

The Resistance and the European idea in the light of the New European Order championed by the Nazis

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Prior to the vigorous campaigning for European unification by pro-European movements and federalist activists from 1945 onwards, the Resistance had also been actively involved in promoting the European idea during the Second World War, while the Nazis, for their part, had been keen to establish a 'New European Order'.

Right from the outbreak of the conflict, the rapid German military victories over the continental European democracies had been fuelling an intense propaganda campaign in support of the idea of a German Europe. The Reich wanted to organise its newly conquered territories along the lines of a united Europe, a *Europäische Wirtschaftsgemeinschaft*, which would put an end to traditional national antagonisms once and for all. Hitler's Germany did not hesitate to present itself as the champion of European unification and of the New European Order.

Official propaganda exalted the values of Western civilisation, which it claimed it was defending against Bolshevism and Anglo-American imperialism. However, the Nazi strategies envisaged the continent being reorganised into a vast European economic and commercial area entirely at the service of the German economy. German geopoliticians particularly hoped to make the fertile plains of Central Europe the breadbasket of the Reich and, at times, envisaged the forced Germanisation of the subjugated peoples. The Nazis' plans were dependent upon the existence of a German race, to consist of Alsatians, Austrians, Luxembourgers and Swiss Germans, as well as the Germans themselves. It would also include the *Volksdeutschen* who, in Europe, could claim to have had German ancestors even if they had since lost all contact with their original culture. This first group would then be joined by parent populations that were judged to be Germanic and easily assimilable, such as the Scandinavians, the Flemish and the Dutch.

In contrast to these peoples and to those from the allied and satellite countries (Croatia, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania and Italy), the Slavs from Poland, the Baltic States and the Soviet Union were portrayed as 'subhuman', destined to be eliminated or displaced and enslaved according to the needs of the Reich. The Jews and the Gypsies, who were considered stateless, were condemned to be exterminated. It was in this way that Nazi Germany envisaged the creation of living space for the Reich, under the exclusive control of a reunited and purified Germanic race, as the result of methodical selection carried out by race experts. The German strategies also envisaged linking up a united Europe with the African colonies of the defeated states into a self-governing Eurafrica controlled by the fascist powers of the Axis

— Germany and Italy — and their satellites.

These discourses on the New Europe, quite apart from reasons of immediate economic opportunism, helped German leaders gain the confidence of certain collaborators in the defeated and occupied European countries. For example, in 1941, a grand exhibition was held in Paris entitled 'European France', which championed the slogan 'a strong France in a strong Europe'. The exhibition, which received more than 600 000 visitors, highlighted the country's agricultural wealth so as to promote its role in the New Europe under German control. This was followed by other travelling exhibitions, one of which was entitled 'Bolshevism against Europe' and illustrated the crusade being carried out by the Reich and its allies against communism and for a united Europe. After the war, communist movements were able to make skilful use of this Nazi concept of Europe and of collaboration to discredit the European ideal, which it considered reactionary.

- [Propaganda cartoon published in the collaborationist journal 'Je suis partout' on the fascist view of a united Europe \(20 December 1941\)](#)
- [Italian poster on 'A new Europe for the workers'](#)

The racist New European Order that was promoted during the war by the Nazis had not discouraged keen supporters of European unity. On the contrary, some resistance groups, inspired initially by patriotic sentiments, had gradually been forced to think more at a European level. They believed more than ever in the need to build a democratic Europe. This is what inspired the militant anti-fascists and federalists Altiero Spinelli and Ernesto Rossi to draft their manifesto for a free and united Europe. Written on Ventotene, a small island in the Tyrrhenian Sea to which they had been exiled and placed under constant surveillance, the [Manifesto](#) was secretly broadcast in the summer of 1941. In this original text, Spinelli compared the union of Europe to the formation of a state. He saw the European Federation as a pillar of world peace. In 1943, Spinelli founded the Italian European Federalist Movement in Milan.

In late 1942, the fortunes of war turned more and more in favour of the Allies. The German debacle in Russia and the entry of the United States into the war against the Axis forces in December 1941 effectively changed the course of events and strengthened the confidence of the Allies in ultimate victory. The various governments-in-exile, sensing that German defeat was in sight, concentrated their minds more keenly on their future as part of a reorganised post-war world. From that time on, the major world powers occupied the international stage on their own, with the small European countries feeling excluded. For their part, they were most alarmed about American plans to simplify the geopolitical map of Europe. Those plans

envisaged in particular the elimination of small countries deemed to be factors for international instability. American and British financial experts also reviewed the possibility of establishing a new international monetary system and the revival of world trade under Anglo-American leadership.

The small countries, which had no intention whatsoever of abandoning their sovereignty, immediately stepped up their mutual contacts and developed alliances and regional groupings in order to defend their interests more effectively, both in the new international economy and as part of the UN. The fight for the rights of small nations became a foreign policy objective for these countries. During the winter of 1942–1943, the Polish General W. Sikorski proposed a comprehensive plan for European regional federations. An economic union consisting of the countries bordering the North Atlantic was also under consideration. But the only concrete achievement of that period was the creation of a customs union between Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg in the immediate post-war period. The Benelux monetary agreement was signed on 21 October 1943 in London. It laid down a fixed exchange rate between the Belgian franc and the Dutch guilder and established a bilateral clearing mechanism. The Belgian-Netherlands-Luxembourg Customs Convention was signed on 5 September 1944. It established a tariff community and envisaged, in the long term, the creation of an economic union between the three countries.

- [Draft Constitution of the United States of Europe \(New York, 1944\)](#)

At the same time, transnational contacts between various resistance movements were formally established and culminated on 20 May 1944 in the adoption in Geneva of a [Manifesto of the European Resistance](#). In this anti-fascist declaration, which bears the signatures of Léon Blum, Pastor Willem Visser 't Hooft and Altiero Spinelli, the resistance movements urged the creation of a federal union between the peoples of Europe. The text declared that the objectives of the Resistance could be attained only if all countries agreed to abandon the dogma of the absolute sovereignty of states and to accept integration into a federal organisation, which alone would be capable of ensuring the peaceful participation of the German people in European life. The Manifesto also argued the case for the establishment of a government that would be accountable to the peoples of the member states of the federation, for an army subject to the federal government and excluding all national contingents, and for a supreme court competent to rule on issues relating to the interpretation of the federal constitution and to resolve any possible disagreements between member states of the federation. Finally, the Geneva Declaration called for the implementation of universal values such as democracy, social justice and respect for human rights.

A Provisional Committee for the European Federation was also set up to act as a liaison

office. On 7 July 1944, the participants in the Geneva international conference approved a new draft declaration of European resistance fighters which, disseminated in secret, secured majority support. In London, some intellectuals and politicians in exile were also thinking about the Europe of the future and drew up various plans for a European federation.