

'Will we have a European Parliament?' from Le Monde (14 September 1947)

Caption: On 14 September 1947, in the French daily newspaper Le Monde, the French MP Édouard Bonnefous gives his opinion on the debates that took place during the first conference of the European Parliamentary Union (EPU) held in Gstaad from 8 to 10 September 1947.

Source: Le Monde. dir. de publ. Beuve-Méry, Hubert. 14.09.1947, n° 818. Paris: Le Monde. "Aurons-nous un parlement européen?", auteur:Bonnefous, Edouard , p. 2.

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After the Gstaad Conference

Will we have a European Parliament?

While the whole of Europe is engulfed in misery and disarray, will the undeniably late, yet praiseworthy, efforts that are increasingly being made eventually overcome the erosive powers that threaten us? The question is no longer ‘Should Europe unite?’ but ‘How can Europe unite before it is too late?’

A three-day conference took place recently, between 8 and 11 September in Gstaad, situated in the enchanting surroundings of the Bernese Oberland. 150 members of parliament from 12 European countries attended the conference.

I was among almost 50 members of the French Parliament (independents, MRP [Popular Republican Movement], RGR [Coalition of the Republican Left] and SFIO [French Section of the Workers’ International] members) who participated in the debates, during which Paul Reynaud, René Coty, Pierre Pflimlin and Francisque Gay eloquently expressed the hopes and the fears of our country.

At the start, all the members of parliament from Western European countries were presented with a questionnaire: ‘Are you in favour of European federation within the framework of the UN?’

Of the 4 094 people questioned, 1 571 (38 %) answered ‘yes’ and only 46 (1 %) answered ‘no’. It is interesting to note that the ‘yes’ vote comprised representatives of all parties from all countries.

The Gstaad Conference therefore aimed to find ways of achieving this federation. The following method was agreed: first, to mobilise parliamentary majorities across Europe who are in favour of federation and organise them above any party politics into cohesive groups; then, to promote increasingly close economic cooperation with the aim of achieving European economic union; finally, to coordinate parliamentary activities through a union of the European parliaments which will prepare for the — hopefully imminent — creation of a United States of Europe.

This is the spirit of the resolutions unanimously adopted by the Gstaad Conference.

The founder of the pan-European movement in 1922, Mr Richard Coudenhove-Kalergi, captured this spirit in his inaugural speech: ‘We are gathered here as good-willed members of parliament from all over Europe, aiming to prepare, to create a true European Parliament, a European constitutional assembly elected by the parliaments, with a mandate from these parliaments and the people.’

Let us never forget that the League of Nations failed largely because it was a league of governments. It might perhaps have succeeded if it had been a league of peoples.

The people themselves must be directly represented, so that, in such assemblies, the individuals themselves can make their voices heard above the chancelleries.

What sincere European democrats do not want is to build in the image of Hitler’s dream around a federal state, nor do they wish to construct one hostile bloc to stand against another, or to be a bridgehead, or an outpost, or a fortress. On the contrary, they want to build a Europe that is not established according to borders arising from our ideal preferences or resentments, but a Europe as it has been bequeathed to us by 20 centuries of history and by an eternity of geographic reality.

Edouard Bonnefous