


The College of Europe

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The College of Europe

In the Cultural Resolution that it adopted on 10 May 1948 at the end of the Congress of Europe held in The Hague, the Cultural Committee, which was chaired by the Spanish writer and former diplomat, Salvador de Madariaga, advocated the establishment of a European Cultural Centre and a European Institute for Childhood and Youth Questions. However, during the proceedings of the Cultural Committee, some Congress participants also put forward the idea of establishing a European University.

Nevertheless, these plans took some time to materialise. The Reverend Franciscan Father, Karel Antoon Verleye, consequently seized the opportunity to propose the historical city of Bruges, Belgium, as the future home of the Cultural Centre. When he learned of this proposal, the Swiss federalist, Denis de Rougemont, rapporteur for the Cultural Committee at the Hague Congress, was keen to consider this possibility. However, it soon became apparent that the European Centre for Culture (CEC) was to be set up in Geneva, where it was inaugurated on 7 October 1950. Nevertheless, Bruges still entertained the hope of accommodating a section of the CEC. Consequently, in September 1948, a committee was set up in Bruges with a view to implementing this project. It brought together both the local section of the Union of European Federalists (UEF) and the cultural association *Les Amis de Bruges* (Friends of Bruges), whose President was the influential Dr Louis De Winter. The Senator and former Liberal Minister, Julius Hoste, also lent his support to the proposal for a European university institute of postgraduate studies. Highly ambitious, the proposed European University was put on the back burner. In February 1949, the name 'College of Europe' was adopted. The local committee also enjoyed the backing of the local authorities and of the Governor of West Flanders, Pierre van Outryve d'Ydewalle.

Meanwhile, immediately upon its inception in Brussels in October 1948, the European Movement had established a Cultural Committee headed by Salvador de Madariaga. In January 1949, in Geneva, the Committee set up a Planning Board for a European Centre for Culture. Denis de Rougemont, who, as a result of his efforts, had quickly acquired the status of unofficial spokesman for European culture, was appointed Director, and Raymond Silva, French Secretary-General of the UEF, became its Secretary-General. Five months later, the European Movement convened a Conference on Culture, entrusting the Geneva-based Planning Board with its organisation. Under the motto 'Culture for the benefit of Europe, Europe for the benefit of our cultures', the European Conference on Culture was held in Lausanne in December 1949 under the presidency of Madariaga. The Committee on European Institutions, chaired by Hoste, who, by now, had been appointed Chairman of the Cultural Committee of the Belgian Council of the European Movement, gave the go-ahead to the opening of the College of Europe on the basis of the recommendations set out in the Conference's General Report. The Belgian Council of the European Movement, at that time led by the former Prime Minister, Paul van Zeeland, founder of the European League for Economic Cooperation (ELEC), approached the Belgian Government directly in order to speed up events.

No time was lost in deciding to hold, in September and October 1949, a three-week trial session to assess the viability of the project. A committee set up by the Cultural Committee of the European Movement to assist the local committee was entrusted with the task of making preparations for the academic programme. The City of Bruges granted the funding required for all practical aspects and made premises available. The European Movement bore the academic costs and appointed John Bowie, Professor of Modern History at Oxford University, as Director of the session. He was assisted by Alphonse de Vreese, Professor of International Law at the University of Ghent, and Henri van Effenterre, Professor of Ancient History at the University of Caen. The students were selected by the national committees of the European Movement which submitted proposals to be approved by the Movement's Cultural Committee. The preparatory session, inaugurated in the Gothic Chamber of Bruges Town Hall, had three aims: to gain initial experience with the College of Europe, to ascertain any shortcomings in students of different nationalities in terms of European training programmes and to provide participants with training in the issues of European unity by involving them in the activities of the European Movement. The overall theme of the session was 'Teaching history and the development of a European spirit in universities'. Some 20 students attended the first lectures and seminars on the economic, political, legal, historical and cultural issues of European integration. On the basis of a questionnaire discussed by the participants, the College's structure took a more permanent shape

(development of college life shared by lecturers and students, admissions procedure for students, working methods and subjects taught). It was even advocated that students should not have to sit any exams, a decision which was overturned after the third academic year.

In January 1950, one month after the European Conference on Culture held in Lausanne, the Executive Committee of the European Movement appointed the Dutch Socialist, Henri Brugmans, President of the UEF and Professor of Literary History at the University of Utrecht, as Rector of the College of Europe. On 19 May, the College was officially awarded the status of an institution of public utility. The constituent act was signed by the Prince Regent, Charles, on 20 June, and the College's Articles of Association were published in the Belgian Official Journal on 23 June 1950. The aim of the new institution was to 'supplement students' education in the field of human sciences, with a view to substituting a political, economic, intellectual and social entity for the current compartmentalisation of European States.' On 24 August, the Consultative Assembly of the Council of Europe gave it the ultimate accolade by deciding to place the Bruges College under its aegis.

Accordingly, all the necessary arrangements were made to welcome, from 12 October 1950, the first intake of students to the College of Europe. This all took place little more than two and a half years after the Congress of Europe in The Hague. Courses were taught in French and English. The College degree, fully recognised in Europe, was intended to meet requirements for the 'recruitment of (...) some of the staff and administrators required for the permanent secretariats of the future institutions of Europe.' However, it was also intended to provide students with excellent career prospects in various areas of European life, such as education and research, diplomacy, journalism, politics, finance, industry and commerce.

Every year, the College of Europe — which now has a second campus in Natolin, Warsaw — currently offers its supplementary European interdisciplinary studies programme to several hundred students from Europe and across the world.