

## 'Hendrick Brugmans: The College of Europe' from World Affairs (October 1951)

**Caption:** In October 1951, Henri Brugmans, former Dutch President of the Union of European Federalists (UEF) and first Rector of the College of Europe in Bruges, considers the establishment of the institution and outlines its main tasks.

**Source:** World Affairs. The quarterly journal of the London Institute of World Affairs. October 1951. London.

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**Publication date:** 19/09/2012

## The College of Europe

### HENDRICK BRUGMANS

The 'Congress of Europe' at The Hague, in May, 1948, was attended by a Flemish Franciscan priest, Father Verleye, from Bruges. On his way home, he wondered whether his beloved city could, in one way or another, contribute to the renascence of the European commonwealth. He persuaded some of his compatriots to form a local committee, established contact with the European Movement's Cultural Section (especially with its chairmen, Señor Salvador de Madariaga and Mr. Kenneth Lindsay); and—almost miraculously—found official help for his idea, which, as time went on, became more and more precise. The object was: not to create an illusory 'international University', but to organise an international school for postgraduates, who were interested in a career in the European field (OEEC, Strasbourg, the Schuman Plan, the Payments Union, ECE, etc., as well as journalism, and economic organisations with international interests). The idea seemed to be sound for, if some kind of European Union has to be organised, it would need specially trained officials.

With the help of the City of Bruges, a preparatory session of three weeks was held in November, 1949. This time a Frenchman was present, Monsieur Henri van Effenterre, Professor of Archaeology at the University of Caen—and an Englishman as Director of Studies, Mr. John Bowle, the author of *The Unity of European History* and *Western Political Thought*. In three weeks of continuous improvisation the foundations were laid for a permanent institution. It was to be neither a school where one specific political doctrine was to be taught, nor a 'Super University' wishing to compete with existing higher education in the different countries, but a centre of European education und research.

The results of the preparatory session were discussed a few weeks later at the European Cultural Conference at Lausanne, and the initiators were encouraged to proceed. In the last days of January the Rector was nominated; there was just enough time to organise the first regular academic year, to be started in October, 1950, with the material help of the Belgian Government. From that date onwards, a small committee, meeting every week in Brussels, went to work and gave the College a juridical status, a budget and a programme. In May, a pamphlet, written in the two official languages of the College—French and English, was distributed and a recruiting campaign started.

In fact, it was rather late, and there existed little or no machinery for selecting candidates. All national branches of the European Movement were asked to take the initiative and create special committees, composed of government officials and University authorities, ready to examine the personal qualities of potential students for Bruges. The general conditions to be fulfilled were and still are: (i) students must have completed studies at a national university; (ii) have a sufficient knowledge of French and English; (iii) have the intention of following an international career. On this basis, the first academic year was ceremoniously opened in the Gothic Hall of the Town Hall at Bruges, on October 12, 1950; thirty-five students, belonging to sixteen nations, participated. Nearly all the Strasbourg Nations were represented, and also two non-European countries, Egypt and the United States, while seven were refugees from the Eastern countries of Europe. A generous grant of the Belgian Government made it possible for us to try our chance.

Obviously, the College of Europe would not have been created if there had not been a drive towards greater unity among the European nations. But this does not mean that the programme should have a political or ideological bias. There does not exist any official or non-official College doctrine, as to Federalism or Centralism, Commonwealth or Atlantic Union, Constitutionalism or Functionalism, Left or Right. Nothing, of course, is taboo; but the aim of our methods at Bruges is to discuss problems on the basis of objective, scientific knowledge, instead of being carried away by emotional prejudice.

### The programme

Of course, we do not look merely to 'lessons of the past' as such. History does not repeat itself, and the 'Plutarchian moralism' is perhaps not very effective. But history can show us how much the European peoples have in common (although they stubbornly try to ignore it) and how many grievances they have

against each other. The study of both seems to be indispensable for those who want to understand and to transform present conditions of international life.

The grievances! Somewhere Heinrich Heine warns his French friends against the passionate feelings which modern Germans have against them because of the decapitation of poor Conradin, at Naples, in 1214. Of course, the French themselves have completely forgotten how deeply they wounded the German soul, as Heine says, but his compatriots all learn this lamentable story in their elementary schools. The noble Staufen, wearing a white gown, serenely marching towards the scaffold, still haunts German imagination—and the French have not the slightest idea of it! Here lies a whole complex which has to be brought into the open when we want European understanding to become genuine.

On the other hand, how many traditions and experiences European peoples have in common without realising it! Are not our juridical systems all inspired by the same Roman law? Is not Christianity the source of public morale, even (and perhaps especially) if Anti-Clericals come into power—and is this not the case in all our countries? All of us have been confronted with the Reformation and Counter-Reformation, as most of us have participated in the Hansa or have been deeply influenced by free thought and revolution. Is it not probable that a non-European, looking upon our past, would be much more impressed by the similarities than by the national differences, important and valuable as they are? English children hear about the War of the Roses, and young Frenchmen about Armagnacs and Bourguignons. For both, this is national history. But the two phenomena of civil struggle seem strikingly alike to a stranger: to his mind, they appear as two symptoms of the same historic evolutions at a comparable stage. In this respect, the main effort cannot be made by the professor, but by the students themselves, facing up to the memories of school history-books.

Or take the History of Art! Take two illustrated books on Italian and Flemish paintings, and then compare the primitives of both countries and afterwards the baroque period. Where is the main similarity? Between Memlinc and Rubens, between Giotto and Cimabue? Of course, you can find national characteristics, but is it not clear that the chronological cleavages between periods are much deeper than between the nations in evolution? All these matters have to be studied carefully, not only in the cause of intellectual truth, but also because no method is better suited for starting the indispensable task of collective analyses, and for proceeding beyond well-meaning but sentimental cosmopolitanism.

Between the two wars, German scholars like Haushofer, had created the word 'geopolitics'. There was much mysticism in it, and expressions like 'the axis Flushing-Vladivostock' were intended to appeal more to romantic imagination than to reason. Later, the Nazi movement seized upon the idea and found herein a 'scientific' alibi for the conquest of new 'vital space'.

But sound ideas do not lose their value just because they are associated with political fanaticism. The idea is sound, that political action does, to a very large extent, depend upon concrete, basic, factors like population, economic wealth, geography, conditions of production, etc. In other words, if one wants to serve the cause of European integration, whatever may be its final form, it is necessary to know not only the historic background of the nations separately but all of them as a community. One must also be familiar with maps, and with some statistics. How did the past shape us? What are the basic reasons for any action we may have to undertake? What are the 'geopolitical' elements at our disposal?

Take the European map. What strikes us is the arbitrary character of the national borders. A huge geological entity like the Western European coalfields seems to ask for a Schuman Plan. In another field, the ethnical and linguistic differences which make Europe so immensely varied, so complicated and so rich, do not coincide in any way with the political States, despite all efforts made over centuries towards administrative and educational centralisation. Knowing the European map does not mean that a Union becomes self-evident or easy to realise, but it makes one aware of possibilities beyond the present nationalistic regimes.

Further, a study of the Geographic Foundations of a European Personality shows that, while the internal borders are all but sacred and eternal, all but 'imposed by the facts', the Continent's Eastern frontiers are extremely vague. And what about 'European Russia' as opposed to 'Asiatic Russia'? Is there a 'European' and a 'non-European' Turkey? Why then is the whole of Turkey represented at Strasbourg? On the other

hand, if we consider Europe as an entity, what are the regional groups which compose it? Are they, for example, Scandinavia, Mitteleuropa, the Mediterranean basin and perhaps the 'Intermarium' which is becoming something like a myth in certain émigré circles? About all that, geography has something to say, and a College of Europe would be guilty of amateurism if it did not deal with these problems.

Finally, Europe is part of the world. It may seem a complete platitude to say so, but it remains useful to underline it. The economic lectures, delivered at the College by Monsieur François Perroux, had one general trend : to demonstrate that the 'devaluation' of frontiers within Europe is not enough, and that the final field where human economic activity can fully develop, is the whole world. True, economic policy cannot be separated from political action as a whole. True, political action is influenced deeply by historic sentiments of solidarity or aversion. True, even in a free and united world, there will be regions more closely linked together by common interests and similar aspirations. Europe, in recovering from her nationalistic disease, will need protection in her convalescence. Yet European statesmen and civil servants must also realise how desperately Europe needs the rest of the world, and what complicated problems arise when we try to promote a free world economy, without sacrificing weaker convalescent nations to the great powers.

I do not believe in the value of the so-called 'practical knowledge', without a theoretical background. That is why a future civil servant, whatever his particular branch, needs history, geography and general economic thought. It would be absurd to make Bruges a cloistered seminary of philosophers and unpractical scholars. Indeed, it would be useless to make such an attempt, because this generation seems to be hopelessly absorbed by the problems of the day. We may try to enlarge their often rather narrow horizons, but our opportunities are limited. Thus, the College must be open to the discussion of current questions, in which partisan passion is inevitable. Here, particularly, we have to try to give our students real knowledge and a certain *goût du concret*, the lack of which is at the roots of so many ideological debates.

Curiously enough, this younger generation is on the one hand very fond of general ideas, and on the other, disinterested in party politics. Most of them, as far as I can judge, have a bitter distrust towards the ruling political group, whether belonging to the Right or to the Left. They look forward to new political formations, corresponding to the needs and problems of this century. And yet, they have a constant temptation to bring discussions to the level of generalities. Here it is that we must find a place for the third group of subjects within the programme of Bruges. It would be absurd, if a member of the College thought himself capable of representing his country at international conferences without being able to explain how the European Payments Union works. Though he may not know all the details, a year at the College should have taught him to analyse before criticising.

Comparative Law, International Law, elements of Federal Law embodied in institutions like the Schuman Plan are also subjects of which the students must have a general picture and some guiding knowledge. In fact many of the students are lawyers and are particularly interested in these subjects. Some of our professors have complained of a lack of general culture and of concrete practical matter of factness amongst their pupils. In many cases, the students had completed their studies in conditions extremely unfavourable to an intellectual balance; they have, it is true, a tendency towards formalism and abstract reasoning. Nevertheless, Professor Paul Guggenheim, of the Geneva Institute of Higher International Studies, found them able to prepare and discuss papers upon subjects such as: (i) some of the recent judgments and advisory opinions of the International Court of Justice; (ii) a comparison between the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights and the Strasbourg Convention on the same subject; (iii) Soviet views on International Organisation. But in this field of modern European and international organisations the discussion of juridical questions alone is insufficient. This is where the visiting professors help us in explaining and discussing actual institutions and organisations; among them Dr. Van de Goes van Naters, on the General Affairs Committee at Strasbourg, of which he is President, Lord Boyd Orr on the Food and Agriculture Organisation, Dr. Den Hollander, President of the Dutch railways, on transport planning, a leading trade unionist on the social aspects of European integration, a former Minister of Finance on monetary union, one of the negotiators of the Schuman Plan on the Plan and on the technique of international negotiation in general.

Next year, the College will add to its programme a course on the science of public administration in the

international field.

## Methods

The College of Europe, although not completely unique, has certainly all the novel aspects of an experiment. It is a College in the British sense of the word. Not only do students spend a year together, listening to the same lectures, but they live together at the same hotel, the 'Saint Georges' at Bruges, which is exclusively reserved for the members of our community, pupils and professors. It is impossible to exaggerate how much this means. Many of these young men have recently waged war against each other. There are Czechs, Germans, Italians and a Greek. In the beginning, certain delicate subjects had to be avoided. After thirty weeks, while they do not agree on everything, they can discuss practically everything without creating ill-feeling. This is one of the results of the College system.

Secondly, there is the question of selection. We have already referred to the national selection committees. This year's Director of Studies, Monsieur van Effenterre, put forward the idea of a second examination which was conducted in a somewhat original manner. The College invited a group of candidates to come to Bruges and work with this year's students to show what they were able to do. The technique was simple. One general theme had to be studied from different angles. The result was a series of reports—not an intellectual sensation in themselves—but good pieces of work, after giving everybody the chance to act as president, rapporteur, debater or something of the kind. After three days, students and professors made their estimates of each of the candidates; there is no doubt that this kind of examination was very valuable. We hope that these 'Bruges Days' will become a College tradition for former and future students alike.

Thirdly, there is perhaps something new in the special emphasis which is given to personal and seminar work. The College Faculty asks all students to write at least two papers on matters related to the general objectives of the College. In addition, the two permanent tutors at Bruges, each give a year's seminar, the results of which will be published. For these reasons, we simply must not over-burden our students with lectures. In practice, the morning consists of two lectures followed by a seminar, the attendance of which is not compulsory. The afternoon and the evening are in principle free, but from time to time a visiting professor speaks at 5 p.m. or after supper. It is my experience that the *passants parlants* have to be extremely good, if they want to escape censure by our students who had other plans or intentions. In any case, it is a consoling thought that the College gives long week-ends, and that the sea is nearby.

There is another College tradition. Every Wednesday, after lunch, one of the students gives a 'Radio Europe' talk. In fact, there is no microphone, but just a script which is read out and afterwards discussed in a general cross-examination under the chairmanship of next week's speaker. The experiment has sometimes a tendency to become a *Café du Commerce* discussion. A link with the outside world is provided by study trips, which we organise at regular intervals, to such places as Brussels, Ghent, Antwerp, Holland, the Rhine and Ruhr area.

Finally, the College publishes a review, the Bruges Quarterly, composed exclusively of contributions from professors and students. The first number gave a general picture of the College itself. A second summarised the geographical course and contained two articles, one from a German and one from a Czech student. The third issue is devoted to history and includes eight articles from students on various 'national' grievances, each one treated by a writer belonging to the nation against which the grievance is formulated. Is this scientific work? I believe it is. In any case it truly reflects the spirit and the ideals of the College.