



## Quelle

Rougemont, Denis de: Introduction to Beloff, Max: Europe and the Europeans (1959)<sup>1</sup>

I used to think while these Round Tables were in progress, whether under the gilded ceilings of the Aldobrandini Palace or around the green table-cloths of the Council of Europe, that the task of the presiding officer is as exciting as it is unhuman. It is unnatural to listen to all that so many eminent figures have to say on such great topics without ever stopping to think about or to react to their remarks; without ever shifting one's place to take up a point with someone who has just filled you with pleasure or so politely made you suffer. It is more amusing to take a mental note of what an orator has not said and to supply for oneself the reasons for his purposeful or involuntary omissions. But the real trick is to guess what one or other speaker is going to say, to incite him to say it and afterwards to compare what he has said with that which one expected him to say. If I have learnt a great deal from this game – less, however, than from the knowledge of the illustrious specialists and the wisdom, gained from experience, of two great statesmen – may I admit that the experience of Rome and Strasbourg has left me with my hunger as a committed European, unassuaged?

Having followed from close at hand (but with no power other than that of suggesting names, since the final choice was for the governments to make) the elaboration of the list of about thirty participants, and seeing that among them there were a large majority of convinced and tried Europeans, I could expect, and ought to have expected, that each of them would bring more than enough new and striking illustrations of this community of culture which was our general theme. I awaited, pencil in hand, the ingenious, wise, or daring suggestions that would surely not fail to stream in from all sides. These would surely incite the discovery of what is common to us all, of that which is now threatened and which we must, without delay, defend and illuminate by the union of the most diverse spirits, in brief, that which is called "the European idea". Something quite different happened.

Was it because of the scrupulousness of learned men desirous to make it clear that we were concerned not with propaganda but with science? Was it the official atmosphere of meetings held under the aegis of the prudent Council of Europe? Or was it, finally, the wish so strongly evident at Strasbourg to investigate more closely the rather broad generalities formulated at Rome? I do not know. But certainly a surprising phenomenon revealed itself and one which, with perhaps two or three exceptions, became common to the whole group. The majority of these "Europeans", although supporters of union and charged with the task of examining what I believe to be its firmest basis – our common cultural inheritance – in fact occupied themselves with multiplying objections, in themselves quite valid, sceptical restrictions, and warnings against "the mysticism of union". They besought us to respect our national and local values, which seemed to them the most certain. They insisted upon nuances and difficulties and put them forward sometimes with ardour and sometimes with a sort of moral irritation against those – whom exactly I do not know – who would wish to mix up everything, to render everything uniform, or perhaps to regulate everything – procedures to which one knows that all culture is recalcitrant. Each set of specialists declared that union, which was undoubtedly desirable in other fields, had no point in their own and that the measures proposed were either premature or else too late. The result was that in the end one found oneself asking whether the very notion of European culture corresponded to any reality or was merely a slogan for over-enthusiastic schoolboys.

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<sup>1</sup> Rougemont, Denis de, Introduction, in: Beloff, Max, Europe and the Europeans. An international discussion with an introduction by D. de Rougemont, London 1957, pp. ix-xix.

Certainly there is nothing more European than these doubts and this skepticism – this habit of questioning things again, of retreating from platitudes and of insisting upon differences. There is nothing more typical of a civilization that has not developed by chance the parallel ideas of *originality* and of *national character* and of which the best minds have always cultivated a sort of passion for differentiation, up to the point of holding their differences for the essential end, so that they are prepared altogether to neglect what is common, what is admitted by everyone and what, therefore, is not worth saying. And by this I mean those common traits which it was precisely our task to bring out, to underline and to state. There is nothing, I repeat, more European than such an attitude of mind. But did those who adopted it fully understand that they were thereby illustrating one of these major common characteristics which they were occupying themselves with calling into question? The taste for nonconformism, is that not exactly what the immense majority of Europeans have in common and that which at first blush distinguishes them not only from Soviet man, but also from the wise man of Asia and the magically-inclined African?

Towards the end of our discussions I jotted down this definition: Would not the European be in fact this strange man who manifests himself as a European precisely in the measure in which he doubts it and claims, on the contrary, to identify himself either with this universal man whom he imagines, or with one of the composing units of the great European complex, of which he reveals himself to be part by the very fact of denying it?

I suggest to the reader that he reminds himself from time to time, in reading the following chapters, of this definition which is only just impertinent. His smile will prove that I was right.

Born in such circumstances – representing "Strasbourg" against "Rome", to put everything in the simplest manner – the well-constructed and closely argued work which follows is very markedly characterized by the jealously objective approach which predominated in our later discussions and by the temperament of the author. The author declared at the beginning that he was far from sharing the illusions of "European mysticism". It was therefore necessary to convince him that the terms "Europe", "union" and "culture" put together could make sense. We were sufficiently sporting to congratulate ourselves on receiving such a challenge and I think the reader will see that we were not wrong.

That which will be a weakness in the book in the eyes of militants who have been convinced for a long time, should be its strength in the eyes of others. They will find no advance commitment to the "European idea" – much the contrary! What they will find will be a determination never to give in except to the best documented evidence and only to admit the existence of European unity and the measures for furthering European union which it permits, if there is no way of avoiding it. This, I hope, will be much more convincing than any kind of preaching would be. The book is addressed to the great mass of people who are hesitant or suspicious; it does not try to hustle them or to seduce them by eloquence or sentiment, to direct them along in spite of themselves, or to lecture them for their own good. What they are given is a sober and detailed balance sheet and the author has been determined not to neglect any of the possible objections and has no wish to minimize them or even to produce a reply at all costs. As for the reader who does not share some of the author's notions, he will find in the text matter for correcting them and I see no better way of praising a work which wishes above all to be "scientific".

So much having been said, may I be allowed to ring my bell as chairman for a last time? I would like to say here what I was unable to say or unable to defend strongly enough during the ten days which these discussions lasted. I should like to denounce the unnecessary pettifoggery and malicious objections which the opponents of our union are so ready to multiply, whether or not they are prepared to proclaim themselves as its opponents. These are the partisans of a kind of nationalism which often disguises itself as "world union". In doing this I would be thinking less of our discussions at Strasbourg than about the writings and speeches which today form part of the general debate over Europe and the "European idea".

1. It is only necessary to go away from Europe, in any direction, to feel the reality of our cultural unity. In the United States already, in the Soviet Union without hesitation, and in

Asia beyond all possible doubt, Frenchmen and Greeks, Englishmen and Swiss, Swedes and Castilians are seen as Europeans. There must be some reason for this and looking at it from all sides, I can see no better reason than this celebrated community of culture which so easily escapes our definitions, but is so difficult to conceal from other peoples. Seen from outside the existence of "Europe" is obvious. The history of our own times defines this concept with an inescapable precision; for it finds confronting it hostility, envy and even hatred more often, I fear, than love. The Afro-Asians and the Arabs know only too well what Europe represents: the sole entity which brings them together in a common, even if ambivalent, hostility. I may be told that it is very dangerous to write in this way, I believe that it is even more dangerous to try to ignore Bandung.

2. I believe that I have noticed that those Europeans who insist with the most emphasis on the universal nature of our problems and, starting from this point, deny all personality, whether economic, social, or scientific, to the Europe which it is necessary to unite, are often the very same who, turning right round, declare that we cannot unite our old continent because of the profound differences which have separated our nations for centuries. If one were to believe them, there would then be no important differences (as far as their own special fields are concerned) between Europe on the one hand and the Congo or Kashmir on the other, while there would be inescapable differences between the British and French, between the latter and the Germans and so on.

A similar movement in such minds leads them to minimize differences between continents but to exaggerate local contrasts. In this way they rescue both the universal Utopia and the national realities, but sacrifice in so doing our historically creative task – the necessary union of Europe. (I am not speaking here of politics, but only of attitudes of mind and of methods of intellectual evasion.)

3. The argument about age-old contrasts which is everlastingly brought up against the union of Europe is only a blind in the eyes of the historian or of the observer of cultures, but it is a last refuge for the nationalists. Yet, as a matter of fact, one discovers that precisely this argument cannot be sustained at the level of the nation. How then can it be sustained at the level of the whole of Europe?

They tell us that the contrasts between Germans and Frenchmen, islanders and continentals, Swedes and Greeks (and this is only to speak of geography, recent history and ways of life, leaving aside religion, economics, political institutions and so on) forbid all political union and give us reason to doubt from the beginning the existence of the unity of culture which would give a basis for this union.

But in the first place, the differences of language, religion, "race", of customs and standards of living between Bretons and the inhabitants of Languedoc, between Frisians and Bavarians, between Piedmontese and Sicilians, between Catholic shepherds of Appenzell and Protestant bankers of Geneva, have not prevented the national unification of France and Germany, of Italy and of the Swiss Cantons – no more than this unification has suppressed these differences (and one could point out in this connection that these countries have had a century of State education, whereas no one has ever expected anything of the kind from a federal European State). Thus the obstacles which people put forward to the union of Europe and the dangers which they fear if this union is realized, are equally imaginary, as is shown by the experience of the nation itself in whose name union is rejected.

Secondly, however picturesque may be the contrast between Swedes and Greeks, it is nonetheless true that a Swede reading Kasantzakis and a Greek reading Selma Lagerlof, or a Frenchman and a German reading both these authors, would pretty well take the same pleasure in them because they would recognize the same passions and the same sufferings, the same hopes and the same doubts and, despite all which it would be so easy to say, the same faith dominating a centuries-old background from which derives the dignity of man.

4. A number of writers have discovered – and this has been going on for years – that Europe does not exist as a geographic or historic entity since its frontiers have never stopped moving in

the course of time. It would therefore only be capable of definition by its specific culture which does not exist. The conclusion is that there is no Europe, and that if one wants one it is necessary to invent it; and this does not make easier the task of union.

This is how the sophists play around and the reader is disquieted. He feels vaguely that he is getting caught up in an artificial argument which has no relation to the coming drama. As a matter of fact, all this only makes sense for professors; they have got to define with exactitude the subject they are going to teach. If they fail to define it, they regard it as non-existent, from the academic point of view. This legitimate carefulness on the part of pedagogues becomes in the case of free writers a method of obstruction, whether conscious or not. To insist upon discovering in advance an historical and geographical definition provides an occasion for making speeches which enables people to put off the discussion on the immediate future of Europe, and thus provides for our intellectuals the equivalent of the parliamentary procedure known as the filibuster. I will only quote one example which comes to my notice as I write.<sup>2</sup> Although he is the author of a *History of Europe*, M. Berl believes today that Europe is not an entity but simply an "expression". Indeed, he follows a familiar line,

it is no easier to localize in time than in space ... People have argued that the Roman Empire was a first sketch of Europe, but it excluded Frankfurt, Copenhagen and Amsterdam. Spengler holds that Europe appears with the Holy Roman Empire of the German nation, but this excluded all Spain, all the Balkans, and the whole of Eastern Europe. The birth of Europe is no better known to us than its boundaries.

Are we then to say that Europe was never born at all because we cannot come to an agreement as to the date of its birth? But the same reasoning would, for example, lead us to doubt the existence of Switzerland. Historians go back to its birth in the Pact of Grulli concluded by three Cantons in 1291. This alliance "excluded" about nine-tenths of present-day Switzerland. In the same way, France before Philip-Augustus "excluded" Brittany, Alsace, Languedoc, Provence, Burgundy and Champagne. Nevertheless, it was Switzerland, and it was France. It is necessary to reorganize our categories to make them correspond to reality; for what is at stake at present is to save this reality, not to argue interminably about its definition.

In depriving the concept of Europe of its past, one does nothing less than undermine its future; and one discourages the yearning towards the necessary union instead of showing its legitimate foundations in the antiquity of its common conscience.

5. On the subject of the birth of Europe there are twenty theories which confront each other, though I fear to no purpose, because what is true of civilization, of a culture, and even of a nation, is more or less the same as in the case of a work of art. Is the latter born on the day when its outline is sketched, when the order for it is received, or when its climate of feeling is first felt? Or is it the hour when its first page was written, the first stroke of the brush applied to the canvas, or the first harmony recorded? Would it not rather be the moment of a particular intuition several years before? Or would it not have taken shape and name only half way through the work which suddenly changes its meaning and thereby finds its true meaning? All this matters fairly little; the work of art is there.

How long have people been talking about Europe? Is it simply an invention of Victor Hugo, or of the federalists of our own time, as some have cleverly supposed? A little known cantata of Beethoven, composed for the Congress of Vienna, was nevertheless entitled "Europe is Born". Montesquieu and Leibniz before him put Europe above their "nation". But the adjective European is much older and it appears for the first time immediately after the Battle of Poitiers (732) in the work of a Spanish monk, the continuator of the chronicle of Isidore of Beja. The author calls the victors of that great day Europeans and "repeats with pleasure this name which

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<sup>2</sup> *Hors du réel*, Emmanuel Berl, in *La Table Ronde*, January 1957.

indicates the awakening of a new sentiment".<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, consciousness of the existence of a European entity can only be proved with the aid of documents from the year 1300. The first portulans, or navigation charts, writes Mr. Denys Hay, "constitute maps of Europe as such and (what is more important), they were evidence of the interest taken in the cultural and political character of the lands whose coasts they defined".<sup>4</sup> But in order to see the words "Europe" and "European" come into the current vocabulary it is necessary to wait for the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the period at which Christianity loses its Near Eastern extensions, which are now occupied by the Turks, and therefore tends to become identified with geographical Europe, while on the other hand, the first humanists began to distinguish between the two concepts of *Christianitas* and *Europa*. It is, finally, in the works of a man who was first a great humanist under the name of Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini, and then a great Pope under the name of Pius II, that Europe sees itself defined, when face to face with the Islam of Mahomet II, as the Christian heir of Rome and Greece. Everyone knows the subsequent vogue of this definition of Europe by its three sources, which was latterly taken up with distinction by Valery.

6. But nations began to constitute themselves from the eighteenth century. We were reminded not without some sharpness and contempt, that they are the true reality. What am I saying? They are styled "eternal" in the poetic prose of banquets and of wartime editorials! Let us pass over these excesses and look at the thesis itself and the judgment about "reality" which it implies.

One has often been tempted to deny the existence of a true "European culture", in arguing not only that a culture of this kind is difficult to define, but also that one is faced by the complexity of its origins and the importance of the extra-continental influences to which it has been subjected. These arguments are, however, equally powerful as against the concept of "national cultures", which appeared in the nineteenth century. "What have you got that you have not received?" Europe might say to the nations; and they would find it very difficult to answer. Whether it be specifically European or not, the culture of Europeans is at any rate older than our division into twenty-six or twenty-seven nation-States who have not yet managed to define the so-called autonomy of their cultures. As a matter of fact, in this respect no creative reality can be identified with the accidental and often very recent limits of one of our States; and even in other respects, who cannot see at a first glance that the decisive realities have ceased to be national ones in the twentieth century?

Our economic life and our technology have developed despite nations who have at the most the power to retard them by paralysing exchanges between them. As for the political aspect, we have recently been able to see the true worth of this "sovereignty" which our former "Great Powers" refused to sacrifice on the altar of Europe. It would be absurd to deny that the national idea is still strong: it can preserve nothing, but it can indeed lose everything. Let us be on our guard against underestimating it. But let us be on our guard also not to mix up any longer this mixture of lyricism and emotive memories, of unjustified pride and true patriotism, with political reality. The fatherland is not the nation: generally-speaking, it is something much smaller. The cultural nation is not the State: it is, generally-speaking, something much larger. And if one mixes everything together: fatherland, State and nation, whether spiritual, cultural or political, within the boundaries of a single customs frontier and under the authority of a single police, one gets in the end precisely what one deserves – meaning by that the totalitarian State.

It is nevertheless true that in the eyes of many intellectuals the nation conceals Europe as the tree conceals the forest. I would go further and say that a European who has remained national-

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<sup>3</sup> I take this from a letter written to me on this subject by the Count Jean de Pange. The reference will be found in Th. Mommsen, *Monumenta Germaniae*, *Chronica Minora*, Vol. II, p. 362. See also H. F. Mueller, *A Chronology of Vulgar Latin*, and Marc Bloch, *Société Féodale*.

<sup>4</sup> Denys Hay, in *Diogenes*, No. 17, 1957. (This article is taken from a communication made to the tenth international Congress of historical sciences at Rome in September 1955.).



ist at the bottom of his heart, seems to me comparable to a tree which continues to doubt the very existence of the forest. ("Does one know precisely where it stops? Does one know when it was born? How many trees does one need to make a forest? I have my roots, that is what is true and the rest is a myth...")

Is it not time to make these nationalists see that a federal Europe would be the only one capable of preserving the concrete facts of our national lives, and in so doing, would sacrifice only what is illusory, that is to say what is already lost anyhow, and what could only be recovered – in as far as this is desirable – at the level of the federation: sovereignty perhaps (if this is the right of a group to make war or not to make war when it chooses); prosperity undoubtedly (if by that is meant a better material life, and not simply the material result of what is humanly speaking a brutalizing effort); independence certainly (if that is the power not to have to submit to the will of a foreign state). . . .

All this presupposes the development or the awakening of a sentiment which is still too weak among our peoples, that of belonging to a human collectivity larger, older and henceforth stronger than any of our nations. Now this human collectivity is still today a fact only of culture in the widest sense. To acquire the consciousness of our belonging to this community of culture is to meet the necessary condition of a supra-national union and of the allegiance which it demands. But the sufficient condition will be achieved through other efforts.

7. Here we come out into the domain of politics, which in my view is nothing other than that of the means by which the existence of a human group is regulated. A group of this kind cannot be defined by its institutional framework, but only by a way of life, a system of values, by a particular meaning given to the fact of living, to love, to death, to relations between human beings, to matter, to the body, to the spirit and to time-in brief by a culture in the sense in which I use the word.

Between politics and culture conceived as we have indicated, the relationship should be analogous to that between form and content.

A policy making for union becomes possible only if there is to begin with a community of culture between those whom one wishes to unite. This policy will later on only be valuable if it gives expression to, and tends to preserve, what is creative in this community.

I conclude from this that the political form which a genuinely European union would have to have could only be a federal one. For our diversities constitute the principal source of our creativity to the extent, of course, to which they are neither isolated nor mixed up in an indistinguishable fashion, but remain in a state of tension, autonomous though linked together. This dynamic equilibrium which is always risky, this empirical and subtle art of manoeuvring between the Charybdis of a narrow particularism and the Scylla of a levelling centralism, is the secret of a healthy Europe.

At this point culture and politics join in making the same single demand, that for a federal union of our peoples.

At the beginning of these remarks, I dared to describe myself as someone committed to Europe. Must I explain this? During the final session of the Rome Round Table held on the Capitol, I made the following remarks:

I should like in conclusion to refer to a famous episode, which should serve as a grave warning.

Our Empire is commonly compared to the Byzantine Empire, which foundered for ever exactly five centuries ago and had ceased to play its great historic role by the year 1204, when the Crusaders pillaged its capital and violated its sanctuary. A mighty fall of which the direct cause was the refusal to accept a small sacrifice.

Landing before Constantinople the Crusaders demanded tribute before going on their way; about ten million gold francs. The Emperor paid half that sum and then began to bewail his fate. The rich said they were all ruined and refused to contribute to a patriotic pool the small

sums which would have ensured their salvation. After months of waiting, the city was stormed and sacked. After three days the loot amounted to more than a hundred millions, without counting the inestimable treasure represented by the works of art and sacred objects appropriated or "requisitioned". The wealth of Byzantium was after all "pooled" but only to be carried off by the conqueror.

It rests with us, Gentlemen of the Round Table, with all of us Europeans to see to it that a different history is written for the new Europe.

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Auf diese Quelle bezieht sich ein einführender und erläuternder Essay von Kirsch, Martin, Europa-zweifel als Kennzeichen des Europäers. Denis de Rougemonts intellektuelle Konstruktion Europas im zuvor genannten Sammelband, S. 218-220.

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