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### **Author**

Bouchard, Lucien-Pierre

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## Was de Gaulle a European? *Nation and Supranation Following World War II*

By Lucien-Pierre Bouchard

"It is not impossible, of course, to imagine that all the peoples of our continent will some day be one..., but it would be ridiculous to act as though that day had come."

— Charles de Gaulle, Speech of July 23, 1964.

"In his haughty nationalism, de Gaulle is Tristan. France is his Isolde..."

— Denis de Rougemont, *Preuves*, May 1961, p. 34.

What were General de Gaulle's intentions regarding the construction of Europe? Should he be considered one of the promoters of a united Europe, or, as some think, did he contribute to a dramatic decline in this plan? De Gaulle's role in post-war efforts at continental organization is the subject of intense controversy even today.

And for good reason, as De Gaulle's conception of Europe was undoubtedly the least clearly delineated aspect of his thinking. At times he called for the "federation" of the peoples of Europe, at others for their "confederation"; at still others, he advocated the nation, its sovereignty, its "grandeur," and France's "influence" and "mission" in the world. In fact, de Gaulle's management of the European question is somewhat surprising for historians: stratagem and candor, enthusiasm and pessimism, pragmatism and idealism, hesitation and decision are merely a partial list of his apparent contradictions.

However, one should not forget the extremely uncertain conditions in which de Gaulle's views on European politics developed. First of all one can well imagine how difficult it was in the midst of war to contemplate the order of a liberated Europe. What to do about Germany? And even more important for de Gaulle, what would be the status of France, a country conquered by

the Nazis and liberated by the Allies? These questions and, more immediately, those raised by a war that had not yet been won, made it impossible to develop a clear conception of the political and economic forms that Europe might take in the post-war period.

In addition, conditions remained eminently complex once peace had been restored. Being exhausted, busy counting their dead and rebuilding from their ruins, the various peoples of Europe did not have the same priorities. The ravaged and disturbed European nations maintained complicated and, at times even mistrustful relations; not to mention the massive diplomatic interventions by the Russians and Americans. De Gaulle's at times paradoxical treatment of the European question must be viewed in light of these circumstances.

For some de Gaulle's views are all the more excusable since, in addition to the difficult historical conditions, there was the "novelty" of the concept of Europe, which "even in de Gaulle's lifetime, gave rise to numerous variations, indeed even conflicting positions, both in France and its European partners."<sup>1</sup> However, while it is true that European leaders for the first time displayed a genuine political will in favor of continental organization, believing that de Gaulle was unfamiliar with the history of this argument would be to underestimate the man, because this is in fact a very old story, which we will now consider very briefly before looking more closely at de Gaulle's role in it.

## **I. A Brief History of Europe**

The idea of a single Europe dates back several centuries. It was fairly clearly explained in the seventeenth century by Henri IV's minister Sully, and in the eighteenth century by l'Abbé de Saint-Pierre. At the time, wanting to unify Europe meant embracing an eminently universal idea,

that of structuring humanity in political terms because, as political analyst Charles Zorgbibe so clearly states, "Europe at that time was the known world, or at least the 'useful' world."<sup>2</sup> Consequently it cannot be said that a genuine European sentiment was beginning to emerge, but rather that there were broader global intentions, the motivations of which were essentially geopolitical, because the first purpose of a "Single Europe" was apparently to secure peace and concord in the Christian world.

Condorcet, Benjamin Constant, Saint-Simon, Auguste Comte, Proudhon, Victor Hugo and many others subsequently developed the idea beyond the mere imperative of common security and defense. In the nineteenth century there arose the concept of a properly European regionalism. While vaguely felt at first, this concept soon brought calls for greater cooperation among the continent's nations.

The European Directory was the first systematic attempt at continental organization based on diplomacy rather than arms, and was instituted after the Napoleonic wars by the victorious powers (England, Austria, Prussia and Russia) for three closely related reasons: to control France, to suppress all revolutionary movements in Europe, and to guarantee the peace and territorial integrity of every state. In 1823, following the admission of France, which had restored its monarchy, the Directory became the Concert of Europe, which, through numerous diplomatic conferences, helped solve numerous international issues peacefully until 1914. However, the First World War marked its end.

Following the war, the idea of a union of European countries within a formal institutional structure came increasingly to the fore. The term "integration" appeared in the vocabulary of the

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<sup>1</sup> Pierre Maillard, *De Gaulle et l'Europe* (Paris: Tallandier, 1995), p. 10.

<sup>2</sup> Charles Zorgbibe, *Histoire de la construction européenne* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1993), p. 1.

political class. Other events included the publication of the European Manifest by Count Koudenhove-Kalergi in 1924<sup>3</sup> and the famous 1929 address to the Society of Nations by France's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Aristide Briant. Briant stated that, "between peoples that are grouped together geographically, ... there must exist a kind of federal link", which however "must not affect the sovereignty of any of the nations which might belong to such an association."

Despite evermore explicit unionist talk, no specifically European institutions emerged. European politics at the time was characterised much more by deep divisions than by the vague integrationist impulses of a certain political and intellectual class. The continent then ignited once again, this time racked by the Second World War.

It was only through the experience of the war that Europeans began seriously to consider introducing pan-European decision-making structures. There were ultimately two reasons for this concern. The first was to be done with the warring excesses of militant nationalism and thus to ward off its apocalyptic possibilities. The second was to arm the continent against the messianic ambitions of communism as a counterweight to the East Bloc countries.

Work on a new Europe genuinely got under way at the Hague Conference in 1948, which resulted in the creation of the European Council, an organization responsible for promoting cooperation among the member states.<sup>4</sup> The Council, a forerunner institution, could only make recommendations, which thus limited its influence on the unification process.

It was not until 1950 that Europe took a decisive step. Drawing on the ideas of Jean Monnet, Robert Schuman, then France's Minister of Foreign Affairs, proposed to create an

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<sup>3</sup>De Gaulle then had an interesting correspondence with Koudenhove-Kalergi, whose idea of Europe was reminiscent of the Holy Roman Empire at the time of Otto, before it was virtually germanized by the Hapsburgs.

<sup>4</sup>It is interesting to note that the Hague Conference was a private initiative. In December 1947, the International Coordinating Committee for a United Europe (ICCUE), a non-governmental organization, organized the Congress, which was attended by more than 800 public figures from 19 countries, including 16 former heads of government

organization with independent powers in the steel and coal industry. The Schuman Declaration led to the establishment of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC), which set an international political precedent. ECSC was not merely an institution for cooperation, but also for governing in concert through a body to which the various states had delegated powers that were traditionally their own.

Of course, the ECSC concerned only a single industry, but at the time it was the only compromise acceptable to all partners. However, the particular feature of the ECSC was that in establishing it, its members tacitly agreed to build Europe on a piece-by-piece basis, one industry after another, with the ultimate goal being political union, the terms of which remained to be determined.

From this moment on, progress toward a political Europe was virtually stalled by two major setbacks. The first was the French government's rejection in 1954 of the plan for the European Defence Community (EDC). This was followed by the failure in 1962 of the Fouchet Plan which, at General de Gaulle's initiative, was intended to provide a structure for and introduce political cooperation among the states.

The political construction of Europe remained at a dead end until the Paris Summit in 1972, where the idea was revived and put on the agenda. On the basis of the considerable progress made toward economic integration (cf. the Rome Treaty in 1957), the participants undertook at Paris to bring together the conditions for a political union. But once again, the members were not in a hurry, and the discussions begun in Paris were constantly put off from summit to summit and from conference to conference.

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and more than 20 acting ministers. This private intervention, a historical curiosity, resulted in the establishment of an international public law organization.

When solemnly reaffirmed more than ten years later at the Stuttgart Summit in 1982, the plan for political union ultimately resulted in the Spinelli Plan, which was ratified by the European Parliament in 1984. However, the Parliament's proposals were deemed unacceptable to the majority of governments, which once again were in no hurry to advance them. As usual, economics was the most frequent focus of discussion until the Single Act of 1986, in which the members implemented the longstanding Single Market plan.<sup>5</sup>

It was not until 1992 that the member states actually carried out the first diplomatic step toward continental political unification: the Treaty on the European Union (TUE) also known as the "Maastricht Treaty".

## **II. Reference Point: The Nation**

As will be seen, de Gaulle never wanted a supranational Europe. At most he wanted an international continent built on cooperation among states. Why? Strategic and geopolitical contingencies were undoubtedly a very important factor in this choice, but, for the real answer, we must first of all look into de Gaulle's political philosophy.

### ***1. Civic Nation and Ethnic Nation***

Marked early on by his reading of Barrès, de Gaulle had an idea of the nation that, despite what has been said of it, drew on both French and Germanic sources. In France, in the Enlightenment tradition, the revolutionaries of 1789 based the idea of the nation on the union of individual wills, on freely chosen membership in a social contract. Siéyès defined the national

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<sup>5</sup> Note that, from the moment it was ratified, the Single Act became the subject of intense controversy over its actual scope. Many thought it did not advance the integrationist cause as far as it appeared to do. See Jacques Nemrod, *Le mal européen : le trompe-l'oeil de l'Acte Unique* (Marseille: Rivages/Les Échos, 1988).

community as "a body of partners living under a common law".<sup>6</sup> Later on, Renan best expressed this republican and civic conception of the nation. Strongly influenced by Kant, Renan held that the nation was founded on two things, the one past, the other present. The nation is definitely a matter of memory, that is to say "the common possession of a rich heritage of memories," but it is especially "present consent, the desire to live together, the will to continue to carry on the heritage we have received together."<sup>7</sup> While the cult of ancestors is a perfectly legitimate basis, the nation is above all "an everyday plebiscite,"<sup>8</sup> the result of a constantly renewed contract between the individuals who make it up. Being built by them, it is therefore not eternal: as Renan said, nations "had a beginning, and they will have an end."<sup>9</sup>

In the wake of Herder and German romanticism, a diametrically opposite theory developed in Germany. In his *Speech to the German Nation*, Fichte linked the concept of nation to the ethnic factor and attributed a spiritual dimension to nationalism. The integrating principle of life together was first of all blood, soil and common origins. This was the nation as nation-race, the *Urvolk*. Contrary to the individualism and constructivism of the Enlightenment, romanticism offered a holistic and naturalistic vision of the national community. This was not the result of a contract. The community had its own eternal soul, whose existence was independent of individual wills. Without it, the individual is nothing, while the nation, an imperishable subject of history, can easily go on without the individual. It is a first principle, the origins of which are lost to memory, and it commands unconditional devotion. No one can escape his blood, race and roots.

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<sup>6</sup> Cited in Jean Touchard, *Histoire des idées politiques*, tome 2 : *Du XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle à nos jours* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1962), p. 459.

<sup>7</sup> Ernest Renan, *Qu'est-ce qu'une nation? Et autres essais politiques*, selected and presented by Joël Roman, (Paris: Presses Pocket, 1992), p. 54. Our emphasis.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 55.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*



## 2. At the Confluence of Two Traditions

Fichte was of course a major inspiration to Barrès,<sup>10</sup> who, together with Péguy, was one of de Gaulle's intellectual guides. There can be no doubt that de Gaulle assimilated aspects of German thought through Barrès, but it would probably be an exaggeration to conclude, as does Jean-Baptiste Neveux, that in de Gaulle, "there were... many more traits borrowed from the German form of thinking which underlies Germanicism... than elements borrowed from the traditional political thinking of those who built France."<sup>11</sup> Of course, one sees in de Gaulle a number of things that coincide with German romantic thought. His idea of a France "which has existed from time immemorial," an "eternal France whose "grandeur" is linked to the world by "a 2,000-year-old pact,"<sup>12</sup> undeniably suggests this. His call for national transcendence and his constant references to "founders" such as the Gauls, Clovis, Charlemagne and Joan of Arc, also reveal a mythical conception of a homogeneous France.

However, while it is true that de Gaulle had a holistic idea of the French people, and that the nation, in his mind, at times had an ethnic and territorial component, it would be unfair and reductionist to see this as the last word on his ideas because the cult of the nation never made de Gaulle forget the fundamental traits of French republican thinking. De Gaulle's unshakeable attachment to democracy and its values - tolerance, liberty and law - is well known.<sup>13</sup> And while France was always his greatest concern, he never forgot the recognition due to other peoples, that is to say the necessity of "granting them ... what he claimed for his own, ... respect for their

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<sup>10</sup> "... the clearest aspect of the Barrès doctrine ... is German political romanticism." Charles Andler, *Vie de Lucien Herr, 1864-1926* (Paris: Maspero, 1977), pp. 153-154.

<sup>11</sup> Jean-Baptiste Neveux, "Charles de Gaulle et la pensée allemande", in *Études gauliennes*, numéro 17, février-mars 1977, p. 17. Cited in Pierre Maillard, *op. cit.*, p. 27.

<sup>12</sup> Charles de Gaulle, *Discours et messages, 1940-1946* (Paris: Berger-Levrault, 1946), p. 52.

specific nature and [their] right to independence."<sup>14</sup> The Algerian war, moreover, demonstrated this quite clearly.

To consider France and *Urvolk* as being vaguely on the same footing would be to underestimate Gaullism. A finer analysis would place de Gaulle at the crossroads of the French-civic and German-ethnic traditions. Being an ardent nationalist, he wanted a strong and proud nation, and, being an ardent democrat, he wanted it open and respectful. While the Gaullist conception objectified the eternal myth of the nation, it also released it from the narrowly biological meaning generally attached to it by the tradition of Fichte, and established it rather as a historical cultural community, naturally sovereign and having its own international personality.

This profoundly nationalist credo underlies de Gaulle's vision of the world and, in most instances, his plan for Europe. For de Gaulle, the state, as an agent of the nation, must be the inevitable unit of international relations.<sup>15</sup> It must be strong and remain independent in order to carry out its mission, which was first and foremost to secure the conditions of the nation's development.

We should note here the importance of the concept of independence, a corollary of the General's ideas on the nation. According to Pierre Maillard, independence is even "the key word in his thinking." He applied it to persons ("he displayed it himself in his constant rebellion against conventional thinking"<sup>16</sup>), and he demanded it for France. As will be seen below, he also demanded it for Europe.

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<sup>13</sup> See in particular the Oxford speech of November 25, 1941 in Charles de Gaulle, *Discours et messages*, op. cit., p. 138.

<sup>14</sup> Pierre Maillard, op. cit., p. 30.

<sup>15</sup> Note here the great affinity with the realist trend in international relations, one of the best known theoreticians of which, Raymond Aron, was extensively read by de Gaulle.

### III. Europe and the de Gaulle Years

With the war and the alliances it required, de Gaulle realised the necessity of organizing Europe. Between his exile in London and his presidency of the Fifth Republic, de Gaulle's views obviously had time to change, but, unlike those who point to paradoxes and ambiguities in his thought, one should suggest instead that there was an evolution. This paper will illustrate the belief that de Gaulle remained faithful to the principles of his political philosophy and constantly strove, with a considerable degree of coherence, to reconcile them with the vagaries and demands of international events. This may be seen by viewing events chronologically.

#### *1. During the War*

As Under Secretary of State for War in the Reynaud government, de Gaulle went to London in mid-June 1940 at the very moment Jean Monnet and Sir Robert Vansittart submitted an extensive plan for Franco-British union to the British Parliament. De Gaulle's reaction to the program as presented was lukewarm, but he nevertheless supported it energetically before Churchill, who, although quite reluctant, ultimately allowed himself to be convinced. On June 16, the British government offered France union on the following terms:

... France and Great Britain shall henceforth no longer be two nations, but one Franco-British Union. The Union shall institute common organizations for defence, foreign policy, finance and the economy. Every French citizen shall immediately enjoy the status of citizen of Great Britain and every British citizen shall become a citizen of France. ... During the war, there shall be only one war cabinet and all the forces of Great Britain and France ... shall be placed under its direction. The two parliaments shall be formally associated.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Pierre Maillard, *op. cit.*, p. 31.

<sup>17</sup> See Pierre Gerbet, *La construction de l'Europe* (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1997), p. 42.

De Gaulle telephoned Paul Reynaud that same day to inform him of the British offer, but he was too late: Reynaud had just handed over power to Pétain, who had accepted the armistice.

That de Gaulle agreed to support the offer was quite surprising. The union it proposed profoundly undermined the sovereignty and independence of the parties, and it is difficult to understand how de Gaulle's nationalist approach could be reconcilable with this breach of the nation's monopoly on the kingly functions of the state.

However, as the war progressed, de Gaulle became considerably more circumspect in his "unifying" intentions. This may be seen from his declarations, which, from that point on, focused on general matters. In a speech at Albert Hall on November 11, 1942, de Gaulle said: "France wishes to make every effort so that, in Europe, all those whose interests, defense and development needs are joined to its own will unite with it, and it with them, in a practical and lasting way."<sup>18</sup> On March 18, 1944, he informed the Advisory Assembly of Algiers:

For the old continent, once renewed, to find a balance... we feel that certain organizations of nations will have to be developed within it, without of course undermining the sovereignty of each member. As regards France, we believe that a kind of Western organization, developed with us, mainly on an economic basis... could offer considerable benefits. ... The French government is now prepared to begin, ... together with other interested states, all the necessary studies and negotiations to achieve this end.<sup>19</sup>

All these proposals were submitted in rather vague terms: in fact, the only point that was explained in this speech was the inalienable nature of national sovereignty. At the time, de Gaulle had thus drastically distanced himself from the British plan of June 1940. In fact, the traditional ideas of the leader of free France are much more recognisable in his Algiers speech.

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<sup>18</sup> Charles de Gaulle, *Discours et messages*, op. cit., p. 258.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 420-421. Here de Gaulle is expressing the position of the Comité Français de Libération Nationale (CFLN).

Similarly, de Gaulle resolutely distanced himself here in the Algiers speech from the vague unionist impulses of the exiled governments of the occupied countries. Starting in 1942, some of those countries, in particular Belgium, the Netherlands and Poland, raised the possibility a number of times of a federal organization of liberated European nations. While this idea obviously appealed to Jean Monnet, who felt there could be no "peace in Europe if the states re-established themselves on the basis of national sovereignty,"<sup>20</sup> it held no allure for de Gaulle, whose priority was to restore grandeur and prestige to France.

How then to explain his consent in 1940 for a plan under which Great Britain and France would virtually have merged? De Gaulle's consent is doubly surprising because, not only did the pact in question limit the sovereignty of the parties, it also meant that British authorities would in actual fact become the guardians of a routed France. De Gaulle was not unaware that, under the plan, his country would give up both sovereignty and independence.

But de Gaulle was a pragmatist. France was in trouble and had to seize the hand that was extended to it. In addition, Churchill's offer might have convinced the Reynaud government to continue the fight and to resist the supporters of armistice. But time was of the essence: the influence of Pétain and Weygand was increasing daily, and it was therefore impossible to review the terms of the plan. It must be understood then that de Gaulle acquiesced to the plan even though he profoundly - and perhaps even completely - disagreed with it, and solely in view of his country's immediate situation. Starting in late 1944, when, with considerable lucidity, he considered the war as "ultimately won,"<sup>21</sup> de Gaulle returned to a much more nationalistic vision of European politics.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> In a memo sent to the CFLN on August 5, 1943. Cited in Pierre Gerbet, p. 46.

<sup>21</sup> Cited by Colonel Passy in his *Mémoires*. See Pierre Maillard, p. 106.

<sup>22</sup> This was also the case for Churchill, who, in the spring of 1945, withdrew the offer made to France.

Like most of his contemporaries, de Gaulle obviously foresaw the need to organise Europe politically once peace had been restored. The speeches cited above prove this beyond any doubt. However, it is unlikely that de Gaulle had an authentic "concept of European" at that time, that is to say political designs that were rooted in a genuinely European regional consciousness. Unlike Pierre Maillard, we do not believe that de Gaulle's Algiers and Albert Hall speeches provide a valid basis for thinking that de Gaulle had "a broad and clear vision"<sup>23</sup> of the future in this regard. The General's European intentions were intimately related to the circumstances of the war, and, while he anticipated preferential relations with France's European partners in the post-war period, those relations did not go beyond the classic model of co-operation and diplomacy between states.

It was not until later that de Gaulle thought of Europe "for Europe's sake," that is to say, without always considering it in relation to geopolitical circumstances.

## *2. De Gaulle's Opposition to the Fourth Republic*

In January 1946, following the failure of his proposed constitution, de Gaulle left the head of the provisional government, but remained very active politically and founded the Rassemblement du peuple français (RPF). His positions against the nascent Europe were numerous and vehement.

It should be noted that de Gaulle did not belong to the pro-Europe circles at this time, and even remained far removed from them. Although he corresponded quite regularly with Koudenhove-Kalergi, he had no known contact with the International Coordinating Committee for a United Europe, or with any of the organisations it spearheaded. Nor did he attend the Hague

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<sup>23</sup> Maillard, p. 97.

Convention (1948), to which he was not even invited. In fact, under the Fourth Republic, de Gaulle's speeches on European construction turned essentially on two themes: the Soviet threat and the plan for the European Defence Community (EDC).

*a) Soviet Imperialism*

As the war raged on, de Gaulle was already concerned about the power of the Anglo-American bloc. Often pushed to the sidelines by Roosevelt and Churchill, de Gaulle signed with Stalin the "*Belle et Bonne Alliance*" (1944) which he hoped would increase France's flexibility in dealing with the Anglo-Saxons. However, the pact soon revealed its limits: Stalin did nothing to ensure the French were present at Yalta or Potsdam, and the USSR soon displayed an imperialist attitude towards Eastern Europe that was contrary to the spirit of the agreement.

De Gaulle was bitter. And like all Western governments at this time, he became very much concerned about "the Stalinist policy of aggression." After considering the USSR as essential to the continental balance, he now viewed it as the cause of a very grave imbalance that absolutely had to be corrected:

To the grave outside dangers that threaten Europe, the world and us as a result of Soviet Russia's unlimited ambition to dominate, and nothing else, we have a solution called the *European Federation* in the areas of the economy and defence.<sup>24</sup>

How could de Gaulle, the defender of national sovereignty and independence, evoke the image of a federation of European countries? The ambiguity in his choice of words would undoubtedly never be corrected, but it seems reasonable to believe that what the General had in mind was, at most, the idea of a confederation. Whatever the case may be, his speech here clearly stands, at

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<sup>24</sup> In a note to the RPF dated July 19, 1948. Cited in Maillard, pp. 106-107. Our emphasis.

least in principle, against the nationalistic positions of its author. Why? We would say for the same reasons that led de Gaulle to accept Churchill's offer in 1940. Once again, de Gaulle was acting out of pragmatism. Faced with this outside threat, he adopted positions that he would normally have rejected. This is not contradictory, but rather a lucid and energetic decision by a man who had a clear conception that France's sovereignty, left alone before the massive power of the Soviet Union, risked much more than it would within an organization of European nations, no matter how integrated it might be. Moreover, it was in this spirit that de Gaulle agreed to the creation of the Atlantic Alliance in 1949. However, he vehemently denounced the plan for a common European defense system a few years later.

#### *b) The EDC Plan*

In 1950, Schuman introduced his plan, which would ultimately result in the ECSC. De Gaulle opposed the plan, denouncing its essentially economic nature. In his view, this agreement concerning the "muddled business" of steel and coal could not come before a political agreement. He was concerned that the ground rules would not be politically determined at the outset. For Gaullists, politics, as a form of expression of national sovereignty, must come before economics. Not to mention the fact that, from a nationalist standpoint, the ECSC was much too supranational in appearance.<sup>25</sup>

And if supranationalism was clearly a disturbing development in the field of coal and steel, it was simply unacceptable in the area of defence. For Jean Monnet, the plan was perfectly

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<sup>25</sup> According to a simple definition of supranationalism, its supporters seek to reproduce the conventional concept of nation state on a continental scale. See Lucien-Pierre Bouchard, "Les Quinze à la croisée des chemins", in *Études internationales*, Québec, IQHEI, Volume XXVII, No. 3, September 1996.



legitimate because federal Europe "cannot be limited to coal and steel,"<sup>26</sup> but de Gaulle fiercely opposed the EDC and fought it every step of the way.

The purpose of the EDC was twofold: first, to provide a structure for the rearmament of Germany and, second, to continue the federal integration of Europe. Those behind the plan felt that a European army was the safest way to establish genuine solidarity among the partners of the new European Community. But de Gaulle did not see matters this way.

In his view, an army was the primary tool of national independence. As a military man and a nationalist, de Gaulle could not accept any weakening of France's control over its own troops. He flared up against what he called "the stateless mix." As he said in January 1954, "I guarantee there will be no European army! I will do everything in my power to oppose it. I will work with the Communists to block it. I will start a revolution against it."<sup>27</sup> Defense was the very symbol of national sovereignty, the last bastion of the people, and its command should never be shared. "A so-called 'European' army," he said, "threatens to put an end *de jure* to France's sovereignty."<sup>28</sup>

In addition, in de Gaulle's view, the concept of continental defense was a contradiction in terms. An army had no purpose apart from defending the homeland, but Europe was not a homeland, nor even an economic or political entity. The idea of the EDC was thus absolutely illegitimate in his eyes, a "fallacious" and "artificial" plan, a "fraud" and a "sham."

But there was another, more immediate reason why de Gaulle rejected the idea of an integrated continental army. He suspected France's European partners (in particular West Germany and the Netherlands), who were very much aligned with Washington, of wanting to

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<sup>26</sup> Cited in Pierre Gerbet, p. 137.

<sup>27</sup> Cited in Ernst Weisenfeld, *Quelle Allemagne pour la France?* (Paris: Armand Collin, 1989), p. 63.

<sup>28</sup> Cited in Jean Monnet, *Mémoires* (Paris: Fayard, 1976), p. 429.

organize a much more Atlantic than European form of defence. In a word, the General feared the EDC might serve as an alibi for "pro-American zealots" in promoting even more massive intervention by the United States in the continent's defence. In a letter of October 1955 to Koudenhove-Kalergi, he wrote that the EDC agreement "cannot go through Washington, which... no one in Bonn or Paris has realized..."<sup>29</sup> because the military would certainly then be handed over to the "great American leader."<sup>30</sup>

In short, not only would the EDC confiscate France's army, it would also hand over command to a group of Atlantic powers whose decision-making centre would very likely be located on another continent, which was obviously an intolerable prospect for de Gaulle who had always wanted a strong and sovereign France in an independent Europe.

This requirement of autonomy would also be the touchstone of de Gaulle's efforts at European construction. As will be seen below, it was because of this that de Gaulle would pit the Paris-Bonn axis against the London-Washington axis once he returned to power.

### *3. De Gaulle's Initiatives*

De Gaulle immediately began contributing to the start-up of the Common Market as soon as he returned to power in 1958, implementing a range of measures - fiscal and monetary arrangements and trade liberalization - to ensure the success of the Rome Treaty. It will be remembered that he had opposed the ECSC, but were these actions a reversal of his position? Analysis shows that, on the contrary, de Gaulle was once again acting in a very rigorous and realistic way. In his view, the idea was to pit the Common Market against the single free trade area that Great Britain was proposing at the time.

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<sup>29</sup> Charles de Gaulle, *Lettres, notes et carnets*, Volume 7 (Paris: Plon, 1984), p. 255.

He also had to face the realities of power and deal with considerable integrationist forces. Opinion quickly evolved in France and the idea of the construction of Europe - at least of a certain type of Europe - was increasingly coming to the fore. Developments in this area seemed inevitable and de Gaulle was aware of this. Furthermore, while he opposed the Europe of his predecessors in no uncertain terms, it is not clear that he himself was anti-Europe. He simply demanded conditions for a united Europe that he was now in a position to set. President de Gaulle's European initiative was marked by two outstanding moments: the meeting with Chancellor Adenauer at Colombey-les-Deux-Églises and the development of the Fouchet Plan.

#### *a) Meeting at Colombey-les-Deux-Églises*

During the war, despite all the traditional differences between France and Great Britain, de Gaulle had contemplated a continental organization based on the Paris-London axis. While the matter had appeared quite straightforward at that point, this was no longer the case in 1958. The English had established closer ties with the Americans and were advocating an essentially Atlantic policy. De Gaulle therefore had to look for another solution.

The solution was the RFA. Being solidly democratic and permanently back in the concert of nations, Germany, in the General's mind, no longer represented the threat it had posed ten years earlier. His mistrust had given way to a desire for close collaboration; West Germany now had to be considered a full-fledged partner of France, even its friend.

President de Gaulle now viewed Europe from the standpoint of the Franco-German axis. But it is not certain this idea was new to him. In 1943, he had answered Otto de Habsburg, who advocated the dismantling of Germany that the sole hope for "rest and well-being" for Europe

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<sup>30</sup> Cited in Monnet, p. 429.

was "a revision of the Treaty of Verdun and the reunification of the Franks of the West and East."<sup>31</sup> And in 1949, he said he was "dazzled by the prospect of what Germany and France could do together."<sup>32</sup>

It was in this spirit that he invited Chancellor Adenauer to his property at Colombey-les-Deux-Églises, a personal and friendly invitation that was not subsequently repeated in de Gaulle's relations with his foreign counterparts. He offered Konrad Adenauer a preferential cooperative arrangement, which was to serve as a springboard to the construction of Europe. But what Europe did this mean? De Gaulle was very clear on this: "... One must not confuse the respective policies of two countries, as the theoreticians of the ECSC ... and the European Defense Community claimed to do, but, on the contrary, recognise that the situations are very different, and build on that situation."<sup>33</sup> In short, Europe must not limit the sovereignty and identity of its members.

De Gaulle set two other conditions. First, he insisted that any potential European union must be independent of the United States. Adenauer, the head of a divided country threatened by the Soviets, was still very attached to the idea of American protection. De Gaulle understood the Chancellor's concern and reaffirmed France's commitment to the Atlantic Alliance, but remained firm on the principle of a European, not Atlantic Europe. His second condition, that Great Britain be excluded, was a corollary of the first. Since England was, in the General's view, nothing more than a political and economic satellite of the United States, admitting it to the community would be tantamount to letting in an American Trojan horse. Although in favor of including Britain, Adenauer was nevertheless persuaded by his counterpart's argument.

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<sup>31</sup> Cited in Maillard, p. 99. Ratified in 843 and putting an end to the Western Roman Empire, the Treaty of Verdun marked the start of the historically antagonistic relations between France and Germany.

<sup>32</sup> Cited in Pierre Gerbet, p. 95.

However, there may have been another motivation behind his desire to exclude the English. In addition to his requirement of independence, there was probably also a desire to ensure that France held the leadership of the new Europe. Germany was divided and had been defeated, and, even though it was recovering quickly, its relative weight was considerably diminished. It in fact appeared that de Gaulle viewed Europe as a means of extending France's influence throughout the world. The membership of a great power such as Great Britain would obviously reduce France's influence in the new organization proportionately.

Regardless of the differences it revealed, the Colombey meeting proved to be a definite success. Adenauer found that de Gaulle was more pro-Europe than he had hoped and thus accepted the essential parts of his arguments, although with some reservations. President and Chancellor agreed on three points: first, a political Europe must be built; second, its main support would be the Paris-Bonn axis; third, it must never undermine the essential aspects of national sovereignties. The Fouchet Plan would then be based on these parameters.

#### *b) The Fouchet Plan*

The founding fathers of Europe, with Monnet and Schuman at the forefront, aimed for a federal and supranational Europe. They suggested achieving this objective gradually through economic integration, which would ultimately bring the political component in its wake. This was the spillover strategy; with a combination of hard sell and soft sell, wherein the political would follow the economic. However, the leaders of the Fifth Republic under de Gaulle did not view the matter in this way. They pitted a state-based, national and confederal Europe against a supranational and federal Europe. In arguing against the mechanism and function of the spillover

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<sup>33</sup> Charles de Gaulle, *Mémoires d'espoir*, tome 1: *Le renouveau, 1958-1962* (Paris: Plon, 1970), p. 186.

strategy, they contended that political voluntarism was required. De Gaulle himself had nothing but recriminations for the supranationalists, accusing them of confusing "exaggerated and chimerical myths" with "common sense and reality." In the General's mind, he was dealing with "cranks" and "shipwreckers of the nation" who would substitute a "stateless and irresponsible technocratic assembly" for national governments, "the only entities with the right to order and the power to be obeyed."<sup>34</sup>

In the wake of the Colombey meeting, de Gaulle decided to take the initiative in the matter of the construction of Europe, which to that time had been monopolized by the supranationalists. Apparently for the first time, de Gaulle's unionist intentions were no longer simply a matter of circumstance, essentially linked to "common threats." Starting in 1960, Europe, in de Gaulle's mind, was no longer a purely pragmatic choice, or what one might call a lesser evil. Immediately after Colombey, de Gaulle conceived of a Europe for Europe, in accordance with a genuinely European concept. He wrote that he now more than ever felt

...what the nations that people it have in common. Since they all are of white race and Christian origins, have the same way of life, have been bound together forever through innumerable relationships in thought, art, science, politics and trade, it is consistent with their nature that they should form, in the middle of the world, an entity with its own character and organization.<sup>35</sup>

But de Gaulle's new "European consciousness" did not undermine his nationalist conviction: in the same breath, he added that he also thought that "European union cannot be a merger of European peoples, but must result from their systematic rapprochement."<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Cited in Charles Zorgbibe, p. 51.

<sup>35</sup> de Gaulle, *Mémoires d'espoir*, p. 181.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibidem*.

It was in this "European" spirit that, in July 1960, President de Gaulle organized the Rambouillet meeting, which paved the way to the Paris Summit in February 1961. Five months later, the Bonn Conference resulted in the "Godesberg Declaration," in which the six signatory countries officially and unanimously decided to enter into a political union. But according to what principles? An Intergovernmental Study Commission under the chairmanship of Christian Fouchet was established to consider this question.

In October 1961 the Commission submitted the French plan to the member countries. This was the Fouchet Plan, two versions of which were successively negotiated before the General himself submitted a third in January 1962. De Gaulle proposed a confederation based on two main motivations: to collaborate closely in the fields of science, technology, culture, human rights and democracy, and to shape a common foreign policy and defence policy. In more concrete terms, the Fouchet Plan called for the creation of three major bodies: a parliament, a council and a political commission. The parliament would have an exclusively deliberative role, the political commission would be an advisory organization composed of officials from the member states, and the council would be the sole decision-making body. The council would periodically bring together the heads of government and reach its decisions unanimously. Each state would have the choice of voting for, against or abstaining. Confederal decisions would be binding only in countries that had voted in favor of them.

However, the negotiating marathon over the Fouchet Plan resulted in a resounding failure. The model it proposed - a Europe of states - was too radically different from the federal and supranational conception the Benelux countries had defended. In addition, those countries were irritated by France's refusal to eventually admit Great Britain. In April 1962 the break occurred and the Fouchet Plan was aborted.

Under analysis, the Belgian and Dutch positions seemed somewhat contradictory. On the one hand, they called for the creation of a supranational organization, while on the other, they advocated membership for England, whose nationalist positions were much closer to those of France. In addition, the Belgians and Dutch did not realise that adopting the Fouchet Plan, even if it did not respond to supranationalism, would nevertheless represent a first step toward a political Europe. On the contrary, its rejection meant the end of talks on integration, which would not seriously resume until the 1980s. The result was thus paradoxical: in the 1960s it was the supporters of a "greater Europe" who were responsible for its decline, which would not be reversed for another twenty years.

De Gaulle was sorely disappointed and broke off his unionist action. He doubted his partners' motivations and accused them of wanting to establish a union on conditions that were unacceptable to France. He no longer believed in a political Europe. The "empty chair policy," which he exercised in Brussels in 1965 and the "Luxembourg Compromise," which resulted in 1966 moreover confirmed this cooler attitude.<sup>37</sup> President de Gaulle's main concerns would henceforth be the role and specific nature of his country in the world. His foreign policy attests to this: between 1963 and 1966, France left NATO, forged independent relations with communist China, drew closer to Moscow and decided unilaterally on a new policy concerning the Third World.<sup>38</sup> France alone would carry out the mission it had set for itself in the world, which was to defend the right of nations to independence.<sup>39</sup>

For the rest of his presidency, de Gaulle remained indifferent to all attempts to revive plans for a political Europe. He summed up his thinking on the subject at his press conference on

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<sup>37</sup> As is known, these episodes marked profound decline in community powers.

<sup>38</sup> See the Phnom Penh speech.

<sup>39</sup> As witness, among other things, the "Vive le Québec libre!" incident in Montreal (Canada).



July 23, 1964: "... France... is pursuing, by its own means, what a European and independent policy can and should be. The fact is that peoples everywhere are pleased with this, and France is no worse off."

Europe as a political construct was dead, and would remain so until Maastricht in 1992.

#### **IV. A Historic Role**

De Gaulle was not one of the precursors of the idea of Europe. At the same time, other political leaders embraced the project with considerably more fervour than he. And this was because the General remained attached to France, to its past, to its independence and its specific nature. The homeland, in his mind, embodied an irreducible and impassable myth, and the individual should strive to reflect its glory. De Gaulle's entire life is moreover an exceptional example of this dedication. One feels that all of de Gaulle's reluctance with regard to Europe is rooted above all in this philosophy of the nation, which we see as standing at the confluence of the German and French traditions.

De Gaulle thus remained profoundly nationalistic, but that did not prevent him from opening up to the developments of his times, which he himself characterised at the time as "massive exchanges, boundless common undertakings in science and technology, rapid communication, extensive travel."<sup>40</sup> From 1940 to 1958, although he was considering continental unification from a purely circumstantial and pragmatic standpoint, he clearly realized, once he returned to power, that the "concept of Europe" now had a universally recognized legitimacy. It was shortly after the Colombey meeting with Adenauer that de Gaulle foresaw a European organization of countries for himself, regardless of the threats that weighed on France.

Ultimately, General de Gaulle was not a European, but he became one. But the European he became was not without restrictions: "[Europe] must be genuinely European," he said. "If it is not a Europe of the peoples... it will be... limited and have no future. And the Americans will take advantage of the situation to impose their hegemony. Europe must be independent."<sup>41</sup> A Europe of the states, an independent Europe - these were the only conditions on which de Gaulle would accept the idea of continental unification. Of course, these stipulations excluded the federal and supranational intentions of the founding fathers. However, de Gaulle nevertheless wanted union. He simply wanted it less than Jean Monnet, and he especially wanted it to be, more modestly, confederal.

The Fouchet Plan may be considered as one of the great missed chances for integration because, although it went against the most unifying plans at the time, its implementation would nevertheless have formed the basis for a genuine political construct. Instead of this progress, Europe would have to wait years for the ultimate emergence of the TUE, which is scarcely more integrationist than the Fouchet Plan had been.

To gauge the General's contribution to the European question, it would be helpful to consider what the Community might have been without his efforts. Would Europe today be farther along the road to federation? One very much doubts it. Without de Gaulle's double veto, the British would have entered the EEC in 1961 and would assuredly have vigorously opposed the federal and supranational principles for which de Gaulle fought. Not to mention that, with Great Britain and without de Gaulle, the Community would have found itself much more dependent on American interests.

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<sup>40</sup> de Gaulle, *Mémoires d'espoir*, pp. 181-182.

<sup>41</sup> Cited in Alain Peyrefitte, *C'était de Gaulle* (Paris, Fallois/Fayard, 1994), p. 366.

In conclusion, from the end of the Second World War until his death, de Gaulle pitted national reality against supranational plans. In the current movement of bringing peoples together within structures, and soon under the powers that encompass them, how should the historian assess this role? It would seem that the Europe conceived and proposed by de Gaulle was scarcely less constricting for national sovereignty than the union proposed at Maastricht. In the context of the current debate on nationalisms and their various excesses, it would also seem that de Gaulle was, in this century, the great promoter and herald of the fundamentally important idea of the sovereignty of peoples, an idea that common sense appears to recognize today as the natural and necessary stage in their unification.

Lastly, although one can rightly say that de Gaulle was a nationalist, it should be understood that his nationalism excluded the dominant exaltations of which European union has been an unfortunately dialectical consequence. It must be understood that de Gaulle's nationalism meant the affirmation of the reality and dignity of nations, notwithstanding their march, inevitable or otherwise, toward the unification of the continents and the world.