

'The knight and the gentleman' from the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (29 January 1954)


Caption: On 29 January 1954, the German daily newspaper Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung goes over the arguments put forward the previous day by Count Coudenhove-Kalergi when speaking to the Frankfurt Society for Trade and Sciences in support of European cultural unity.

Source: Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung. Zeitung für Deutschland. 29.01.1954. Frankfurt/Main: FAZ Verlag GmbH. "Der Ritter und der Gentleman".

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The knight and the gentleman

Count Coudenhove-Kalergi on the foundations of Europe's cultural unity

Count Richard N. Coudenhove-Kalergi's address to the Frankfurt Society for Trade, Industry and Science was a kind of brief summary of culture throughout history whose conclusions concurred with the proposed idea of European unification. The leading representative of the pan-European concept for more than three decades did not raise questions with his topic; instead, he established cultural unity within the context of a journey through history. This he did with a kind of generous, factual overview which mastered its subject so thoroughly that it virtually resulted in a consolidation of his life's work, even at the risk of oversimplifying the complexity of the subject.

Coudenhove does not consider Europe a continent, because — unlike other continents — it was not shaped by natural circumstances, but rather by the actions of man, emerging 2 000 years ago as a result of Caesar's extensive expeditions of conquest. The cultural as well as the political unity of this supranational structure developed during three 500-year periods: the Western Roman Empire with its uniform administrative language and economy; the early Middle Ages, marked by vast migrations of peoples during which Europe had to defend itself against the incoming hordes; and the late Middle Ages, when knights, clerics and scholars acted as upholders of culture. Two important inventions brought about a sudden end to this intellectual cultural circle: gunpowder and printer's ink. The lansquenet with his musket all of a sudden possessed more power than the noble knight; the individual entered intellectual areas previously reserved for clerics and scholars; the Reformation dissolved the unity of the Church; and the disappearance of Latin made way for national idioms.

Current efforts to build Europe as a whole were characterised by Coudenhove as a revolution whose objective is the creation of a community of fate and culture. The outside threat to this community, its common destiny so to say, formerly represented by the menacing danger of Islam, now comes from Bolshevism. The foundations for spiritual unity are, according to Coudenhove, Antiquity's ideal of freedom, the Christian concept of fraternity and the phenomenon of the valiant knight. It is in the renewal of the 'gentleman ideal', freed from the class prejudices of the past, that the pan-European sees an essential element for spiritual unification and the desired goal of a generally binding ethical code acceptable to both Christians and non-Christians. It is, however, questionable as to how far the rebirth of a previous human ideal possesses enough reality and potential in the present situation in Europe, in a spiritual landscape in which not only ethics and morals matter, but coal and steel, the taming of the demonic mass phenomena, the practical exchange of skilled workers, the results of nuclear research, television programmes and film stars. The pan-European's idealistic structure, generous in its design but not without controversy in its detail, is bound to find overall and wholehearted approval because its creator demands the reconciliation of France and Germany as the foundation of unity and also takes into account the regrettable fact that there is currently more talk about a European army than about European peace.

At the beginning of the address, the Vice-Chancellor of Frankfurt's Johann Wolfgang Goethe University, Professor Gans, presented Coudenhove, in his capacity as Honorary President of the European Movement, with a diploma appointing him an honorary graduate of the Frankfurt Alma Mater.

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