The Christian culture

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Some Christian Democrat groups were talking about European unity long before the Second World War. Some leaders lamented in particular the disappearance of the spiritual unity of Europe as it apparently existed in the Middle Ages. Others had been active in the pro-European movements of the 1920s. As a result, the Austrian intellectual and political writer, Richard Coudenhove-Kalergi, founder of the Paneuropean Union in 1923, mobilised Europe's intellectual and political elites in support of European integration. Deliberately setting himself above partisan schisms, in 1930 he proposed a draft pan-European pact and founded the *Paneuropa* movement, which was immediately joined by a good many Conservative, Liberal and Christian Democrat politicians from a number of European countries. As their predecessor, he was a source of inspiration for the post-war Federalists.

In the aftermath of the war, Conservative circles were in a state of confusion. While many Christian Democrats had fought for the Resistance, some Catholics had shown themselves to be extremely tolerant at times towards the Fascist regimes in power in Italy, Austria and Slovakia. Some had even been drawn into collaborating with the German occupation forces. Furthermore, while the activities of the Resistance may have contributed to the birth of a strong feeling of European solidarity and a sense of Western civilisation's common Christian roots vis-à-vis Nazi barbarism, they did not automatically lead to the idea of a supranational European political entity being established in the post-war period.

The international strategy adopted by the Vatican at the end of the war entailed above all a systematic defence of Western Christian civilisation against the advance of Communism. However, the Catholic Church approved the European federalist idea, provided that it did not promote subversive ideas. Yet, in 1948, Pope Pius XII — a Roman steeped in German culture — expressed his fear of a moral and spiritual decadence in Europe and officially declared his support for the Federalist Movement. However, his support for the European cause also entailed an idealisation of the Christian Middle Ages, as illustrated by the elevation of Saint Benedict to the rank of 'Patron Saint of all Europe' in 1947, on the 14th centenary of his birth. Pius XII also sent a personal representative to the European Congress held in The Hague in May 1948. The Catholics supported European unification on economic, political and military grounds. The rural Catholic population and the Conservatives, however, had reservations about -abandoning the primacy of sovereignty too quickly. The growing threat of Communist expansion confirmed the Christian Democrats' view that only a united and strengthened Europe within an Atlantic Alliance would be able to thwart Soviet ambitions. This aspiration was reinforced by the pro-European policy led by Christian statesmen (R. Schuman, K. Adenauer, A. De Gasperi, J. Bech, P. van Zeeland, J. Luns) and was also at the root of the expression 'Vatican Europe', which was used by some of their political rivals.