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The Idea of Europe Between the World Wars:
Hopes, Problems, and Paradoxes

Abstract: The history of the European integration project after the end of the Second World War is familiar. However, the opinions, hopes, expectations, and paradoxes that went into the idea of a common Europe are still not often investigated or discussed. The topic of what inspired the thinking of people such as Louis Loucheur, Richard Coudenhove-Kalergi, Jean Monnet, Arthur Salter, Gustav Stresemann, Aristide Briand and Altiero Spinelli— that is, people of diverse backgrounds, ways of thinking, and experiences—requires dispassionate and discursive analysis. If, at the height of a nationalist frenzy on the European continent, Monnet's stated objective was to bring about "a union among people" and not "coalitions between States," then why was the latter pursued? Similarly, for the British civil servant Arthur Salter, why was it necessary to work on a European project when the country to which he belonged was, if not outrightly skeptical, not overenthusiastic about it? What compelled Altiero Spinelli to draft the famous Ventotene Manifesto advocating a federalist idea of Europe? Or what were the motivations of Henry Spaak in advising/requesting Monnet to keep the political dimension of the "project" disguised as "economic cooperation" (involving a dismantling of trade barriers)? And was the idea of a common Europe the product of the hyper-idealism that came to reside in European thinking in the wake of President Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points Declaration? Or was the idea a product of Nazi expansionism? Or was it a counter-response to a putative reemergence of the latter in the unknown future? This paper endeavors to find explanations for some of these questions. In the process, it will also attempt to make sense of the forces and necessities that helped crystalize the idea that there was a need for a common European space, a supra state, or as Monnet famously said, "a community of nations."

Keywords: Common Europe, Monnet, Spinelli, Third Reich, Salter, Churchill, Woodrow Wilson, Kelergi, United Europe, Funk, Briand, Ventotene Manifesto

Introduction

In 1789, on the eve of the French Revolution, German playwright Gothhold Ephraim Lessing perceptively opined that

[Modern man] often achieves very accurate insights into the future, but he cannot wait for the future to come. He wants to see the future accelerated, and also wants to do the accelerating himself. For what is there in it for him, if what he sees to be desirable is not brought about in his lifetime? (Blanning 2000: 1).

This insightful statement about the nature of the modern human subject gives us a vantage point from which to delve deeper into the ideas, opinions, objectives, and methods that went into forming the idea of the European Union—the conceptualization of the European space as a transnational entity in the critical decades of the 1920s and 1930s, that is, almost a quarter of a century before the idea became a reality. Thus, this paper

will attempt to understand critically how Jean Monnet, Arthur Salter, Altierro Spinelli, and Henry Spaak arrived at the idea of a "United States of Europe." It will also attempt to place the ideas and efforts of these men in the larger historical context.

Mapping the Embryonic Core:
Economic Integration, Political Union, and Mitigation of Conflict

In the epigraph to his *Memoirs*, Jean Monnet stated that "we are not forming coalitions between States, but union among people" (Monnet 1978: 10). This sentence gives us a peek at the nature and objective of the "project" (as it came to be known in the ranks of its adherents). As Monnet explained toward the end of his *Memoirs*, he realized that sovereign nations had outlived their usefulness in the face of the challenges of the twentieth century: they were incapable of resolving either their internal challenges or those involved in interstate relations. The only way forward out of the morass was to strive to bring together a "community of nations."[1] The potential to create a "better future and world" resided only in the latter (Monnet 1978: 524). How could this idea be translated into reality? The path involved the creation of a "project" centered at Brussels but operating through the administrative apparatus of the national administrations of the member states of the European Community. Thus, like a shadow—a constant, unremarked presence—it would operate through the moorings of traditional politics and its institutions. And therein resided its power: it would be undetected yet be comprehensive and all encompassing.

It would not be an exaggeration to state that in terms of political and economic impact on the European continent, the First World War was of equal if not greater consequence than

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[1] For a general understanding of the concept of Europe in the context of cosmopolitanism, with due discussions of social, political, and economic aspects (see: McCormick 2010). It is to be acknowledged, though, that the imagination of a common and united Europe did not owe its origins exclusively to the reflections of Jean Monnet upon the subject. His conceptualization was rather unusual, in more ways than one. The concept, in one form or the other, has a long history and can be traced back to medieval times. For an acquaintance with the ways in which the notions of "Europe" and the "Western World" came to conjoined during the medieval and early modern period (see: Hansen et al. 2023; Pagden 2002; Mikkeli 1998). In the modern period, we find that not only people of eminence and philosophers were commenting on the idea, but also that it seriously engaged the thinking and policies of monarchs as well, especially Napoleon Bonaparte and the tsars of Russia. For classical Enlightenment and literary thinking about a possible common Europe in terms of its culture and society (see: Seth and von Kulessa 2017). Regarding Bonaparte's vision and efforts, Martijn van der Burg writes:

> By 1810, the Napoleonic Empire, almost at the height of its power, encompassed much of Continental Europe. The vast European Empire was the outcome of more than a decade of French power politics. Soon after general Napoleon Bonaparte had seized power in 1799, he strove to unite Europe under the leadership of the French. Initially, he formed alliances and founded vassal states, but increasingly he sought to bind the nations of Europe to France by conquering them and transforming them into French departments. Napoleon continued a policy that was developed earlier by French revolutionaries. Present-day Belgium and the German territories situated on the left bank of the Rhine had already been conquered by French forces and incorporated into the French Republic. After that, large parts of Central Europe and Italy gradually followed. As his Empire grew, Bonaparte began to fantasize about a unified Europe—an entity organized according to his principles. His desire to rule from above and to destroy local diversity was a recurring element in his policy. Admittedly, Napoleon never had a definite master plan for Europe, but undeniably he did start to regard uniformity as essential (for details see: van der Burg 2021: 2).

For the vision of the tsars in regard to a possible unification of Europe in its eastern, central and southern regions, with reference to the call of Slavic solidarity and unity (see: Karl and Skordos 2019).

its much more destructive successor, the Second World War. In geopolitical terms, it not only redrew the map of the old European continent and did away with old empires,[2] it also created the conditions for future conflict (in spite of President Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points, which included the "right to national self-determination" and a much vaunted call for the establishment of a League of Nations to manage international affairs). Built into this noble vision was also the idea that the exercise of independence and autonomy "of and by the people" would be institutionalized and promoted. What emerged, though, was a situation where even the miniscule number of democracies on the European continent— at the end of the Great War—had ceased to be democracies two decades later. European countries were then under the jackboot of either fascist or some other kind of authoritarian regimes. The Great War, though, along with its overt impact, had its subterranean effects as well. And one of the lasting and most consequential was the dawning of a realization, in certain quarters of European thought, that concrete, constructive, and consequential efforts must be made to deal decisively with the historical causes of conflicts on the European continent. This was partly also the product of the hyper-idealism generated by the end of the War and the conditions in its aftermath. Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points declaration envisioned a new order for Europe: an order in which the old imperial structures would cease to exist and instead would be replaced by new entities based on the idea of national self-determination (Churchill 2002a: 3–24). Inherent in this hope was the need to draw a new map of the old continent.

As has been amply documented, the First World War left Europe in shambles. This previously unimaginable disaster deeply scarred the people of Europe with the fear that another such conflict would lead to irreversible, all-round destruction. Unfortunately, that insufficiently articulated fear became a grotesque reality two decades later. After the Second World War, the conditions were indeed such that there was no "peace treaty for the vanquished and no respite for the victor" (Arendt 1985: vii). However, in the immediate aftermath of the Great War, in accord with this fear and the tragic experience of the conflict, many people in Europe started to think in earnest that a permanent end must be put to the possibility of recurrence. And the form this thinking took was the conceptualization of the European space as a "community of nations" that would gradually progress toward the establishment of a supra state (Ifversen 2002: 14–31).

The conceptualization, however, had twin dimensions. As was to be expected, one was economic and the other political. This becomes quite evident on reading Arthur Salter's observations. In his understanding, a common, united Europe should involve a hierarchized enterprise beginning in a political form and then finally metamorphosing into an economically integrated edifice (Salter 1933: 92). This line of thinking, though, came to be reversed when actual and concrete—albeit nascent—efforts were made in the wake of the Second World War. Then, instead of efforts being directed toward a political union, the idea of economic integration began to be emphasized. Among western European countries, the cre-

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[2] It should be noted that in 1918, at the end of World War I, the political map of Europe had undergone a fundamental alteration. The autocratic empires of yore, namely the Hohenzollern, Habsburg, Ottoman, and Russian empires, had become articles of history. Following peace treaties, the continent was transformed and its political map was redrawn, witnessing the birth of new states in Austria, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Romania, Poland, the Baltics, Finland, Germany, Yugoslavia, and Turkey. For details see: Kershaw 2016: 93–48.

ation of the Steel and Coal Union was a prime example. A long-arch argument can be drawn that economic interdependence would have led to political amalgamation, especially when considered from the vantage point of the Cold War, ideological polarization, the different levels of economic and political development in European countries, and other complexities of Europe at the time, which was rife with historical animosities. In other words, it is possible that the contingencies of the time necessitated the emphasis on the economic aspect.

(1920s) The "United States of Europe": Initial Ideas and Federative Thinking

The lead-up to this point, however, had complicated antecedents. And it all began in the course of the First World War itself. If for Britain the most consequential battle of the war was the battle of Somme in 1916, for France and Germany, it was the battle of Verdun. The impact of Verdun was profound on the psyche of both nations. In the aftermath of that prolonged war of attrition with colossal human costs, it dawned on some people in these countries that an important reason for the hyper-grotesqueness of the war had been the unleashing of the industrial power of hostile entities. And not only was industrial power blamed for the grotesqueness of the war but also it was rather perceived to have been the primal cause of the war itself. And indeed it is true in more ways than one that the war evolved as a contest between the rival and mutually antagonistic industrial systems of the two major countries of west-central Europe, that is, Germany and France.

In regard to this aspect of the conflict, Louis Loucheur, the man in charge of French industrial efforts for the war, concluded that industrial organization played a paramount role in any conflict. Thus, if conflicts were to be avoided in the future, there was an absolute need to either lessen or dilute the effective control of sovereign powers over certain industries, namely coal and steel, and to transfer the same managerial authority to the collective command of a "higher authority" that would transcend individual nations and sovereignties. This "higher authority" was expected to operate as the custodian of a lasting peace. In other words, the argument was that the maintenance of a lasting peace required taking control of resources out of the hands of individual countries, since such control had previously provided them with the means to wage and sustain conflicts (Carls 1993: 33, 264).

The First World War came to an end in 1918. Along with the excruciating experience of devastation and suffering, it was a time of idealism as well. Thus, provisions were made to establish a League of Nations in order to maintain a lasting peace on the European continent. It was also a time of warm relations between Aristide Briand, France's minister of foreign affairs, and Gustav Stresemann, chancellor of Germany, and the resultant drawing up of the Locarno Treaty of 1925, which guaranteed mutual security for France and Germany, and was supported by Belgium, Italy, and Britain. One of the consequences of this development was the admission of Germany to the League of Nations, followed by expansive hopes of Franco-German economic collaboration. These developments gave impetus to the idea of establishing a "United Europe" mirroring the structure of the United States of America.

In this euphoric milieu, the idea of states "unified" or "united" into a single Europe started to gain traction among the leading members of European politics, industry, and

intellectual life. The antecedents of the idea, in fact, can be traced to a time when the war was still raging. In 1918, Italian businessman Giovanni Agnelli argued in a seminal text that a federal Europe must be explored if the challenge of destructive nationalism on the European continent were seriously to be countered. In 1922, this idea caught the imagination of another important person, Count Richard Coudenhove-Kalergi (Vaughan 1979). In his book *Pan Europa*, Coudenhove-Kalergi, in agreement with Louis Loucheur, argued that a sustainable peace on the European continent required that the French steel and German coal industries be merged into a "pan-European" industry. As posited earlier, such a development, according to him, would have formed the basis for the emergence of a United States of Europe modelled on the American state.

In 1924, Louis Loucheur, the progenitor of this idea went on to campaign in support of a "customs union" among European states, which had initially been proposed by the French economist Charles Gide. This idea found articulation in other forms as well. In 1924, Sir Max Waechter, a British industrialist and founder of the European Unity League, argued on similar lines that the path to European federation would inevitably have to follow the establishment of a customs union or "common market"—not solely for lasting peace, but for the continent to be able to compete economically with the commercial might of the United States and Japan in times to come. However, to return to Coudenhove-Kalergi, it is essential to mention that he thought the federative project entailed not an eradication of national specificities or a dilution of the powers of sovereign states but a celebration of the "continental spirit": a harmonious, coordinated, and collaborative imagination of Europe through which its constituent elements would work together for the common good.

Coudenhove-Kalergi was remarkably successful in communicating his ideas to a wide array of people, ranging from intellectuals to people in business and politics.[3] In 1926, this vision became the pivot around which a European Congress in Vienna was organized, with more than 2,000 people attending it from different fields, such as politics, academia, business, and journalism. The following year—that is, in 1927—Aristide Briand was elected honorary president of the Pan-Europa movement. In the same year, Briand, a staunch advocate of the League of Nations, applied to the then US secretary of state, Frank Billings Kellogg, for help in bringing about a "non-aggression pact" between Germany and France in which they would forever renounce war as an instrument of policy (Roobol 2002: 32–46; Briand 1930: 9–14). The result of the proposal was the Kellogg-Briand Pact of 1929, in which 57 states, along with France and Germany, agreed not to have recourse to war (Ferrell 1969: 266–269). Following this development, on September 7, 1929, after a discussion with Gustav Stresemann, Briand proposed to the League of Nations the idea

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[3] Thus, among the men of intellect, we find Pablo Picasso (a Spanish artist), Albert Einstein (a German-born physicist), Guillaume Apollinaire, St. John Perse, Paul Valery (French writers), Karl Tucholsky (a left-wing intellectual of the Weimar Republic), Luigi Einaudi (a left-wing, Italian lawyer) and Edo Fimmen (of Holland, chairman of the International Transport Workers' Federation), who were not only favorably disposed but even enthusiastic about the idea. Amidst the ranks of polity, the idea appealed not only to people in a higher position but to youngsters as well. Hence, Gustav Stresemann (co-author of the Locarno Pact), along with Konrad Adenauer (the then mayor of Cologne), were as supportive of it as were the French prime ministers Edouard Herriot and Leon Blum, and the long-serving foreign minister and co-author of the Locarno Pact, Aristide Briand. In fact, in 1930 Edouard Herriot published a book titled *The United States of Europe* (see: Herriot and Reginald James Dingle 1930; Booker and North 2005: 20).

of a federal link for Europe. Imagining the "menace of American economic power" to be a threat to Europe, he thought a "federal link" among the geographically grouped peoples of the continent would be an association operating in the economic sphere (Fischer 2017: 56–77). He was convinced that from a social and political standpoint the "federal link" would not impinge on the sovereignty of any of the nations that might be part of it. On the contrary, according to him, such an arrangement would benefit them (Gladwyn Jebb 1966: 23; Fischer 2012).

Moving ahead with the idea, in 1930, Briand drafted and circulated to different national administrations of Europe a note outlining a federative vision of the continent. The idea was that for lasting peace and socio-economic prosperity, Europe was in absolute need of being arranged into a federative structure. It was hoped that the vision could be translated into practice under the aegis of the fledgling, super-state organization called the League of Nations. The notion that there should be no compromise, at least overtly, of the sovereign powers of the states was inherent. Rather there was a clear emphasis on conceptualizing Europe along lines of political cooperation. In other words, it can be argued that this vision involved the sublimation of ideas for integration concentrated on economics in favor of political ideas, and consequently, the problem of European integration became more of a political enterprise and less of an economic one. Along with this shift in focus, the primary issue came to revolve around cooperative concurrence on fiscal and investment concerns, infrastructure developments, and community well-being (Salter 1933: 107).

Across the channel, that is, in Great Britain, Briand's proposal received a response that can be characterized as neither reluctant nor overtly enthusiastic (Woodward and Butler 1947: 312–353). Churchill at first expressed approval and was of the opinion that the proposal of a united and federated Europe, even if partial, was a novel idea worth celebrating.[4] However, caution later overtook enthusiasm as he realized that while Britain might be part of the continent it could not be expected to assimilate with it completely. In other words, he was firmly of the opinion that Britain's distinctive identity and political and economic position, independent of Europe, had to be maintained. Nevertheless, in spite of his desire to maintain a critical distance, he still thought that Britain, with America, should encourage attempts to translate the idea of a new Europe into reality (Galin 1947; Europe: A Little More Real, 1946). It should not come as a surprise that Britain refused to approve Briand's proposal. However, the responses of other states of Europe were markedly different. Twenty-six endorsed the proposal, with the Netherlands adding the rider that such an effort must be accompanied by an undiluted commitment to the idea of absolute sovereignty and political independence (Salter 1933: 123).

In spite of such widespread discussion, Briand's vision could not become a reality. By the 1930s, the world, including the European political and economic situation, was changing at an incredible pace. The Great Depression of 1929 had shaken the economies

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[4] This argument was so strong that it compelled Winston Churchill, then British chancellor of the exchequer, to take note of it and brief the House of Commons, saying that "…the aim of ending the thousand-year strife between France and Germany seemed a supreme object" and "by bringing the old rivals, that is, France and Germany, together in an economic, social and moral relationship, there indeed was the real possibility for the old antagonisms to die in the realization of mutual prosperity and interdependence. All of it shall lead to the rise of Europe yet again." For details (see: Churchill 2002a: 47).

of almost all Europe, and the Nazis were knocking at the doors of power in Germany. Gustav Stresemann had died and the Japanese attack on and subsequent occupation of Manchuria had proven the League of Nations to be impotent. Briand himself passed away in 1932. Thus, the belief in an outright politico-economic union of the whole of Europe in a federal structure was receding into the twilight. If the dream of a united continent was to be realized, it would have to follow a different path, with radically altered strategies and tactics. And this was indeed the thinking of the people who would take over from the early "idealists" of the 1920s.

(1930s) The Vision of a "Supranational United Europe": Changing Strategies and Tactics

In the 1920s, the main axis of thought regarding a common and unified Europe was the idea of intergovernmental cooperation. In other words, there was a hope that, without a surrender of national sovereignty, states would strive to overcome their mutual animosity and antagonism in order to make federative efforts for the collective good. Nevertheless, this was the aspect of the idea of a federal Europe that did not go down well with the new generation of thinkers who came to dominate the discourse on European union in the 1930s. For Jean Monnet and Arthur Salter, two important figures in the League of Nations and optimistic believers in its objectives, the fact that the League granted veto power to each of its constituent members was frustrating. Monnet and Salter were of the opinion that this aspect of the League prevented the coming into being of any arrangement between the different states of Europe, as decisions could only be made by consensus. For Monnet, the League was thus a disappointment, since it allowed states to exhibit their sovereign egoism, which in turn rendered most efforts sterile. Nevertheless, the necessity and importance of the idea of a supranational organization such as the League aspired to be did not cease to appeal to Monnet's imagination. In spite of his experience with the workings of the League, he was convinced that for the establishment and perpetuation of peace and security, efforts must be made to develop supranational institutions. These, however, should be different from the League of Nations.

Arthur Salter, a British civil servant in charge of the Reparation Commission, shared many of Monnet's opinions. He was also a passionate advocate of a unified continent. In 1931, in a seminal text, he explored the idea of a union of European states under the aegis of the League of Nations. In hoping for the political unification of Europe, he sought inspiration from the nearly century-old German experiment with the Zollverein system (a customs union or common market) and conceived of the union as sectorial, or as a kind of conglomerate with limited territorial representation and influence. After all, the Zollverien system had indeed helped Germany to attain political unification toward the middle of the nineteenth century. Thus, it can be deduced that at some level there was a belief that economic unification could enable political amalgamation. And such thinking has informed the European project throughout its existence. Therefore, it should not be considered surprising that there is a connection between the Coal and Steel Union, the European Economic Community, the Currency Union (Euro), and the attempted Constitution Treaty

of 2005. However, it should equally be acknowledged that in the absence of a final political union, every other effort would amount to a truncated affair. And Salter was very much aware of this fact. It is in this light that he famously cautioned that any idea of a continent with unified states had to provide for a robust sub-structure of political unification, because without it there was not the remotest chance for economic integration.

However, to return to his proposal, it required the body of a united Europe to operate in the same manner as the German customs union had done in the past. In other words, efforts would have to be made to collect funds through the imposition of common tariffs on imports from outside. Such an arrangement, however, would have necessitated the institutionalization of another arrangement, or a "political instrument," for the distribution of the funds collected. It should be noted that the establishment of a political union was at the core of this vision and that it also concealed a desire to take control of a substantial part of the revenue sources of states and thereby to reduce the "national" governments to the status of nothing more than municipal authorities. For Salter, such an approach was probably based on his assessment that, apart from the other reasons for continuous war and devastation in Europe, a primary factor was the control of states over revenues. After all, without money and actual control over it, neither the launching nor the sustaining of a conflict would be possible. Nevertheless, he did not express the idea directly (Salter 1933: 92).

The institutional structure that Salter imagined for such an entity would be supranational, with overriding powers over national administrations. While still committed to the idea of the League of Nations as a structure, Salter suggested that the political instrument for the distribution of resources collected through the customs union needed to have an effective administrative and judicial apparatus. A condition of the arrangement was that its administrative secretariat would be bestowed with supreme authority over its other institutions. And the secretariat was to be constituted by a permanent body of administrative officials drawn from a global and cosmopolitan corps with absolute commitment to this novel administrative arrangement rather than to the governments of the varying constituent national entities to which they otherwise belonged. This was intended to provide a check on national loyalties, which members of the council of ministers would be presumed to have.[5] Such an arrangement would be an unprecedented experiment in world history: for the first time, an organization would operate independently of national assemblies (Salter 1933: 136).

This proposal was evidently in absolute contrast to the visions of European federation that had been indulged in the 1920s. Previously, efforts had been made to have a federative arrangement without any compromise on the idea of national sovereignty. However, as we can see, in the dominant "common Europe" discourse of the 1930s, the idea was to establish an organization that would be supranational in nature, with powers that could override those of the national assemblies of the member states. Interestingly, decades later, Jean Monnet

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[5] In the words of Salter, the necessity for such an arrangement was the following: "In face of a permanent corps of Ministers, meeting in committees and 'shadow councils,' and in direct contact with their Foreign Office, the Secretariat will necessarily sink in status, in influence, and in the character of its personnel, to clerks responsible only for routine duties. They will cease to be an element of importance in the formation or maintenance of the League's traditions" (see: Salter 1933: 134).

used this line of thinking as a blueprint for the establishment of the European Economic Community. Thus, there appears to be an embryonic link between the thinking of the people associated with the project in the 1930s and the developments that followed that period, when efforts were made to translate the thinking into actuality.

Modelled, thus, on the lines of the League of Nations of the time, such a vision of Europe had as its objective not only the establishment of a united Europe of integrated states but also simultaneously the erosion of nationalism, which was so widely present on the continent and was aggressively defining its political orientation. After all, it should not be forgotten that the 1930s was a time when Nazism made a successful transition from movement to regime and entrenched itself in power in Germany, and the clouds of another war were starting to gather on the European political horizon. Thus, in that period, the European project came to be ensconced between the rising tide of nationalism on the one side and the vision of a supranational body on the other.[6] As stated before, during this time, the people in charge of the "project" were striving hard to erode the national consciousness of different states: at times by imagining the project as a federative entity or one with a centralizing instrument called a secretariat, and at others even by considering the arrangement of member states into regional groupings. What is noteworthy is that in all subsequent discussions, the blueprint Salter had devised remained the reference point. This is not to say that efforts were not made to tweak it, but such efforts only amounted to changing the nomenclature and not to a fundamental restructuring of the plan. We thus see Salter, while responding to Briand's proposal in the 1930s about the establishment of a "European Federal Union," suggesting that the League of Nations had foreclosed this possibility by previously establishing a "European Commission" (Salter 1933: 124)—an entity/institution that was very similar to his original idea of a "secretariat."

The Nazi Interlude and "The Gathering Storm"

On the cusp of the 1920s to 1930s, Europe was facing critical challenges. Economically, the Great Depression had arrived, and politically the fascist bell had begun to toll, as the Nazis came of age in Germany. What these developments symbolized was an economic

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[6] It is pertinent here to take note of the fact that at this juncture there were peoples and states in Europe, such as Poland, Austria, and the then Czechoslovakia, which were not only concerned about their position in any future federative arrangement but were also acutely worried in regard to their own security and future existence. Poland, an important example, was keenly aware of the absolute peril that an expansionist Nazi Germany represented for it. Consequently, the Polish intellectual ambience of the time was churning with questions regarding the country's chances of regaining independence, and of having built-in safeguard mechanisms in place that would free it from its dependence on the erstwhile Soviet Union, along with reflections on the idea of a united Europe in the form of an entity imagined as a "federation of federations." Beyond that, in attempting to escape the inevitable challenges of an ethno-linguistic idea of the state, the nuanced role they imagined for themselves was that not only would their country be a federal entity but it would also lead a closely bound regional federation of states, which, in turn, were expected to sacrifice a certain degree of their respective sovereignties in order to attain common objectives, as well as managerial ease regarding economic, diplomatic, and some domestic political affairs. The people of Poland wanted these guarantees to be either robustly addressed or sufficiently enshrined, along with express commitments upholding the idea of individual rights and a democratic form of government as inalienable and indispensable foundational principles in any arrangement regarding a common, federated Europe. For a detailed discussion on diverse perspectives in Poland (Łukasiewicz 2011).

disarray of extensive proportions, accompanied by hyper and aggressive nationalism hellbent on beating the war drum and calling for the conquest of other nations. These were developments that contrasted with all the visions of a "common Europe" that had been the subject of discussion so far. The hoped-for "Thousand Year Reich," which had an actual life span of just a dozen years, had its own imagination of Europe, which was quite divergent from the proposals that had been advanced elsewhere. The "new order" of the Nazis encapsulated a Europe without frontiers, through the establishment of a continent-wide common economic community/fraternity and a single currency—ideas that have a very eerie similarity with the actual developments decades later. On a cautious note, though, it should be mentioned that not much should be read into these similarities, as the way the European project came to be defined after the Second World War, by the people instrumental in effecting it, was not aligned with the Nazi thinking of the time. In fact, the project, as has been argued so far, had its antecedents in times that preceded the Nazis coming to power. Furthermore, the critical thinkers involved in the project in the late 1920s and early 1930s were resolutely opposed to Nazism and the Nazi vision of anything and everything.

When Nazism was a movement, though, there was indeed a moment when the imagining of a novel frame for making the continent one and integrated came to exercise the minds of its leaders (Noakes and Pridham 2014: 1–14, 40–88). In 1924, Hitler's rival within the Nazi Party ranks, Gregor Strasser, in association with the master propagandist Joseph Goebbels, attempted to include in the Party program ideas that were in close symmetry with Briand and Stresemann's proposal for a "United States of Europe." The reason for the inclusion of such an idea is considered to be the Nazi Party's desire to broaden its appeal and support among people in larger Germany, beyond the limited pale of the province of Bavaria. Another reason often attributed to such a move is that Strasser believed the Nazi Party had to strive to become ever more national and socialist in appearance, if not in actuality. Thus, such a move had propaganda value and Goebbels, reading the cues, put his weight behind it. However, with the triumph of Hitler's authority over the Party in 1926, the idea was nipped in the bud, as Hitler had neither inclination nor interest in pursuing any vision of an integrated or unified Europe. Stresser himself fell on the Night of the Long Knives in 1934. For Hitler, it was the centrality and triumph of Germanness, be it in culture or elsewhere, that mattered, and attempts were to be made to preserve it from any possible source of dilution. In other words, Hitler believed it was absolutely necessary to force German culture on others, rather than be dominated, deluded, or diluted by them.[7]

From the above, it is evident that instead of imagining Europe in terms of either a federative structure or one of the kind that Salter and Monnet had envisioned, Hitler's perception of the issue had an altogether different orientation. Even the idea of a postwar European unity was loathsome to him (Evans 2014: 638–664). Not only had he despised early European unity movements, he was also extremely bitter about the policy of rapprochement that had underpinned the Briand-Stresemann idea of a common Europe. Typically, he did not mince words in rejecting Coudenhove-Kalergi, whom he called

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[7] For Hitler, Germany mattered most, and accordingly he stated that "Our Country, our people, our culture and our economy have grown out of general European conditions. We must therefore be the enemy of any attempt to introduce elements of discord and destruction into this European family of peoples" (Laughland 2016: 11).

"everybody's bastard" (Burleigh 2000: 423–431). His dislike of talk of a common Europe was so far-reaching that following his assumption of power he ordered a blanket ban on all organizations and associations that had been involved in the pursuit of European unity. Nevertheless, the Nazis did intend to unify Europe. For them, the aim had to be achieved through occupation and domination rather than by treating the states of the continent equally. Built into this kind of thinking was the desire to assert, or rather reassert, German national identity, in reaction to the humiliations that had been forced on Germany through the "dictated peace" of the Treaty of Versailles in 1919.[8] Thus, the idea of a united Europe was indeed coming into being, but in a form that would have been the cause of much consternation to Stresemann and Briand, or to Salter and Monnet, the original architects of the plan.

Below the Führer, though, there were people amongst the Nazis who were not as skeptical of a common Europe as he was (Salewski 1985: 37–178). Thus, for Werner Diatz, Joachim von Ribbentrop, and Walter Funk, the thought of a unified Europe with a common future was not anathema. Diatz, a prominent Nazi economist, argued in a text on the issue that the concomitant ideas of the nation state and national sovereignty had outlived their utility. Furthermore, for him, the idea of a nation was symptomatic of parochial and selfish thinking when pitted against the idea of Europe as a "great common undertaking." He submitted that the interests of a collective Europe, comprised in a varying but single vision, must have precedence over the specific and limited interests of different states and peoples (Laughland 2016: 14). In conjunction with this thinking—and not representing the official Nazi line—Ribbentrop, the Nazi minister for external relations, also attempted to convene a meeting of the heads of state of the occupied territories, along with Spain, which was under General Franco's rule, in the hopes that they would commit themselves to the establishment of a "European Confederation" (Laughland 2016: 29–30). Walther Funk, the Third Reich's minister in charge of economic and financial affairs, also held opinions that did not diverge much from those of either Diatz or his colleague Ribbentrop. For Funk, the collective or common interests of Europe needed to take precedence over individual ones and there had to be a willingness to subsume or limit particular expectations for the sake of a continent-wide, common, single community. Furthermore, he had been vested with responsibility for the reconstruction and regeneration of the continental economy following the conclusion of the Great War, with reference to the idea of a new structural European edifice and a new global economic order. Funk headed the Europaische Wirtschaftgemeinschaft committee, which, through a series of publications until around the beginning of 1945, floated suggestions of the continent as a common economic enterprise (albeit under the command of Germany, with a single currency).[9]

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[8] This is evident from the actions of the Germans after the Nazis came to power in 1933. To avenge "insult and humiliation," Hitler ordered German troops to march into the "demilitarized" Rhineland in 1936. This was followed, in 1938–1939, by Germany's unilateral intervention in Austria and Czechoslovakia, as well as in the lands ceded to Poland under the provisions of the Versailles Treaty. The following year, that is, 1940, saw Germany overrun Norway, Belgium, Denmark, the Netherlands, Luxemburg, and France.

[9] It should be noted that the term has inclined certain analysts with an inclination for Eurosceptic thinking to draw a direct connection between the establishment of the European Economic Community in 1957 and the European Economic Community as it had been envisaged by Funk earlier. However, it should be remembered that there seems to be confusion in the interpretation of the concepts of *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*. The former

The German war machine also used the above vision of a common economic enterprise under the leadership of Germany to propagate the message amongst occupied peoples that economic association and cooperation with Nazi Germany would be beneficial in future. The Nazi German state, however, did not make any concrete efforts to translate such thinking into actuality. Moreover, efforts in such a direction would rather have been economically detrimental to German war efforts.[10] Thus, in spite of the rhetorical beliefs of some of Hitler's eminent followers, both in the Party and the government, the Führer did not countenance any of these propositions. His idea of Germany's relationship with Europe involved the superiority of Germany. The exclusive and unadulterated objective of the Nazi dispensation was the brute domination of the continent under the unrelenting jackboot of hyper-German nationalism. Any idea or movement that could assist in the pursuit of the objective was worth engaging with but ultimately had to serve the grand ideological and imperial end. Thus, Goebbels warned that the relevance of any idea of a cooperative Europe was limited to its political and propaganda value and nothing beyond (Goebbels 1948: 83).

The underlying objective was to project an image of Germany as the "savior" of Europe, through the development of a Nazi-led sense of "European identity," in contrast to "alien cultures" such as those of Britain, the United States, and the Soviet Union, with whom Germany was at war (Siemens and Wolf 2017). In this approach, it was important to project the German nation as the omnipotent protector of European cultural traditions from possible onslaughts of forces from beyond the geographical limits of the continent. It was expected that in a putative "European war of liberation," young men from the occupied territories would volunteer to help. And such expectations did not go unanswered. In the summer of 1944, as the conflict raged, Vichy France's secretary of state, Fernand de Brinon, stated that Germany should not feel isolated and France should make all-out efforts to assist it in order to protect the epistemic and cultural traditions of Western civilization. Toward the end of the conflict, people belonging to non-German nationalities from those areas of Europe that had been conquered by the Nazi Reich were rendering assistance to German war efforts on the eastern front—in the belief not that they were helping Germany advance

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represents the idea of a community crystallized around the sense of belonging together on the basis of shared loyalties, values, and possibly even kinship. And this understanding of the concept, to a large extent, takes us closer to Nazis' conceptualization of race and cultural relations, which was very close to a hierarchized relationship between the people who were presumed to be of Aryan origin and others in the German Empire. The territories at the core of the empire were designated for the former people and the peripheral and outer regions for the latter, with the understanding that they would not only be treated as vassals but also pressed into service. In this light, it should be remembered that the European Economic Community, as it actually came to be structured, established, and operated, was more in the spirit of *Gesellschaft*, which invoked an idea of the societal relationship as the conduct of exchange and intercourse between equals operating on a common foundation of rules and regulations managing their competing interests. For the philosophic and theoretical meanings associated with the concepts (The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, 2016). For a detailed discussion about issues of race and spatial dimensions associated with the same in the Third Reich (Mazower 2009: 446–470).

[10] The introduction of a common currency would have caused Germany to undergo significant economic losses. In the course of the First World War, Germany had insisted that the occupied territories bear the cost of their occupation. For example, France was made to pay twenty million Reichsmarks per day. Due to the extremely devalued exchange rate, its debt to Germany increased to such an extent that there came a time when the German war machine ended up expropriating 42% of the total contribution from France itself. Any attempt at the introduction of a single currency would have been detrimental to this plunder (Burleigh 2000: 478).

its interests but that they were defending Europe (Burleigh 2000: 430–431). Such was the power of Goebbels's propaganda.

The Fascist Take: Dismantling the Nation and Dreaming of Union under an Authoritarian Dispensation

Other fascists and their collaborators were closely aligned with the Nazi view, but there were also differences. The other fascists, too, had their vision of European unity based on the dismantling of nation-states and their absorption into something called the greater European identity. The expectation of the fascists was that the new Europe would not only regain its old self-confidence but would also have the power and ability to compete with rival centers of power in world polity (Cofrancesco 1985: 179–201). On a different tangent (but in essence following the same trend of thought), fascist Italy's minister of education, Giuseppe Bottai, opined in 1943, at the height of the war, that nationalism was the concretion of the political ideation of state and community. For him, the national spirit acted as an obstruction to the further advance of civilization and culture. Similarly, the then Italian minister of finance, Alberto de Stefani, suggested that any new structural ordering of Europe could not be premised upon national specificities (De Grand 2004). Moreover, he thought that for an enduring peace on the continent, it was essential to have an arrangement in which there would be due recognition for the inalienable sovereignties of the states, which must yet be made subservient to the pan-continental strategic policy. Stefani equally refused to countenance any invocation of liberal and democratic methods of consultation and persuasion in the resolution of any disputes that could arise in regard to policy in a unified Europe (Nardelli-Malgrand 2020).

In this context, derisive reference to the "liberal regimes" of the West, that is, Britain and America, betrayed the actual intent of such proclamations, which was to propagandize fascist objectives through the "European cause." Such thinking was not incidental nor was it limited to the functionaries of fascist states. It also exercised the imagination of other fascist believers, sympathizers, and those who secretly identified themselves with fascism (either through intellectual compatibility or opportunism).[11] This is attested by the change in orientation of all those people who resided in the occupied territories and who in the 1920s had spiritedly advocated for and supported the European cause. Now, they went through a "change of heart," because for them the possibility of European unity was only achievable through collaboration with the Nazis (Werth 1957: 126; Laughland 2016: 16). How that unity would happen, and at what cost, and what would be the nature and form of that European unity was anyone's guess. Roger Griffin aptly if caustically argued that the Nazis in fact made active efforts to propagate the illusion of a pan-European arrangement, with the aim of obtaining either the willing cooperation or acquiescent submission of the people of the conquered and occupied territories. According to Griffin, neither the

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[11] In this context, it should be noted that Camillo Pellizzi, editor of the periodical *Civilita Fascista*, thought that "the Axis is, or can be, the first definite step towards surmounting…that typically European phenomenon which we call the nation, with its inevitable, one might say physiological corollary of nationalism…One cannot 'create Europe' without the nations or against them: we must create it from different nations, while subduing national particularism as far as may be necessary" (Laughland 2016: 17–18).

Führer nor the top brass of the Nazi hierarchy were willing to entertain the possibility of a diminution of Germany's hegemony in any confederate arrangement of European states (Feldman 2008: 152). In other words, the centrality of Germany, and more importantly, the Nazi vision of Germany's role in the affairs of Europe, were non-negotiable and immutable for the Third Reich.

In light of the above, it can be argued that the Nazi vision of Europe was a blind alley whose travelers were in effect advancing their own interests rather than rendering any constructive service to the actual vision of European integration. A Europe under the stifling authoritarian jackboot of fascism or its more vitriolic form, Nazism, was the preference of no one except convinced fascists and their collaborators. There was nothing in these propositions that would contribute to shaping the project that was undertaken in the postwar years. Rather its real sources of inspiration emanated if not wholly then substantially from those who were opposed to Nazism. Thus, while Nazism ruled in Europe, efforts toward attaining European integration when the war was over continued. However, the realization of such dreams required a decisive defeat of the rulers of the expected Thousand Year Reich and their followers.

Beyond the Nazi Spell: Resistance and Parallel Efforts at Integration

In pursuit of that objective, toward the late 1930s, efforts were made to bring together a closer union of Britain and France. Jean Monnet, as the chairman of the Anglo-French Coordinating Committee, and his vice-chairman, Arthur Salter, had prominent roles to play in that endeavor. The task had attained an element of urgency by the spring of 1940, when the Nazis launched a blistering *blitzkrieg* on Denmark and Norway. By summer they were mercilessly pounding France, the Netherlands, and Belgium. This was followed by the Dunkirk evacuation, which signaled the inevitable collapse of France to Nazi aggression.

Hurried efforts were made to produce an Anglo-French union, whose pivot was supposed to be governance, defense, and a common currency. Given the desperate circumstances, it was deemed prudent for the two nations, otherwise historically hostile to each other, to now commit themselves indissolubly to a union with a single government/administration and permanent auxiliary branches of the state apparatus, such as a defense force, common citizenship and insignia of belonging, and an exclusive monetary system with a single currency. Monnet drafted a proposal for such a union with active assistance from Salter. The draft was submitted to the then British prime minister, Sir Winston Churchill, who, after initial reluctance, agreed to discuss it with the members of his war cabinet. Churchill later thought the plan lacked vision and foresight (Churchill 2002b: 249–278). However, along with the whole of his war cabinet, he approved of the proposal, except for one alteration, which was to do away with the idea of a common currency. It is no wonder that Britain never accepted the euro when it was introduced decades later and has now decisively negotiated its own exit from the European Union (following the Brexit referendum of 2016).[12]

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[12] For an in-depth analysis of the various historical and long-term causes of Brexit (Whiteley et al. 2023).

However, to return to the plan for a Franco-British Union, after Charles de Gaulle's approval, the proposal was communicated to the French government in Paris. In this milieu of hyper-enthusiasm, however, no one had tried to gauge the possible response of the French government. Thus, their reaction was completely unanticipated. They rejected it outright and with visible disdain. They perceived of it as an English trick to reduce France to a British "vassal." In the French imagination, as exemplified in the thinking of Marshal Petain, it was preferable to accept the overlordship of Hitler rather than to become a helot of England. Furthermore, France thought that Britain's fate was as doomed as its own, and therefore a union with it would be like "fusing with a corpse." Thus, as can be guessed, nothing came of this daring proposal, except for the fact that it exacerbated the French surrender to Germany.

Resistance movements played an important role in dissipating the Nazi shadow over Europe, and the idea of a common destiny for the continent's countries was a significant motivation for such activities. In the postwar situation, it was thought that Europe must have a new beginning, based on unification. Moreover, in accord with the thinking of advocates of a single, unified Europe of an earlier period, resistance fighters also held the opinion that the reasons for war and strife in Europe had been hyper-nationalism and the concomitant feeling of national pride. And if lasting peace was to be established on the European continent, it was essential to create structures that would transcend both historical boundaries and national specificities. [13]

In this context, the role of Altiero Spinelli became critical. A communist in youth, a participant in the resistance movement, and a prisoner of the fascists for more than a decade, in 1941, with Ernesto Rossi and Eugenio Colorni, he wrote the famous and consequential text *For a Free and United Europe: A Draft Manifesto*. It is popularly known as the Ventotene Manifesto. Not only did it espouse the cause of European unity, it also became the foundational text for the European federalist movement. The crux of the manifesto foretold continent-wide chaos following the end of the war and argued that Europe absolutely had to be reconstructed on federal lines in order to escape the problems that would come in the war's wake. The attainment of such an objective could only be possible through doing away with the present parceling of the continent into separate sovereign states and independent national authorities/administrations. Furthermore, a revolution needed to be launched for the socialist emancipation of the working classes, with the aim of creating humane conditions for them.

Beneath such programmatic features, the Manifesto was in essence an argument in favor of a European federation on the lines of an all-powerful supranational authority with its own constitution and defense forces (Delzell 1993). It argued for provisions that would permit the supranational body to intervene in the affairs of individual federal states for the maintenance of common administrative arrangements and the overall organizational and structural order. The state, thus imagined, was primarily to be just an arrangement for the

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[13] Long before the war ended, this was the declared belief of resistance groups in the Netherlands, Poland, Yugoslavia, France, Italy, Czechoslovakia, and to some extent in Germany, as well. However, those who expressed such thinking most vocally were the Italian communists, who were in the vanguard of the anti-fascist struggle. For a wider discussion (Mazower 2000: 138–180; The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica 2019). For a comprehensive treatment of the theme (Lipgens 1985).

development of political life according to the particular characteristics of different people, and the role that democracy was to play in such an arrangement was to be very minimal. Spinelli held that in radical, cataclysmic, and revolutionary times, in response to the need to create new institutions, not much value need be attached to democratic and consultative procedural methods.[14] In other words, the Manifesto argued that in the construction of a new European federation, the people (the demos), would have no role. Their role, if any, would only emerge when the project was nearing completion. Then an assembly would be convened to deliberate on the rules, regulations, and procedural arrangements through which general administrative and meta-policy governance could be dispensed with. It was argued that with the adoption of a constitution, the idea of a United States of Europe would attain its final aim and consequently the resumption of democracy could be permitted.

In 1944, Spinelli's ideas inspired the convening of a meeting of the European Federalist Movement in Geneva, Switzerland. Representatives from the major countries of Europe, including France, Italy, Denmark, Norway, the Netherlands, Poland, Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, and so on, attended. A resolution was adopted that said that the experience of struggle born of the war should give all the countries represented at the meeting the same rights in the postwar reconstruction of Europe as those of the powers on the triumphant side. There was a fundamental idea of restoring respect for the individuality of the human subject, along with concerns for social justice, security, and a full development of economic potential with respect to the optimum utilization of resources for the furtherance of national life (Vaughan 1976: 17; Urwin 1991: 1–12). Accordingly, the conference declared that such aims would remain perennially unattainable unless national administrations agreed that the time had come where a dogmatic belief in inalienable and indivisible sovereignty needed to be transcended in favor of a single federal structure. The assembled body was nevertheless aware of the resistance that would be encountered. It made due acknowledgment of the Herculean challenges presented by the absence of concurrence among the different cultures of various parts of the continent. It was presumed that, in near future, cultural divergences had the immense potential to tear apart all the efforts that would be made toward having a federal governmental structure. This, though, was a call for radical intervention in the form of a European "federal union." And as before, the union in this case was also to be provided with a written constitution and a supranational government. It would be directly accountable to the peoples of Europe. In order for it to be effective, national armies were to be done away with, and the union was to be provided with a defense force of its own, along with courts that would have sole jurisdiction over all constitutional matters and the exclusive right to arbitrate in matters of conflicts between the central power and the constituent member states—an arrangement that the contemporary European Union has substantially adopted (Pinder 2007).

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[14] "During the revolutionary crisis, this movement will have the task of organizing and guiding progressive forces, using all the popular bodies, which form spontaneously, incandescent, melting pots in which the revolutionary masses are mixed, not for the creation of plebiscites, but rather waiting to be guided. It derives its vision and certainty of what must be done from the knowledge that it represents the deepest needs of modern society and not from any previous recognition by popular will, as yet non-existent. In this way it issues the basic guidelines of the new order, the first social discipline directed to the unformed masses. By this dictatorship of the revolutionary party a new State will be formed, and around this State new, genuine democracy will grow" (Spinelli, Rossi and Colorni 1944).

Conclusion

It should now be mentioned that it would be almost half a century before Spinelli's ideas would be realized. However, the form that the project of European integration took in subsequent decades owed much to Spinelli's thoughts, as well as to other visions of a federative arrangement. Thus, in conclusion, it can be argued that the idea of a common Europe largely emanated from an awareness of the need for lasting peace on the European continent. The federative idea originated in the idealism that came to reside in European political thought in the second to fourth decades of the twentieth century. The path to peace would have to traverse the hyper-emotional and politically combustible field of nations, nationalisms, and state sovereignties. In the 1920s, there were calls for a federal Europe on the lines of the League of Nations, with the individual sovereignties of the member states maintained intact. In regard to economics, it was thought that the resources chiefly implicated in wars on the European continent, for instance, German coal and French steel, must be placed under a single authority, out of reach of the national administrations of such countries. By the 1930s, when the return of hyper-nationalism had begun to expose the limitations of such plans, the supranationalists started to imagine the European integration project on the lines of a supranational body that would come into being after the dismantling of borders, sovereignties, and nationalisms. Neither the Nazi interlude nor the Second World War contributed anything substantial to the project except to add an element of urgency to the whole enterprise. In addition, the war drove home the message that any arrangement of a United Europe would have to address the concerns of democracy and national sovereignties, and could not be authoritarian. The ideas that contributed substantially to the creation of the current European Union were those contained in Arthur Salter's proposals, along with those of the Ventotene Manifesto. The shape the European Union project attained in actuality was quite different from the form that had been imagined in the interwar years. What the final project had in common with all the earlier versions was its vision of lasting peace and cooperation among the different countries of Europe, and this it succeeded in providing—including in circumstances as volatile as those in the interwar years.

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