

## Address given by Carlo Sforza (Perugia, 18 July 1948)

**Caption:** On 18 July 1948, in an address given at the University of Perugia, Count Carlo Sforza, Italian Foreign Minister, summarises the historical development of the European idea and calls on his fellow countrymen to work actively towards the unification of the continent.

**Source:** SFORZA, Carlo. Cinque Anni a Palazzo Chigi, La politica estera italiana dal 1947 al 1951. Roma: Atlante, 1952. 586 p. p. 483-496.

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## Inaugural lecture delivered at the *Università per stranieri (University for Foreigners)* in Perugia on 18 July 1948

The issue of Europe is something of which we are now all acutely aware, be we parliamentarians, academics or members of the public. Had I been expressing my views in the Senate or the Chamber of Deputies I might perhaps have had to choose my every word more carefully. There it would have been the Minister for Foreign Affairs addressing you. But here the backdrop is Italian, indeed European, civilisation, and I can speak as an individual, voicing concerns and ideas that extend beyond an essentially political debate. I believe that, in doing this, I am contributing to civic education and to Italy's own interest. To civic education because, in a true democracy, those responsible for their country's political future should wholeheartedly welcome every opportunity to express their innermost thoughts. In Italy's interest, because Europe is even now much more of an entity than it appears; and it will perhaps be appreciated in Europe that an Italian public figure does not hesitate to adopt what he considers as a stance based on ethical and historical laws that we can no longer flout with impunity. We cannot breathe freely in an atmosphere in which diplomatic balances and military safeguards prevail. We cannot live in a healthy atmosphere unless we fully express all our views. That is what I shall do here, and I am sure that those who listen to me, here or elsewhere, will understand that, so far as our condition permits, we wish to serve the cause of truth and peace — and for us that cause is Italy's cause.

It is clear from the pain, suffering and disasters through which we Europeans have been living since the collapse of the convenient but makeshift structure that lasted from the Treaty of Vienna to 1914 that a united and organised Europe is about to emerge. We must accept that great turning points and unexpected solutions are born of suffering and not from wellbeing. It is pain that instructs human beings and points them towards salvation and higher things. A diverse and productive structure, agreements where once there was sterile suspicion: these are an end, not a beginning.

To those who doubt whether the future of an organised Europe is the main problem ahead, I wish to proffer — at a time when America has come so close to us, increasingly arousing our gratitude and interest — I wish, as I say, to proffer an essentially American piece of evidence. No-one can now deny that Americans are typically American: though they speak English, they are quite unlike the British; and there now exists an American nationality as identifiable as the Italian or French nationality. But let me relate to you the comments, written right in the middle of the eighteenth century, that is to say on the eve of American independence, by an observer of events in America, one Josiah Tucker. According to Tucker, the mutual antipathies and conflicting interests of the Americans, the differences in their mode of government, their habits and customs proved they had no point of contact or common interest. And he concluded that the Americans would never be able to form a close-knit nation, whatever their form of government.

In less than a century events proved that prophecy wrong. The Americans are now one of the most characteristically united peoples in the whole world. In fact, who knows, they may even be too uniform. What is certain is that, living among them, it is impossible to imagine that, 80 years ago, they could have torn each other to pieces in a bloody civil war between the North and the South.

It may be that the rapid emergence of a new and close-knit nationality on the North American continent has played a part in accelerating the pace of Europe's revival. When they crossed the Atlantic on steam ships, the few Europeans who returned to Europe from New York still felt among strangers if they disembarked in London rather than Naples, Bremen or Cherbourg instead of Antwerp or Genoa. But that is no longer the case, and even those who, like myself, felt so much at their ease in the cordial and open atmosphere of the United States, feel the inner delight of returning home immediately on landing in Europe, whether their point of disembarkation is in Brittany, the Netherlands or the Mediterranean. In shedding its European features, America is increasingly making the Old Continent a common homeland for us all. The countries of Asia did something similar with their national revivals. While Asia slept and America was barely inhabited, Europe felt alone and could afford the empty luxury of being divided.

That is no longer true. And since — despite the words of the old Italian adage — every truth should be told, it is as well to know why the standing of the French, the British, the Italians and the Dutch has so diminished

in Asia and in Africa. There is just one reason: the two World Wars of 1914-1918 and 1939-1944. Before 1914 even the most nationalist of colonialists had become Europeanists, almost despite themselves. They had learnt to their cost that European initiatives in Africa were pitted one against the other. The Europeans agreed on one thing at least: on dominating the two neighbouring continents through the superiority of their organisation and weapons. It was in 1914 that their prestige began to wane. Despite the noble picture both sides painted of the conflict, to everyone in Asia and Africa it appeared nothing more than a sordid and inexplicable civil war. And when, once the war was over, some of the whites returned to their colonial possessions, the natives could not conceal, despite their impassive expressions, that the white people dubbed 'Rumi' in Arabic, those Europeans they had so feared and admired were now, in their eyes, just poor devils like themselves, and perhaps even worse.

It is for those and similar reasons that we must tell ourselves that even if we do not want European unity for the love of it, we will have to secure it in our own interest.

Even though our forebears did not in practice use the word Europe, it existed and was clearly perceived, but was called Christianity. And one of the heaviest responsibilities, in European terms, that the Germanic world has to bear is that of having deprived that noble word of force and life as a result of the break brought about by the Reformation.

Revived and further developed at the time of the Enlightenment, in the contemporary world the concept of Europe was merely a cultural motif.

Like our own Mazzini, who said: 'I love my country because I love all our countries,' the European concept was enhanced and strengthened by eliminating the militaristic elements of Napoleon's European aspiration and the policing element of the more appreciably European inspiration that imbued the thoughts of Metternich and the actions of the Holy Alliance.

But if the Holy Alliance gave Europe peace and tranquillity, and perhaps even prosperity, it did not give it the freedom to breathe. It provided the peoples of Europe with a blessed tranquillity that banished all dreams, including dreams of patriotism and even dreams of a truly profound religious sentiment. In every police department, the absolute order was: '*Nihil de principe, parum de Deo*' (a caution to say nothing of princes, little of God). At the time, a concerned Russian aristocrat wrote from wealthy imperial Vienna, which lived off ten subject nations: '*Que voulez-vous, ce sont des gens qui ont la bêtise d'être heureux*' ('What do you expect, these are people foolish enough to be happy').

Anxious to rid themselves of the oppressive atmosphere inflicted by foreign and national tyrants, our forefathers — in 1821, 1831, 1848 and 1859–60 — were to find a valuable resource in the principle of nationality. Moreover, the same was happening almost everywhere: in the noble but vain uprisings of the Polish people, for example. The same was to happen later for the peoples of the Balkans when they began to struggle to become masters in their own homes.

That was the positive side, but there was also a negative side. And we are still struggling with the two main shortcomings the nineteenth century failed to resolve in what was nevertheless its greatest achievement. It is the mission for those of us who wish to work together on shaping the future to remedy those two shortcomings as rapidly as possible.

The first shortcoming was that freedom was acknowledged to be the ultimate ideal, the ultimate guarantee of human progress. But faced with the economic development of a world that was industrialising, it allowed a rigid economic liberalism to emerge. Not long since, this was unanimously rejected, in words at least. But we need not discuss that nineteenth century shortcoming here, however fraught with danger it may be.

The second shortcoming, which no-one, sadly, seems prepared to repudiate, in words if not in actions, is the excessive freedom of the nation-states, whose suspect and absolute sovereignty is the sole cause of all modern wars.

Of course, if there is something we Italians can be proud of (and it is a sad thing that textbooks make little of it) it is this: only in Italy did we have a *Risorgimento* that was both national and universalist at the same time. We are the only people in Europe who, in the famous slogan '*Ripassin l'Alpe e tornerem fratelli*' ('Let them go back over the Alps and we shall become brothers once again'), affirmed against the Austrians in the battle of Goito and in resisting the French at Porta San Pancrazio in Rome, that we were prepared to love even our invaders as brothers — provided they went away again.

Sadly, not only did this not happen everywhere, it was not always true of Italians either. The chaste goddess — the nation, the free nation — was gradually transformed into a destructive idol: nationalism. It was in France that the word itself itself, 'nationalism', was coined around 1900, and it soon became identified with the most senseless of racisms, anti-semitism, the socialism of idiots. The scourge weighed heavy on the world, first in Italy and then in Germany, and produced what hatred always produces: wars, destruction, the ruin of entire generations and, equally damaging, the kind of peace that is inadequate and ungenerous and is merely an uncertain armistice bearing the seeds of fresh conflict.

There is real peace only when its authors set out the kind of world they are moving towards. Thus it was that, in 1815, Talleyrand won peace for a defeated and invaded France simply because he made himself the advocate of the principle of legitimacy which, for better or for worse — and, in terms of European peace, for better rather than for worse — reigned in Europe for half a century.

Democratic Italy today is no longer under invasion and, in a sense, has never been defeated. In the long term, Italy could be better off than Talleyrand's France, were it able always and everywhere to proclaim that its future is linked to the union of Europe and were it always and everywhere to declare that Italians are prepared for any limitation on their national sovereignty, on just one condition: that the others do the same.

Of course, we must remain profoundly Italian. For the sake of Europe's nobility and moral prosperity, serious and sober national patriotism must continue to flourish. A standardised Europe would be dull and mediocre were it no longer possible to distinguish Dante's Italy from the France of Racine and Molière, or Shakespeare's England from Cervantes' Spain and so forth. But even today — despite the suspicions and barriers — it is increasingly difficult for Europeans to think of themselves solely as Italians or French, British, Poles, Austrians and so on.

For the very reason that we Italians are a people conscious of our own vital force, who know we have everything to gain from a world in which peace is open and secure, we must declare and proclaim at every opportunity that we are prepared for limitations on our national sovereignty, on just one condition: the condition I have already mentioned, that other countries do as we do.

The League of Nations, which the Italian people welcomed with such high hopes in 1919, failed because it was a federation of sovereign states, all in practice free to declare war.

Switzerland today is an oasis of good sense and civic dignity in Europe. But do not imagine it was always so. The cantons hated and fought each other, as did Guelphic Florence and Ghibelline Pisa. Peace among the cantons only came when it was decided that a single sovereign authority in Berne would have charge of the army, although all the other sovereign freedoms of the cantons were left intact. And even today, each — save in relation to the armed forces and customs — is a genuine and individual sovereign state.

Even back in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Europe's sovereign monarchies were a source of anarchy compared with the old Holy Roman Empire which, in theory at least, embodied European unity. But what is the use of the absolute sovereignty of those states or of the pointless Chinese-style great walls — be they military or for customs purposes — with which they surround themselves in today's world in which aeroplanes, submarines, bombs and airborne missiles know no frontiers or distances? It would be laughable were there not a darker element: those who cling to such damaging anachronisms seek to embroil the peoples, attempting to pass off their foolish clichés as evidence of patriotism. And yet recently, they were to some extent successful, with their weasel-words like *Lebensraum*, 'chosen peoples', descendants of one moribund empire or another.

Only the most naïve — and sadly there were naïve people in Italy as well — could believe that the recent wars, and particularly the war that began in 1939 and 1940, came about for economic reasons. No, they were wars of sects or religions or prestige, if you prefer. Now, it is clear to us that this pathological madness could recur. Just a few days ago, I was myself horrified to recognise its symptoms emerging in the discussions on the application of the Marshall Plan to Italy and the rest of Europe. Some people were actually speaking in good faith and arguing that black was white and white was black, just because they believed they were serving the cause of some obscure religion of theirs which, albeit materialistic, is a religion nonetheless. That may also be behind the attacks on the Franco-Italian customs union that I proposed in July 1945 and that the French government is examining and pursuing with the same good will as our own, with the goal of the economic progress of both our countries and because we want to be among the first to set Europe a practical example of union.

Italians must react against *a priori* rejection from whatever quarter. We must all understand that the only way to avoid a third world war and secure the one thing that counts in the long run, the primacy of ideas, is to become the forerunners of the union of a Europe that is open to all. This must be a Europe generous and clear-sighted enough to persuade all the small states that make it up — and even Germany and France are small in the face of modern technology — all, I repeat, of these small states of Europe, to relinquish a portion of their sovereignty. One hundred and fifty years ago, the new North American states similarly surrendered part of their sovereignty, and two generations later — as I said — so did the Swiss cantons. Without that, calls for a United States of Europe and Interparliamentary Conferences will be no more than pious hopes. Either we Europeans, and particularly we Italians, must leave behind, and soon, the phase of the sovereign nation-state, first in our way of thinking and then in reality, or we shall perish in the horrors of a third war.

Just as our ancestors resisted European unification as pursued through the folly of a Corsican adventurer, just as our fathers and, indeed, we ourselves resisted the myth of a Europe as conceived by the goose-stepping generals and sophists of Kaiser Wilhelm II, so are we now determined to resist any form of dictatorship by an individual state. But resisting is not enough; we need to create. And the only practical solution available to us is the federal model. It gladdens our hearts as Italians that this was developed years ago in the minds of our pioneering brothers, in the solitude of their confinement in the prison island of Ventotene. The name of one of those pioneers is sacred and must be mentioned here because, like the martyrs of old, he gave his life for his faith: Eugenio Colomi, killed by the Nazis in Rome in 1944.

In this hall at least, before this audience, there is no need to respond to the ignorant objection: ‘but there has always been war ...’ There have been so many things: human sacrifice, slavery ... but they have disappeared. Even practices that existed in our short life span have disappeared. When I tell my children I once fought a duel when I was very young, they look at me in amazement, as if I were standing before them clad in body armour and helmet.

Has not war between one castle and another, between one city and another, vanished? War can be made to vanish, at least as a legal institution; that is already in our hands. But we have to want it, and we can only want it by taking a positive approach, by creating a federal Europe.

Almost all European capitals are now awash with federalist societies that differ from one another about as much as one protestant denomination differs from another. All are faithfully pursuing the same ideal. Last autumn, I was in London for talks with Ernest Bevin — on the basis of which we happily resolved a number of Anglo-Italian disputes. Churchill wanted to see me again, and, in the friendliest of conversations, sought my cooperation for the successful outcome of the conference he was preparing at The Hague for the European union. For what it was worth, I promised him my wholehearted assistance, and set just one condition: that all of the unionist and federalist groups should be invited — and he agreed.

I would say the same of all the plans, proposals and agreements that will result in the federation. They will all be of value, provided we can then say ‘*inveni portum*’ (‘I have found my haven’). And, on the understanding that I am expressing a purely personal view here, I would venture only to point out that there

is never any need for excessively detailed plans. If the final wording is too precise, it almost always prejudices the germination of creative ideas. History is like a river that cuts its way through the plains. Its final outlet may be certain, but not the direction it will take. And that is why for a time, some years ago, Aristide Briand's plan for a 'United States of Europe' seemed more akin to our ideal in its objective, but it failed miserably in the corridors of Geneva. It failed because it was detailed and precise — precise as a postage stamp. History and the future must be allowed greater freedom.

There are times when a movement as extensive as the Crusades can spread like wildfire. There were certainly such moments in the French Revolution. Another example was the American anti-slavery movement: in five years, it accomplished what ten centuries of aspiration and lament had failed to achieve. But it is clear that we cannot expect miracles from today's famished and fearful Europe. A new plan in the Briand mould is today inconceivable, even were it more flexible.

And so we need to encourage partial unions which, being open to other countries of good will, may spread and make their mark, not by force but by shining example. That was what I was thinking — even if I hardly dared admit it to myself — when, in July 1948, I launched the idea of a customs union between Italy and France at the Conference of the Sixteen Powers in Paris. The idea is now moving forward, and it is my belief that it can no longer be halted, because it will be so useful to France, to Italy and to the whole of Europe.

Furthermore, it is to be hoped that the Brussels Pact among five European powers — the United Kingdom, France, Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg — will have a very different and more successful future than the political and military institution it is today. Nowadays, overshadowed by the possibility of conflicts between giants, events may prove mere diplomatic agreements to be of no more value than the many sad treaties of the Napoleonic era that were made, unmade, forgotten and violated. If, as we hope, it is to become a stable and influential European entity, the Brussels Pact also must meet far more extensive requirements than thus far recognised.

Those requirements take one form and one form only — as is apparent from what I have said to you so far: there has to be a federal link, with all the economic and moral consequences that flow from it.

Of course, even if it remains the purely military alliance it is today, it may well be that other European countries will accede to Western European Union, which has just been established in Brussels. Needing an alliance, they will naturally think in terms of entering into a partnership with western countries with which they are morally and historically connected through so many long-standing and close links. But in that case, Western European Union, even if enlarged, will not be a permanent force of attraction. At best, it will be a good temporary solution, a good insurance policy. But at the first — desirable and not impossible — sign of an easing of tension, it is likely to become a dead letter.

If we want to assess the practical value of a military alliance among European states, even if it comes with an American guarantee, I would suggest that we measure it against the feelings and interests of a people which, perhaps more rapidly than is imagined in Frankfurt and Berlin, will become a far more complex problem for Europe and for the whole world than the Soviets: I am referring to the German people.

If a western military alliance became really powerful, it could attract the German people. But it is Germany's most untrustworthy instincts — part militaristic, part romantic — that will draw it to the alliance. The Germans, Europe's new lansquenets, might perhaps still secretly intend gambling on a German national victory at the very time of hiring out their military capabilities to the new alliance. They might be prepared to abandon it for more attractive opportunities, as they did at the battle of Leipzig, and as they would happily have done (except that they were not given the chance) with one or other of the combatants in the last phase of the Second World War.

My point, incidentally, is not to revive fatuous anti-German wartime propaganda, but just to remind ourselves and recognise that the Germans have learnt self-governance less well than have other peoples. This is not just because they have by nature a *Bedientenseele*, or servile spirit as August Bebel believed, but because in the sixteenth century Luther, despite appearances to the contrary, halted their development by

offering them in droves to their temporal masters, the various sovereign princes of the Empire.

The democratic recovery of the Germans is one of the prerequisites for solving the European problem. After the war, it was foolishly attempted by imposing foreign didactic therapies. It is our supreme duty to reconcile the Germans with Europe. But how? The only way is to offer the Germans the opportunity of sitting around the table of the great political and economic federation of western Europe as equals among equals and free men among free men. Then, and only then, will the age-old vestiges that gave rise to Nazism and still fester in so many German pagan souls be driven out. On that day and on that day alone, Goethe's Germany will be revived.

Unless we take that main avenue, the risk is that, in the interest of avoiding a theoretical Soviet threat, we reforge with our own hands an inherent and closer German danger.

Meantime, we Italians, unlike the Germans, instinctively know that history and nature have made us a western people and that — although we are very keen to establish the most productive economic agreements with the peoples of Eastern Europe and the Balkans — our own longest-standing heritage is the Western heritage.

If we want a tranquil, industrious and serene Italy, an Italy that does not see the problem of its burgeoning birth rate as more serious and insoluble year by year; if we want an Italy in which our republican democracy enjoys real popular support, and where Italian foreign policy (and this would be a miracle) is something we discuss not just without suspicion — like a gentleman's pastime — but with interest and affection, in the evening on the village square and on street corners in working-class districts, we must ensure that Italians cease to feel oppressed as if they were 'between the devil and the deep blue sea' but understand that the world's highways are open to them, that they will travel them as equals among equals, and that Italy will be open to its allies.

It may be that the Italian interest is less vital for Europe than the German interest I mentioned a moment ago. That may appear to be so, but it is not perhaps fundamentally the case. The Mediterranean is becoming an international centre once again, four centuries after Columbus inadvertently relegated it to second place. And it is of very great interest to Europe and the world that the Italian nation should add to all the talents it possesses the ability to cease being a troubled, angry nation and become serenely self-confident. Even those who hold Italy in little account ought to understand that, in the long term, this would be a good thing for them as well.

But there is an overriding consideration that directly affects all the peoples of Europe. And it is that only through a federal society will we be able to rid the old continent of those senseless customs barriers that serve only to keep down the standard of living of our peoples. They serve only, through fictitious advantages, to make those peoples hate or at least envy each other, as they never did in Mediaeval Christian times. If the peoples of Europe today patiently tolerate the senseless bonds of customs, passports and visas that poison their lives, it is merely because, as must once have happened to the children of slaves, they have come to look at them as inevitable. On the day Europeans have for and among themselves the same complete freedom that exists among the 48 states of the American Union, they will soon see that the economists and supporters of the police state have deceived them by telling them over the years that the bonds oppressing them were geo-political necessities and guarantees designed to secure a *Lebensraum* that can never be achieved.

A federal union cannot co-exist with the myth of autarchy. Remembering that those myths left too many of our industries operating unrealistically and cast Italy into chronic poverty, both painful and dispiriting, that is reason enough, in purely economic terms, to want the federal union.

Finally, there are those who mutter that a federal Europe would be thwarted by the United States, which would fear it as a competitor. What a mistake and, in my view, what a vainglorious illusion! The United States would welcome no longer having to worry about wars in Europe. All Americans would proudly claim that, while they owe their civilisation to the Old Continent, they have paid that debt by offering their

ancestors' common homeland the example and lesson of a young North American continent, which tore itself apart 150 years ago when made up of 13 independent states but became the greatest power in the world once the American states formed a federation.

Russia too should want to see a Europe that is peacefully federated and united, even if it persists in remaining isolated itself.

The reasons I have just cited are the national, international and economic reasons that should propel us all towards a federal solution to the European question.

Let those who mask their inherent powerlessness with scepticism express their sneering doubts.

Mazzini and Cavour were also ridiculed as utopians. So we are in good company! But remember that history is the burial ground of peoples who were incapable of looking to the future, who failed to grasp the course of history. Our Italy must live on. To stake its claim in the world, it has just one option today: it must assert itself through ideas.

It is precisely because we love Italy that we want, with all our hearts, to see our country soon esteemed as one of the nations that has hastened on the happy era of hope and a new beginning for Europe!