to address these related issues.

1950–1954: SECURITY COOPERATION AS PART OF A WIDER INTEGRATION PROCESS

_Drafting the Concept of a European Defence Community_

By the end of the 1940s, the European recovery programme was under way. Integration as confined to Western Europe became intensified in the economic field as the Schuman Plan to bring the production of European coal and steel under a supranational authority had been launched. The Soviet threat was existent but there was no urgency to prepare for an imminent Soviet invasion.