

# Visions of Europe in the Resistance

Figures, Projects, Networks, Ideals

Robert Belot and Daniela Preda (eds.)



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PETER LANG

The fight against Fascism and Nazism during the Second World War gave rise to a strong “desire for Europe”: a desire for a united, peaceful, democratic Europe. In many countries, there was a flowering of movements, actions, newspapers and constitutional projects in which the vision of the “United States of Europe” was an essential element, enriching the Resistance with a new, profound and lasting political and historical dimension. By interpreting the changes that the Second World War generated, the Europeanists and federalist forerunners of the times mentioned in this volume were able to identify, ahead of their time, the basis for the construction of the new united Europe and, with it, a new peaceful and democratic international order.

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# VISIONS OF EUROPE IN THE RESISTANCE

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# **VISIONS OF EUROPE IN THE RESISTANCE**

**FIGURES, PROJECTS, NETWORKS, IDEALS**

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## Introduction

ROBERT BELOT AND DANIELA PREDA

In the 20th century, Europe experienced the worst (fascism, Nazism, dictatorship, communism, ethnic conflict). It also dreamed of the best (union, peace, democracy, solidarity, respect for humans) and partly achieved it through what is called “European construction”. We sometimes tend to forget that the unification of Europe after 1945 was an incredible political creation like no other and a geopolitical and symbolic act of the utmost importance.

Post-war Europe was essentially built on the rejection and overcoming of a traumatic history that had led to the denial of its humanist values and its moral and political weakening. It had to guard against the risks of a return to nationalism and xenophobia; it had to be the binding force through which European sentiment would develop to forge a European citizenship.

Recent events (such as Brexit) show us that the hard-won unity of Europe is not as irreversible as we had hoped. The development of national-populism, in both Western and Eastern Europe, reminds us that awareness of this historic achievement is not shared as unanimously as one might have imagined. Crises engender euroscepticism, even europhobia, which sometimes attacks the axiological and metapolitical foundations that support the European project and which were thought to be beyond reach. The myth of the “decline” of Europe feeds on the legendary nationalist that produces a kind of (illusory) identity reassurance effect in the face of change. It homogenizes reality in order to valorize an imaginary community of belonging. Today, a nationalist counter-narrative is developing that presupposes the substantiality of the nation to oppose it to the artificiality of Europe in order to delegitimize the European project. A revisionist and conspiracist memory frees itself

from the historiographical achievements and calls into question a heritage that was supposed to show the way to a better future.

At the origin of this book and the colloquium that preceded it, there was a question: The current memory deviances, flourishing on the poisonous soil of instrumentalized fears, could be analysed as a perverse effect of this difficulty in understanding and knowing the history of Europe? The crisis of European consciousness is also a crisis of consciousness and historical knowledge of Europe.

In fact, the question of the achievements of European construction and the very idea of Europe develops from a faulty and untimely rereading of history. One seeks to undermine the honorability of the pioneers of this history but also the sincerity and importance of the goals that Europe was supposed to pursue, after the tragedy of Nazism and the war that had covered it with ruins and shame. This rereading proceeds from a revisionist approach that selects the elements of this very complex history in order to reduce it to a manipulation of the American government and a “liberal conspiracy”. It isolates and demonizes figures such as Jean Monnet, Robert Schuman, or Alcide de Gasperi, in order to reduce the European project to the effect of the hegemony of the United States during the Cold War. The new “fathers of Europe” would be John Foster Dulles and George Kennan! Without wishing to take anything away from the importance of the influence exercised by the United States, and in particular by the Marshall Plan, on the start of the process of European unification, it is not possible to remain silent on how historiography has long been subjected to a flat interpretation that made Europeanism and Atlanticism coincide, failing to read and interpret the birth within the bipolar world of a new subject: a united Europe.

This thesis is not new. It was the dominant doxa of the French communists in the aftermath of the World War II, when they dominated the political and intellectual field and presented themselves as the spearhead of anti-Americanism and “anti-imperialism”. What is new is that the hunt for “European supranationalist ideology” is being taken up today by the proponents of an anti-Europeanism thriving in the radical right and the national-populist movement. The communists had not foreseen such heirs.

Another myth since the 1990s is the myth of Europe’s “impure” sources. A sub-literature plays on biased and falsified historical analogies

to delegitimize the philosophical roots of the European project. With the “return of Germany” after reunification, there is an awakening of the fear of the old demons of Germanism. The “extreme eurosceptic” discourse boasts comparisons with the Holy Roman Empire, the Austro-Hungarian Empire or Hitler’s Germany, against a background of more or less declared but profound anti-Germanism. The thesis was first spread in the romantic mode, with Andrew Roberts’ book: *The Aachen Memorandum* (1995). A futuristic and dystopian narrative, which describes the Great Britain of 2045 as a satrapy of a new “totalitarian German-European” Reich. The author imagines a British “Resistance” movement against the new Nazi regime that the European Union would have recreated! There is, of course, something shocking in these pointless comparisons, which confuse democracy with Nazism, leading, in the end, to relativizing the absolute horror that Nazism and the Shoah were in the heart of Europe.

This revisionist logic leads to a kind of desecration of the ideal represented by the anti-Nazi and antifascist Resistance. It is a contempt for those who fought, at the risk of their lives, for this ideal. It is also a way of diminishing the major event that was the victory of the Allies, that is to say, the fight for the reconquest of democracy and freedom in Europe. Thus, we move from relativization to revisionism by questioning the achievements of this unprecedented struggle against horror and the worst.

Contempt for history is thus combined with contempt for historians and academics in general, even if some of them are sometimes used as a guarantee. The historians of Europe would be suspect. Especially those who hold a European Jean Monnet Chair, like the two directors of this publication. We believe that there is an urgent need to develop the history of Europe in European higher education in order to train minds that will have the capacity and lucidity to detect the traps of the manipulators of history and the conspiracy theorists. It is not a question of teaching a “holy history” but a critical history. It is about moving from opinion or prejudice to knowledge. For one of Europe’s distinctive values is this capacity to distance and criticize oneself. In the face of the enterprises of “disrecognition” of European history, promoted by the ideologues of anti-Europe, it is a question of trying to know what makes up the history and identity of Europe.

It was therefore necessary to react. We have to remind people where Europe comes from. This book tends precisely to recall that the idea of a

united Europe, reconciled with democracy, was a fundamental achievement of the Resistance of Europeans against Nazi-fascist domination. The fight of the Resistance was not only military, it was a project of political revolution. As the title of the movement *Libérer et Fédérer*, on July 14, 1942, it was about “Winning the war and winning peace”, that is, proposing a new mode of governance between European nations that emancipated themselves from the dogma of the absolute sovereignty of states and its belligerent potential.

The participation to the Resistance during the World War II created in some enlightened individuals and little groups a new feeling of belonging that overstepped the traditional borders of the State in the knowledge of a common destiny for all the European peoples, i.e. in a moment in which the struggle against the tyranny didn't have any barrier. Men and women in the occupied countries – engaged side by side in the common struggle against the Nazis/fascists opponents – often ended up cooperating regardless of the national borders not just to coordinate the military action towards victory, but also to assure peace and progress for the continent and, in prospective, for all humankind. In every country we were witness to a flowering of movements, actions, episodes, constitutional projects, in which the vision of the United States of Europe was an essential element that enriched the Resistance of a new profound and lasting political and historical dimension and content. In that moment some movements supporting the European unity were born in the six countries of “Little Europe”, in Great Britain, in Switzerland, in Austria and among some politically exiled (Poland, Czechoslovakia, ...).

Of course, this desire for Europe was expressed with different intensities depending on the cultures of the countries at war. Of course, the Europeanist projects of the Resistance fighters are indebted to the political and philosophical circles in which they were born before the war, and they are part of currents of thought that existed before the war. Of course, not all the political parties engaged in the struggle against Nazi Europe (e.g. the Communist parties) were mobilized by the European issue. It would be little in line with reality to assert that the peoples of Europe were all ready for European conversion. Far from it.

But the merit of that handful of europeanists and federalists, forerunners of the times, which is historically mentioned in these pages, was great. By interpreting the changes that the World War II generated, with the new context opened by the transition from the European system to

the world system of states, they were able to identify ante litteram in the overcoming of the absolute national state the basis for the construction of the new united Europe and, with it, of a new peaceful and democratic international order.

