

Youth and the United Europe

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The Second World War marked a turning point in European history, leading to a shift from the European to the world system of states and decreeing the historical failure of the absolute national state. The idea of European unification, which in the interwar period still appeared as unrealistic, became concretely achievable in the immediate postwar period, beginning to take shape with the theoretical reflections of many Europeans, who organized associations to promote the idea of a united Europe. The article intends to analyze the history of the birth and of the ideas of the first Europeanist youth organizations in this postwar context.

Youth, Peace, Europe

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The idea of European unification, which in the interwar period still appeared as unrealistic, became concretely achievable in the immediate postwar period, beginning to take shape with the theoretical reflections of many Europeans, who, facing with the disaster of war, wondered about the future, setting forth hypotheses and new proposals that were very similar in nature.

The war and the immediate postwar era witnessed the widespread dissemination of unitary ideals throughout the continent. More specifically, the ideas of peace, solidarity and the cooperation among European peoples were destined to develop in the crucible of the Resistance, with the devastations war and totalitarian degeneration had brought upon the national state still a recent memory.

It was the war and the yearnings for peace that gave many young people a thirst for politics, the desire to get involved in changing society, and the exalted emotions of those who feel they are protagonists in a changing history.

Faced with the catastrophe that brought sudden acceleration to changes in the international context, political thought freed itself of doctrines that

could not keep pace with history, abandoning false solutions and utopias and reflecting on the paths for “constructing” peace and the approach for dealing with the issues of international anarchy, the conception itself of statehood and its relation with “Nation” from a new perspective.

Consideration was given as to how to preserve individual and collective liberty, how to prevent new conflicts and construct a peaceful world, how to avoid repeating past errors. It was the crisis of the national state that led to the cultivation of many Europeanists and European federalists, who were joined together by the identification of a new supranational institutional model capable of overcoming boundaries and barriers in order to lay the basis for a new European order, which could potentially be applied globally as well.

All countries witnessed the endemic flowering of movements, writings, initiatives, journals and true constitutional projects whose goal was the creation of the United States of Europe.

These developments represented a constellation, Europeanist and federalist, vast and disperse, which still today is difficult for the historian to analyze in its totality, despite the fact that, in the last twenty years, historiography – in particular, German (Lipgens 1968, 1977 and 1986-1991), Belgian and Italian (Pistone 1992 and 1996; Landuyt and Preda 2000) historiography – has undertaken a systematic study of these topics, beginning with research on the movements for European unity and its main protagonists.

Nevertheless, while we can state that the pioneering phase of these studies has ended, it is not yet possible to paint a complete picture of the panorama of movements that have worked for European unification, both because in some countries historiography has only recently begun, continuing to favor research on government and party activities, and because the number of movements is so large and their Europeanist strategies so heterogeneous that any systemic recognition of them is an arduous task. Moreover, while some movements have carried on continuously during the postwar period, others have had a brief and often ephemeral existence. Finally, we should add the difficulty in finding documentation, in a context where the pioneering activities of the main groups was not equaled by a need to preserve the historical records.

More specifically, the vast and uneven world of Europeanist youth associations remains obscure in many respects¹, both because historiography has until now favored the more consolidated activities of “adult” groups and because of the difficulty in finding documentation on youth activities. An Europeanist or federalist youth group will arise where there are people convinced of its importance and willing to sacrifice part of their free time to maintain con-

¹ Among the first essays to appear on this topic, see Preda (1996) and Levi (2000).

tacts, organize meetings and conferences, and deal with basic administrative tasks. When these individuals are actively involved, the group often becomes a center of pro-active initiatives, even at times becoming a cultural reference and place for political and theoretical debate. However, once this youth phase is over there is a shortage of time, so that slowly the reigns are left to others, or the group even dies out, slowly and imperceptibly, due to negligence. The lack of active participation in the country's political and party life and the resulting lack of influence in political matters heighten organizational weakness and the continual flux in membership and discontinuity regarding commitment, a discontinuity which in turn lies behind the difficulty in finding sources of first-hand information. To this must be added, on the one hand, the innate predisposition of young people for action, which tends to relegate to second place the more monotonous administrative and archiving tasks, and on the other the uncertainty in terms of the location and shifting of group headquarters, which surely does not facilitate the preservation of documents.

Therefore, given the absence of widespread historiographical research, those writing about youth and Europe immediately after the war cannot provide a thorough account. Nevertheless, I shall try to present an initial overview of the situation.

The first continental Europeanist youth organizations

As at any important moment when plans and ideals are ready to be transformed into concrete action, the activities of young people as part of the widespread Europeanist fervor that hit Europe immediately after the Second World War was crucial. After the war and the nationalistic hangover at the start of the 20th century, many emerged with a desire to take part in improving society, embracing at the end of the 1940s and the beginning of the 1950s organized Europeanism and European federalism, choosing this as their ideal homeland. Often this was a compelling, unconditioned choice, the kind that deeply changes a person's life, while at times representing a fleeting choice that vanished as quickly as it arose.

There thus arose all over the continent numerous groups, leagues and Europeanist youth associations under the most varied supervision. One needs only mention the Bureau Européen de la Jeunesse et de l'Enfance (BEJE), the Jeunes des Nouvelles Équipes Internationales, the Jeunes du Mouvement Fédéraliste pour les États-Unis d'Europe, and the Jeunesse Ouvrière Catholique (JOC). In the Saar alone there was a Coordinating Committee that included 21 youth movements, most of which belonging to the European Movement or the Mouvement Universel pour une Confédération Mondiale. Involvement

in these groups took many forms, perhaps the most significant of which the participation at meetings of youth from various countries organized precisely with the aim of overcoming the barrier of “diversity”: the participation by Helmut Kohl at a meeting at the Franco-German border at Kehl has become emblematic in this regard.

However, it was only beginning in 1948, with the concrete initiation, after the launching of the Marshall Plan, of the process of European unification, when Europeanist and federalist groups began to form a liaison among the various groups already in existence in Europe, based on common ideals regarding the objectives and strategies for unification. The attention paid to young people is also testified to by the cultural resolution approved by The Hague Congress in May 1948, which called for the creation of a European Institute for Youth.

That same year the Union Fédéraliste Interuniversitaire (UFI) was created to provide continuity regarding information on federalist matters disseminated within universities. Initially based mainly in France, the Union would spread to the other major countries in Europe. Its president was Michel Mouskhély, with Georges Rencki as secretary general. Beginning with the Freiburg Congress (March 31-April 5, 1950), the UFI would become affiliated with the Union Européenne des Fédéralistes (UEF).

Also in that year the situation of young people became the focus of attention of the International Coordinating Committee, out of which arose the European Movement (EM), which organized a large youth rally. In 1949 the American Committee on United Europe (ACUE) began discussions with the leaders of the ME, Paul-Henri Spaak and Joseph Retinger in particular, assuring their support for initiatives aimed at sensitizing young people to the European ideal. These preliminary discussions led to ME contact with the most representative youth organizations: the international youth movements tied to the political parties (demochristian, liberal and socialist) and the World Assembly of Youth (WAY), which until then had not dealt much with the deeply innovative process represented by the start of European integration. These contacts resulted in the organization in 1951 of a youth association linked to the ME: the Campagne Européenne de la Jeunesse. The secretary general was Jean-Charles Moreau, who, in July-August, organized at the Europahaus in Marienberg, Germany, several “rencontres européennes de la jeunesse” (Palayret 1996: 338)² over five successive ten-day periods, gathering together thousands of youth, French and German in particular. The Campaign was initially slated to last one year, but then a complex structure was created that called for

² See also Lipgens (1987).

the opening of national secretariats in the 15 member countries of the European Council, under the coordination of an international secretariat in Paris.

Alongside widespread educational initiatives, in 1952 the CEJ also took on a more political direction regarding the battle for the European union of The Six. Two separate sectors were formed: an “educational campaign” service, which would deal with the actions of the 15 member countries, and a political bureau. The main activities were collaborating with the *Comité d’Action pour la Communauté Supranationale Européenne* to initiate that part of the program reserved for youth in the six ECSC nations; a pilot program in a single country (in France in 1954 regarding the ratification of the CED and the CPE, with more than 30 meetings organized in February-March alone) or region; demonstrations during major events³; the setting up of internships and camps for the selection and political training of future cadres; and study sessions for specialized groups (students, teachers, the youth press).

Between 1954 and 1955 a particularly topical effort was made to develop an “*esprit civique Européen*”. Of significant importance in this regard was the production and distribution of thousands of copies of journals such as the “*Jeune Europe*”, “*Jugend Europas*” and “*Giovane Europa*”.

Several important figures played a role in the CEJ from 1951 to 1959, such as Philippe Deshormes, who was first assistant secretary general and then, after Moreau’s resignation, general secretary, and Luciano Sibille, vice-president and supporter of a *Comité d’animation* that served as an important fulcrum of Europeanist activities in the youth sector.

The Jeunesses Fédéralistes Européennes

At the end of the 1940s even the UEF had taken specific steps to spur on the creation of a unified youth movement that adhered to the political direction of the organization. In February 1948 the movements associated with the UEF were invited to each designate a head of the youth area; in June the young Germans of the Europa Union organized an international convention of federalist youth at Cochem Castle⁴ along the Moselle, under the coordination of Magda Nielsen. It was decided at that time to create a new body, the *Jeunesse*

³ Among the most important the youth march at the meeting of the ministers of the Six at Baden Baden in August 1953 and the participation at the congress of the European Movement at The Hague in 1953.

⁴ See the *Risoluzione del convegno della Gioventù a Cochem sulla Mosella* and Malan G., *Si sta costituendo la Jeunesse européenne*, liaison body of UEF youth activities, in «Bollettino d’informazioni del Comitato direttivo nazionale del MFE», 23 August 1948, special issue.

Européenne-Juventus of France, which was to immediately set up a “Bulletin” of the association, at least three issues of which would be published in 1948.

In addition to the German and French movements there arose a Jeunesses Fédéralistes in Luxembourg, while in Switzerland negotiations were under way for a merger of the Mouvement Fédéraliste Universitarie, presided over by Georges Rencki, and the UFI; at the same time the Comité Provisoire d'Action, elected in Berne on September 18, 1948, pushed for the creation of a Mouvement Suisse de Jeunesse en faveur de la Fédération Européenne. A Belgian federalist youth organization was organized by Jean Buchmann and Jacques Toint; in Austria, Peter von Konrad and Elisabeth Habermann began publishing a bulletin on youth and federation issues; in Denmark, Een Verden promoted the idea of European integration in a unified world; in Italy, where the first federalist youth groups had already been informally created at the end of 1946⁵, the first national federalist youth organization was formed in September 1948, taking the name Gruppi Giovani.

There often were strong globalist tones to this *Europeanism* owing to the natural propensity of young federalists to look beyond national boundaries, which accounts for the interest in the annual international congress of the Jeunesse Fédéraliste organization at Hastings (August 28-September 4, 1948)⁶ and in the international congress of the Mouvement Universel pour une Confédération at Luxembourg (September 5-12, 1948).

Despite all this ferment, after only a few months the Jeunesse Européenne-Juventus had nearly disappeared into thin air, due both to the difficulty of bringing together national groups, often sectorial in nature, composed of individuals belonging to politically diverse parties and ideologies, and characterized by weak structures and a lack of resolve regarding the actions to undertake, and to organizational and administrative problems, not least of all financial in nature.

A year later the Central Committee of the UEF decided nonetheless to try again, entrusting to Jean Buchmann (who, in 1975, would become one of the closest associates of Leo Tindemans at the time of the drafting of the famous report) the task of preparing the ground for unification, at a moment when the European unification process had begun and it appeared federalists might play a leading role. The hope of obtaining the election of a European constituent assembly became day by day less remote, opening up distinct prospects for the Campaign for a Federal Pact of Union promoted by

⁵ There is evidence in those years of the participation, though not yet formalized, of a Milanese youth group and a student committee from Turin, two of whose most important members were Anna Anfossi and Pina Casassa.

⁶ Cfr. Jeunesse européenne-Juventus, «Bulletin», n. 3, August-September 1948.

the UEF in connection with the Council of Europe's consultative assembly initiative. There were thus good reasons to believe in the success in the youth area; that is, in an area that, as has already been underscored, favored concrete actions in the struggle for a European federation above and beyond any political, social and cultural division.

The inaugural meeting of the JEF – Département Jeune of the UEF was held in Paris on February 3, 1950, attended by 15 youth from all over Europe, including some in exile from Eastern Europe, representing the Bulgarian, Serbian, Hungarian and Rumanian federalist movements. Initially there were seventeen movements that decided to join the group: from Germany, the Bund Europäischer Jugend, Internationaler Studentenbund Studentenbewegung für übernationale Föderation (ISSF) and the Junge gemeinschaft der liga für weltregierung, the Austrian Jeunes de l'Europa Union, the Belgian Jeunes du Mouvement fédéraliste européen, the Danish Jeunes de Een Verden, the French Jeunes de La Fédération, the Dutch Jeunes du B.E.F., the British Jeunes de Federal Union, the youth groups from the Movimento Federalista Europeo in Italy, the Jeunesses Fédéralistes from Luxembourg, the Swiss Jeunes de l'Europa Union, the exiled youth groups from the Bulgarian and Hungarian federalist movement, the Groupement Roumain pour une Europe Unie, the Union Yougoslave des Fédéralistes (Mouvement Serbe), and the youth from the Basque federalist movement. Soon to be added to these were the youth from the Union des Fédéralistes Tchécoslovaques and the Union Polonaise des Fédéralistes. In August 1951, at the Kleine Lorelai, the Europe House in Marienberg, the Committee approved the entry of the youth from the Europäische Action in Austria, the Nederlandse Jongeren Federalisten, the Dutch Stichting Europaes Jongeren Contact, the youth section of the Lithuanian federalists, and the Jeunes Cercles Européens.

Wolfgang Schaedla Ruhland from Germany was elected President, René Dupriez from Belgium Vice-President, Roland Müsser from France Secretary-General, with Norman Hart from Britain, Daniel Damov from Bulgaria and Thomas Philippovic from Hungary rounding out the *Bureau*. The latter would later hold important positions in Europeanist circles, among which that of Secretary of the European Municipalities and Regions. Here, too, a "Bulletin d'Informations" of the new organization was immediately set up, whose main activities were the international preparation of federalist "cadres", the organization of summer camps for member movements throughout Europe, the launch of certain initiatives that would involve all members, such as spreading the referendum drafted by students in Losanne regarding federation issues, participation in exploring the topic of European unity, organized by the Bureau Européen de la Culture, and the spreading among youth of

initiatives undertaken at universities, for example, the action initiated in Paris by the young members of La Fédération.

The first JEF congress at Strasbourg in November 1950, at the same time the Consultative Assembly of the European Council was called to take a stance on whether or not to convene a European Constituent Assembly, marked the official creation of the Movement and the first true contact among the representatives of the various sections, with the election of Buchmann as president and Anna Anfossi from Italy as secretary-general. On the evening of November 24th, the last day of the Consultative Assembly, when it failed to propose action to create a European political authority, some 5,000 youth, mobilized from all over Europe by the Gioventù Federalista Europea, demonstrated for the first time at the Maison de l'Europe, launching leaflets in the air. In the following months the youth would deal with the JEF's internal organization. There would also emerge the initial problems and tensions both as regards the relationship with the UFI, on the one hand, and the Front des Jeunes Européens (which several months later would become the Mouvement Jeune Europe) on the other. The main difficulties of the JEF's actions were the lack of cohesion among the sections and the nearly total lack of ties with the European organization⁷.

At the conference at La Lorelay on the Rhine in August 1951, which brought together 10,000 youth, the JEF was the only federalist organization with a large representation. In addition to a commitment to the European Federal Constituent Assembly, the conference also decided on the organization of a *Campagne d'Amitié internationale*⁸ under the direction of Muesser. The campaign, conceived of at the Strasbourg Conference and approved by the CC of the JEF at La Lorelei on August 22, 1951, aimed at getting members of various youth organizations to adopt the topics of European federalism. Scout groups were particularly targeted; these groups had participated as observers at the Congress (Scouts France, Boy-scouts de Belgique, Eclaireurs Luxembourgeois, Eclaireurs de France, Scoutisme International, Ligue Française des Auberges de Jeunesse, Union Nationale des Étudiants de France). In addition to allowing youth from the organized movements to work together, the Campaign had an influence on the networks of cities, providing incentives for relations with the local authorities and initiating permanent ties among some of these (the first between the cities of Troyes and Tournai in November 1951), thereby creating a "de facto" Europe.

⁷ *Activité des JEF depuis novembre 1950. Perspectives d'avenir*, Rapport de M.lle Anna Anfossi, Secrétaire générale des Jeunesses Européennes Fédéralistes, in the Historical Archives of Pavia University (ASUPV), «JEF. 2^o congr. Aix-la-Chapelle», f. GM (Gianni Merlini).

⁸ Cfr. *La Campagne d'Amitié internationale*, Rapport de Roland Muesser, Délégué général, in ASUPV, f. GM (Gianni Merlini).

Along with this educational activity of sensitizing youth to European issues there was political activity aimed at providing support for UEF initiatives. Of note in this area are the demonstration organized by the Gioventù Federalista Europea (GFE) in February 1951, during a meeting on the CED among De Gasperi, Schuman, Sforza and Plevin, at Santa Margherita Ligure (Preda 2007), where young federalists took to the streets to ask for a European Constituent Assembly, and the demonstrations in various German cities during ratification of the Schuman Plan by Germany. Also of significance were the traditional local meetings and international camps, which provided an opportunity for direct contact among young federalists. Among the most important of these were the gatherings in La Lorelei in the summer of '51, in Bardonecchia in December 1952, in Gmunden in August 1952, in Viareggio in the summer of '53, and in Trautensfeld. Also significant were the relief activities for the people in the Polesine area in the autumn of '51 and in the Netherlands in February '53. There were also "dramatic" demonstrations, such as the torchlight procession organized by the European youth organization at The Hague in October 1953 and, in particular, the border crossing infringements, the first at Wissembourg, in Alsace, along the Franco-German border, followed by the Franco-Italian border rally at Clavière on December 31, 1952, the conclusion of the international camp at Bardonecchia, and the contemporary Italian-French demonstration at Ponte San Luigi and the Italian-Austrian-German one at the Brenner Pass on April 25, 1954.

Nevertheless, the difficulties in creating a truly international organization remained. Elected president at the second JEF congress at Aquisgrana in 1952, at the end of his yearlong mandate, Hans-Wolfgang Kanngiesser was forced to admit that "la notion d'activité internationale des jeunes est tout à fait nouvelle"⁹. It was not possible even to create a common symbol, and uncertainty persisted surrounding the means for achieving and the meaning itself of international collaboration within the organization.

The collapse of the CED represented a turning point for the JEF as well, which, while deploring the failure of the European army, tried to take a strong position on the issue of isolation and the desire to remain in contact with all the democratic forces that were quick to applaud the Western European Union (WEO). By the spring of '55 the JEF leadership began to dissipate and the entire organization became immobilized due to internal divisions – as well as to the subsequent breakoff between the Action Européenne Fédéraliste (AEF)

⁹ *Activité politique des JEF depuis le congrès d'Aix-la-Chapelle* (1952), Rapport du Président Hans-Wolfgang Kanngiesser, in ASUPV, f. GM (Gianni Merlini).

and the UEF (from 1959 on the supranational MFE) – in the UEF among, on the one hand, the German and Dutch movements and the French group of La Fédération, supporters of the government policy of “European re-launch”, and on the other the Italian and in part French movements, convinced of the need to move to the opposition based on the “new course” policy set by Spinelli. With a full-blown identity crisis the JEF was immobile in the middle of the ford. The passive stance by the secretary-general was only in part mitigated by the action of the international regional centers, which were created at the Congress of Paris and were able to offer militants the occasion for international contacts and theoretical deepening. By the time of the sixth congress of the JEF at Moulhouse the scission among the youth organizations had become a reality.

Despite all this, youth activities continued to be quite energetic, with a number of federalist initiatives that owed their success to the enthusiasm and commitment of young activists. Worthy of note in this regard was the participation of youth linked to the supranational MFE in the activities of the Congress of the European People, which sought to transfer directly to the people the responsibility for working to convene a European constituent body through the popular election of assemblies made up of political and cultural figures representing the federal claims of European citizens. Initiated in 1957, the CEP went on to represent an exceptional training ground for the federalist generation at the end of the 1950s. It was this experience that allowed young people to be included in the adult organization, thereby creating the conditions under which a large part of the federalist leadership of the ‘70s and ‘80s would acquire their political maturity.

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