

'The European Parliamentary Union Congress' from Le Monde (7 September 1948)

Caption: On 7 September 1948, the French daily newspaper Le Monde discusses the impact of the debates which took place during the second European Parliamentary Union (EPU) Congress held in Interlaken from 1 to 5 September 1948.

Source: Le Monde. dir. de publ. BEUVE-MÉRY, Hubert. 07.09.1948, n° 1121; 5e année. Paris: Le Monde. "Le Congrès de l'Union parlementaire européenne", p. 1.

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The Congress of the European Parliamentary Union

The growing number of 'European' meetings is not something to be regretted in itself. Let us just say that the public, which does not always follow them with the greatest attention, is likely to lose its way amid such a plethora of complex organisations.

The European Parliamentary Union, which recently held its congress in Interlaken, is not to be confused with the European Union of Federalists, which held its gathering in May in The Hague. Created last year in Gstaad on a more restricted basis than the latter, the Parliamentary Union has set itself the task of implementing the resolutions adopted by the Union of Federalists. It has thus set about drawing up plans for a European Federation.

The discussions were lively between those countries which would like their empires to be represented in the Federation and those which, having no overseas possessions, are opposed to this idea, and also between the five signatories of the Brussels Treaty and the representatives of the 12 other nations taking part in the Marshall Plan. The latter seem to regard the five signatories as enjoying an advantage over them, as seeking, by virtue of the Treaty, to acquire a dominant position; hence, they are seeking to contain their influence.

The Five would gladly have settled for a Consultative Assembly with a small number of Members, while the Twelve favoured a more numerous Assembly, enjoying extensive powers, in which they would be substantially represented. The Federation plan that was finally adopted seems to embody the victory of this second approach.

The European Federation, which would be open to all but would, in the first instance, consist of the Marshall Plan countries (West Germany included), would have a Government and a bi-cameral Parliament. It would thus be a genuine superstate, whose powers would extend to the control of public finance, foreign affairs and national, or rather European, defence.

It goes without saying that a plan of this kind does no more than point the way forward, since those who adopted it have no official remit. Many other plans of the same ilk could be adopted at many other congresses before any practical result is forthcoming. It will be possible to talk of serious progress only when the governments and parliaments of the countries concerned have agreed to convene an international constituent assembly and have also agreed on the number of Members that it would have, the way in which they would be elected and the powers that they would enjoy.

Gatherings such as those at The Hague and Interlaken, or the forthcoming meeting in Rome of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (a world organisation, rather than one limited to Europe), or again the Congress for a Federal World Government which opens today in Luxembourg, seek above all to generate new ideas, to bring people together. Sometimes their aim is to 'put pressure on governments', to quote Paul-Henri Spaak. And perhaps they have to some extent succeeded, if it is true that the French Government has already made two approaches to the Five and that Clement Attlee, hitherto somewhat dubious, has recently taken the chair of a committee which will coordinate federalist activities in Great Britain.

If governments sometimes bow to 'pressure' individually, how they react together is another matter. Their initiatives do not always attract favourable comment. France's move coincides unfortunately with a period of crisis, and this has prompted doubts as to our true 'federalising' qualities. Even in countries well disposed towards us, we are presumed to have ulterior motives: our aim is surely to hold Germany in check rather than restore its independence, to put Britain on the spot, and to evade certain American demands.

And yet the United States looks favourably on the European concept, in whatever form. In yesterday's edition of the *New York Herald Tribune*, Walter Lippmann went as far as to propose that the US Administration proclaim Europe's independence vis-à-vis both America and Russia. The idea is a fine one, though its implementation might call for a prior agreement with Moscow. It can only encourage the peoples of Europe to follow the path recently mapped out in Interlaken and to set about organising their own affairs.