

## WINSTON CHURCHILL AND THE IDEA OF EUROPE

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### *Abstract*

The idea of united Europe has always been the centre of Winston Churchill's political thought. Since the Thirties of the last century, the great British statesman fixes the line adopted by the governments beyond the Channel in the second postwar period: to support the cause of the unity of the Old Continent leaving the United Kingdom aside to guarantee its imperial mission. Churchill defends this vision most of all starting from 1946, the year of the famous speeches pronounced at Fulton and in Zurich, on the occasion of the birth of the *United Europe Movement* (UEM) and of the Council of Europe (1949), when he is in opposition. And also after the starting of the community integration process and his return to Downing Street (1951) the English statesman – consistently with the historical British tradition – wishes a continental Europe: on the one hand France and Germany that represent the leader countries, on the other hand Great Britain, the Commonwealth and the United States the supporters.

**Keywords:** Europeanism, imperialism, community integration process

### **1. A Continent among Torments and Hopes**

After the new European structure outlined by the Treaty of Versailles, it was widespread the conviction that the overcoming of the international anarchy represented the *conditio sine qua non* to reach that «perpetual peace» evoked by Immanuel Kant since 1795. The first proposal was formulated by Richard Coudenhove-Kalergi, author of the writing *Pan-Europa* (1923) and founder of the homonymous movement; the Austrian count defined the League of Nations an «inorganic structure»<sup>1</sup>,

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<sup>1</sup> See R. COUDENHOVE-KALERGI, *Pan-Europa* (1923), Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1988, p. 68. See also A.

since it did not group States according to their historical, economic and cultural affinities but «in a mechanic way». Drawing his inspiration from the doctrine enunciated by James Monroe («America to Americans»), Coudenhove-Kalergi claimed with equal strength the concept of «Europe to Europeans»; he hoped for a confederal alliance extended to Portugal and Poland, separated from other world powers such as the communist Russia and the British Commonwealth. Using the words of *Föderation* (Federation) and *Staatenbund* (League of States) as synonyms, he did not assign them the meaning of Hamilton's federal tradition.

In the Twenties Luigi Einaudi advocated a «second sort of League of Nations», in the form of a super-State able to exert direct sovereignty on citizens, fix taxes, create and maintain its own army. Besides, the Piedmontese statesman made a clear distinction between the principles of «federation», deriving from the example of the American Constitution, and «confederation», expression of a consolidated European tradition; the structure conceived by Thomas W. Wilson – argued Einaudi – referred to the second concept, because it represented a sort of alliance or league, unsuitable for assuring a lasting peace<sup>2</sup>. In his opinion, only through the weakening of the absolute sovereignty of the European States it was possible to overcome the international anarchy and, then, to avoid new conflicts. Einaudi's criticism did not remain isolated in Italy; Giovanni Agnelli and Attilio Cabiati supported the model of the British Commonwealth, characterized by the principles of «self-government» and «rule of law». They underlined the inefficiency of the League of Nations, since no international organization could impose decisions concerning own finances and army without a popular legitimacy.

On 9 September 1929 Aristide Briand hoped for the unification of the Old Continent in front of the Assembly of the League of Nations; the French Foreign Minister put his speech into a *memorandum* through which he proposed a federal union of Europe, inside the Genevan institution and subordinated to it, aimed at creating long-lasting political and economic relationships among nations without anyway harming their sovereignty (a goal that denied the concept itself of federal union). Despite the interest it aroused in the public opinion of the time, this project did not take off<sup>3</sup>: boycotted by the

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AGNELLI, *Da Coudenhove-Kalergi al piano Briand*, in S. Pistone (a cura di), *L'idea dell'unificazione europea dalla prima alla seconda guerra mondiale*, Torino, Fondazione Einaudi, 1975, pp. 39-57.

<sup>2</sup> See L. EINAUDI, *La guerra e l'unità europea*, Milano, Comunità, 1948, pp. 122-123.

<sup>3</sup> About the plan introduced by Briand, see R. LUCCHESI, *Organizzazione d'un regime d'unione federale europea*, in «Comuni d'Europa», XXXI, 1983, n. 10, pp. 9-10; E. VIGLIAR, *L'Unione europea all'epoca del progetto Briand*, Milano, Giuffrè, 1983, pp. 125-163; O. KELLER (sous la direction de), *Le Plan Briand d'union fédérale européenne. Documents*,

fascist Italy and by Great Britain, it stranded definitively after the crisis and the downfall of the Weimar Republic. Winston Churchill<sup>4</sup> exhorted the European States to unite in order to isolate the Bolshevik revolution. In his opinion, Great Britain must be partner, but not member of a federal Europe because, as he stated in the article published on 15 February 1930 in the “Saturday Evening Post” and entitled *The United States of Europe*, «the British Empire is a leading European power. It is a great and growing American power. It is the Australasian power. It is one of the greatest Asiatic powers. It is the leading African power. Great Britain herself [...] is the centre and head of the British Commonwealth of Nations»<sup>5</sup>.

Churchill’s interest in the European unity was ascribable to three different periods. The first ideally began with the publication of the mentioned article *The United States of Europe* (1930) and ended in 1946, the year of the famous speeches delivered at Fulton and in Zurich; the successive period coincided with the birth of the United Europe Movement (UEM) and the Council of Europe, when the conservative leader was to the opposition; the third corresponded to the beginning of the European integration process and to his return to Downing Street after the end of the Second World War. Therefore, Churchill’s European outlook put down its roots in the Thirties, when – besides various government appointments – he performed an intense journalistic activity, started at the end of the XIX century as correspondent of the “Daily Telegraph” and of the “Morning Post”. In the 1930 article published in the “Saturday Evening Post”, Churchill fixed the line adopted by the governments

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Genève, Jilek, 1991.

<sup>4</sup> Churchill’s official biography was edited by Randolph Churchill, his son, and by the historian Martin Gilbert. It is composed by twenty-three volumes published by Heinemann in London: eight of them have as a title *Winston S. Churchill 1874-1965*, thirteen of them are called *Companion Volumes* and the last two are entitled *The Churchill War Papers*. More precisely they are grouped as follows: CHURCHILL R. (edited by), *Winston S. Churchill 1874-1964*, 2 vols., London, Heinemann, 1966-1967: I. *Youth 1874-1900*, II. *Young Statesman 1901-1914*; GILBERT M. (edited by), *Winston S. Churchill 1874-1964*, 6 vols., London, Heinemann, 1971-1988: III. *1914-1916*, IV. *1916-1922*, V. *1922-1939*, VI. *Finest Hour 1940-1941*, VII. *Road to Victory 1941-1945*, VIII. *Never Despair 1945-1965*; CHURCHILL R., (edited by), *Companion Volume I. 1874-1900*, 2 vols., London, Heinemann, 1967: Part 1. *1874-1896*, Part 2. *1896-1900*; ID., (edited by), *Companion Volume II. 1900-1914*, 3 vols., London, Heinemann, 1969: Part 1. *1900-1907*, Part 2. *1907-1911*, Part 3. *1911-1914*; GILBERT M. (edited by), *Companion Volume III. 1914-1916*, 2 vols., London, Heinemann, 1972: Part 1. *July 1914-April 1915*, Part 2. *May 1915-December 1916*; ID. (edited by), *Companion Volume IV. 1916-1922*, 3 vols., London, Heinemann, 1977: Part 1. *January 1917-June 1919*, Part 2. *July 1919-March 1921*, Part 3. *April 1921-November 1922*; ID. (edited by), *Companion Volume V. 1922-1939*, 3 vol., London, Heinemann, 1979-1982: Part 1. *The Exchequer Years 1922-1929*, Part 2. *The Wilderness Years 1929-1935*, Part 3. *The Coming of War 1936-1939*; ID. (edited by), *The Churchill War Papers*, 2 vols., London, Heinemann, 1993-1994: I. *At the Admiralty. September 1939-May 1940*, II. *Never Surrender. May-December 1940*.

<sup>5</sup> See W. CHURCHILL, *The United States of Europe*, in “Saturday Evening Post”, February 15<sup>th</sup>, 1930.

beyond the Channel in the second postwar period: on one hand to support the cause of the unity of the Old Continent, but on the other to leave the Country aside, as guarantee of its imperialistic mission: «The attitude of Great Britain towards European unification or “federal links” would, in the first instance, be determined by her dominant conception of a united British Empire»<sup>6</sup>.

His support for the European unity emerged again in June 1940 when, inspired by Jean Monnet, he put forward a project of French-British «indissoluble union»<sup>7</sup>; when France had to face up to the Nazi advance, Churchill proposed to the Paris government – sheltered in Bordeaux – the unification of the two States through the establishment of a Parliament, a Government, a common army, and a single citizenship. Although this project seemed to delineate a European federal core, it had a confederal meaning. This appeared on the occasion of the 21 March 1943 radio-message, broadcast by the BBC, when Churchill advocated the birth of the «Council of Europe», an organization for settling disputes and for preventing new conflicts in the Old Continent<sup>8</sup>.

The personality of the British Premier and his indissoluble bond with the United Kingdom were masterfully described by Jean Monnet:

Churchill was a true man of war [...]. Power was his inheritance, and supreme power his instinctive goal; yet he was profoundly democratic. Did he see beyond the interests of Great Britain? I think not – but for him, as for many of his compatriots, British interests were those of vast areas of the world. Wherever the Union Jack flew, Britons ruled the waves. My relations with Churchill were good; but in the nature of things, as he saw them, my influence could only reflect my role, which was not political. He

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<sup>6</sup> Ivi.

<sup>7</sup> The plan of indissoluble union between France and the United Kingdom can be found in W. CHURCHILL, *The Second World War*, vol. II *Their Finest Hour*, London, Cassell, 1949, p. 183; M. SALVADORI, *La Comunità atlantica*, Roma, Opere nuove, 1957, pp. 192-193; P. FONTAINE, *Jean Monnet. L'inspirateur*, Préface de J. Delors, Paris, Grancher, 1988, pp. 164-165; L. LEVI, *L'unificazione europea. Trent'anni di storia*, Torino, Società editrice internazionale, 1979, pp. 25-26.

<sup>8</sup> The 21 March 1943 radio-message can be found in R.R. James (edited by), *Winston Churchill. His Complete Speeches 1897-1963*, vol. VII 1943-1949, New York-London, Chelsea House Publishers-Bowker Company, 1974, pp. 6755-6765 (as regards the quotation, see p. 6758). Churchill had already put forward a similar proposal; in October 1942 he wrote Foreign Minister Anthony Eden, invoking the establishment of a Council of Europe whereby the Continent could act in a «unified manner» and «minimize the barriers among nations». See M. CHARLTON, *Price of Victory*, London, British Broadcasting Corp, 1983, pp. 12-13.

respected political power; and, while he appreciated the form of power that I had been given, it was not worthy of the same regard. I often had to find roundabout ways of securing his attention<sup>9</sup>.

Soon after the Second World War Churchill pronounced some fundamental speeches for the idea of European unity. On 16 November 1945 in Brussels, on the occasion of the joint meeting of the Belgian Parliament, he emphasized the necessity to revive «the prosperity of Europe». The civilisation of the Old Continent had risen again from the destruction into which it had been plunged. At the same time, it was necessary to adopt some measures in favour of the world security to prevent new disasters. The rebuilding of Europe, both physical and moral, must be animated by the kindred themes of «Liberty and Democracy». He declared further: «These words have cheered us and helped to unify us in the struggle. They inspire our rejoicings in the hour of victory. Now that the fighting is over, it is necessary to define these glorious war cries with more fullness and precision»<sup>10</sup>. In conclusion, he hoped for the birth of the «United States of Europe» able to strengthen the Old Continent «in a manner never known since the fall of the Roman Empire»<sup>11</sup> and within which all its peoples could live together in justice and peace.

In 1946 Churchill pronounced the Fulton and Zurich speeches. The Fulton speech, delivered on 5 March, was famous for the metaphor of the «iron curtain» which well synthesized the image of Europe split in two different spheres of influence. In the Missouri town he hoped for a «new unity in Europe» from which no nation had to be «permanently outcast»<sup>12</sup> (the implicit reference to Germany was evident). Besides, he declared that the two world wars had been originated from «the quarrels of the strong parent races in Europe»<sup>13</sup>. During the Zurich speech, dated 19 September, he underlined the need of the continental unity; more precisely he advocated a «kind of a United States of Europe»,

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<sup>9</sup> See J. MONNET, *Memoirs*, London, Collins, 1978, p. 137.

<sup>10</sup> R.R. JAMES (edited by), *Winston Churchill. His Complete Speeches 1897-1963*, vol. VII 1943-1949, cit., pp. 7251-7252 (for these quotations, see p. 7252). The Brussels speech can be found also in Churchill papers, 5/2, CAC, CC, Cambridge.

<sup>11</sup> R.R. JAMES (edited by), *Winston Churchill. His Complete Speeches 1897-1963*, vol. VII 1943-1949, cit., p. 7253.

<sup>12</sup> On the Fulton speech, see Churchill papers, 5/4, CAC, CC, Cambridge. This speech is published in R.R. JAMES (edited by), *Winston Churchill. His Complete Speeches 1897-1963*, vol. VII 1943-1949, cit., pp. 7285-7293 (for these quotations, see pp. 7290-7291). The recording can be found in BBC Written Archive Centre, Library n. T 18184, Reading.

<sup>13</sup> R.R. JAMES (edited by), *Winston Churchill. His Complete Speeches 1897-1963*, vol. VII 1943-1949, cit., p. 7291.

achievable through the Franco-German reconciliation. The Old Continent – the conservative leader specified – could not be conceived without a «spiritually great France and a spiritually great Germany» and, at the same time, without making «the material strength of a single State less important»; finally, he proposed the realization of a «first practical step» towards the setting up of the «Council of Europe»<sup>14</sup>.

In his memories (*The Continuing Battle*) Paul-Henri Spaak highlighted the historical meaning of the Zurich speech and also the misunderstandings it would generate:

When one remembers that Churchill made his speech a mere eighteen months after the end of hostilities, one can but feel boundless admiration for the man; although already old, he did not flinch from new and tough battles. The Zurich speech galvanized all those who believed in the need for a new Europe. By making that speech Churchill became one of the leading pioneers of European unity. And yet the speech was to become the root cause of a grave misunderstanding, for it contained an ambiguity which no one noticed at the time. After remaining hidden for some time, it was brought into the light of day when Churchill, back in power, refused to associate himself with the European Coal and Steel Community and the *European Economic Community*. Though even on a careful reading his Zurich address seems clear, Churchill, in referring to Europe in some splendid passages, failed to define what exactly he meant by Europe in geographical terms. At the time, he appeared to include Great Britain in Europe, but in fact this was not the case. The united Europe which Churchill advocated was a continental Europe, of which France and Germany were to be the joint leaders; Great Britain, the Commonwealth, the United States and, if possible, the USSR, were to befriend and support it. Churchill wanted Britain to promote the creation of a united Europe, but he did not want Britain to be part of it. From a number of years after his Zurich speech nobody asked him exactly what was in his mind when he made it. People

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<sup>14</sup> As regards the Zurich speech, see Churchill papers, 5/8, CAC, CC, Cambridge. This speech is published in R.R. JAMES (edited by), *Winston Churchill. His Complete Speeches 1897-1963*, vol. VII 1943-1949, cit., pp. 7379-7382. The recording can be found in BBC Written Archive Centre, Library n. 10253, Reading.



were only too glad of his backing for a great cause. The ambivalence of this speech suited everyone<sup>15</sup>.

Anyway the Zurich speech marked the relaunching of the idea of European unity. Coudenhove-Kalergi underlined this in a letter to Churchill dated 23 September 1946: «Now that you have raised the European question the Governments can no longer ignore it»<sup>16</sup>. After the Second World War, the British statesman considered the Franco-German reconciliation and the reintegration of Germany into the international community as necessary conditions to guarantee a solid peace in the Old Continent. On 26 November 1946 he invited De Gaulle to «take Germany by the hand and [...] rally her to the West and to European civilization»<sup>17</sup>; fearing the rebirth of a «unified centralized *Reich*», the General answered that he would have supported that cause provided that Great Britain became a «founder-partner» of a European union of States<sup>18</sup>. This statement demonstrated the fears of the future French President concerning the construction of an Anglo-American axis able to diminish the international role of France and Europe, this latter conceived by him as “third force” between the two superpowers.

## 2. Towards the Council of Europe: A First Pragmatic Goal

In Great Britain there was the establishment of the UEM (1947) thanks to the initiative of Churchill and of his son-in-law Duncan Sandys. The movement fixed its three main aims: the *sensitizing* of public opinion on the idea of European unity; the pursuit of forms of collaboration with the European movements; the support of the Labour Government. In particular, Sandys hindered the project of a continental federation; in fact, he intended to pursue some «modest measures of cooperation» or «a free association of States similar to the British Commonwealth»<sup>19</sup>. Churchill's and Sandys' action

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<sup>15</sup> See P.-H. SPAAK, *The Continuing Battle: Memoirs of a European 1936-1966*, London, Weidenfeld, 1971, p. 200.

<sup>16</sup> “My dear Winston Churchill”, September 23<sup>rd</sup> 1946, Churchill papers, 2/19, Churchill Archives Centre (from now on CAC), Churchill College (from now on CC), Cambridge. After his return from the United States, where he sheltered during the war, Coudenhove-Kalergi collaborated with Churchill at the draft of the Zurich speech; at the beginning of September, the British statesman invited the Austrian count to Bursinel, on the Lake of Geneva, to prepare together the text.

<sup>17</sup> “My dear General de Gaulle”, November 26<sup>th</sup>, 1946, Churchill papers, 2/30, CAC, CC, Cambridge.

<sup>18</sup> “Visit to General de Gaulle”, November 29<sup>th</sup>, 1946, Churchill papers, 2/20, CAC, CC, Cambridge.

<sup>19</sup> See W. LIPGENS, *A History of European Integration 1945-1947. The formation of the European Unity Movement*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1982, pp. 666-669.

clashed with the hostility of the new Labour government: Clement R. Attlee was not going to support the initiatives of his main political adversary; in turn Churchill hadn't made a precise choice yet about his relationships with Moscow, because he was waiting for the results of the conferences about the future of Germany<sup>20</sup>. The attention of the British foreign ministry Ernest Bevin was soon focused on the negotiations that would lead to the creation of the Atlantic Alliance; and the Brussels Pact itself – signed on 17 March 1948<sup>21</sup> – was considered by the Labour Government as an instrument to involve the United States in the defence of Western Europe. Favouring the relations with the White House and the Commonwealth, Great Britain created the presuppositions of its non-participation in the European communities.

In the following months Churchill developed his idea of Europe. On 14 May 1947 at the Royal Albert Hall in London, he declared that Europe was above all a «spiritual conception». This continent represented the fairest, the most temperate and fertile geographical area in the world; the parent breeds of western and modern civilisation dwelt in this land. Moreover, it gave rise to the history of the Christianity and of the Renaissance descending from the Roman Empire. In other words, religion, law, art, science and industry testified their European origin in every part of the world; therefore, it was «our task of reviving the glories, the happiness and the culture of Europe»<sup>22</sup>. The UEM was one of the main promoters of the European congress held in The Hague (7-10 May 1948) and chaired by Churchill; this event aroused great expectations for the notoriety and the prestige of the participants<sup>23</sup>.

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<sup>20</sup> On the role of the Labour Party and of the labour government in these years, see K.O. MORGAN, *Labour in Power 1945-1951*, Oxford, Clarendon, 1984; R. OVENDALE (edited by), *The Foreign Policy of the British Labour Governments 1945-1951*, Leicester, Leicester University Press, 1984; H. PELLING, *The labour governments 1945-1951*, London, Macmillan, 1984; K. JEFFERYS, *The Attlee governments: 1945-1951*, London-New York Longman, 1992.

<sup>21</sup> The Brussels Pact extended to the countries of the Benelux the Treaty of Dunkerque which was signed in March 1947 between Great Britain and France; it is a treaty of collective defence which provided the automatic intervention of the signatory States in case one of them should be assaulted. See A. VARSORI, *Il Patto di Bruxelles (1948): tra integrazione europea e alleanza atlantica*, Roma, Bonacci, 1988; J.W. YOUNG, *France, the Cold War and the Western Alliance, 1944-1949*, Leicester, Leicester University Press, 1990.

<sup>22</sup> R.R. JAMES (edited by), *Winston Churchill. His Complete Speeches 1897-1963*, vol. VII 1943-1949, cit., pp. 7483-7488 (for the quotation, see p. 7483).

<sup>23</sup> The Hague Congress saw the participation of one thousand delegates who belonged to the chief currents of the Europeanism; for example, Konrad Adenauer, Léon Blum, Alcide De Gasperi, Anthony Eden, Walter Hallstein, Harold Macmillan, François Mitterrand, Jean Monnet, Paul Reynaud, Robert Schuman, Paul-Henri Spaak, Altiero Spinelli and Paul van Zeeland. The British representation was composed by twenty-four Conservatives, twenty-five Labours, four Independents, five Liberals and two national Liberals.



In the Dutch city two political resolutions were discussed: the French one, mediated by Paul Reynaud, foresaw the universal suffrage election of a European Assembly with constituent powers according to a federalist vision; the British one, represented by the “unionists” and led by Sandys, put forward a confederal vision and claimed the right of each single State to choose its representatives. The final resolution was the fruit of a compromise between the two different theses; the convocation of an Assembly elected by national Parliaments and formed by their members constituted the most significant element of the conclusive document.

During the preparation of The Hague Congress, Churchill hoped for the presence of a German delegation; this could be considered a first small step for the reintegration of Germany into the international community after the dramatic defeat in the Second World War. On this occasion the British statesman declared that the European unity represented «the only solution»<sup>24</sup> to solve the problem of Germany, as it could prevent its economic difficulties, the rebirth of the military power and the spirit of revenge<sup>25</sup>. In his *Memories* the German chancellor Konrad Adenauer underlined this farsighted and courageous Churchill’s initiative:

A European congress was being held at The Hague from 7 until 10 May. It had been called by four European organizations including the United Europe Movement founded by Winston Churchill [...]. Churchill was elected Honorary President of the congress. In his speech he expressed an especially cordial welcome to the German delegates. He discussed the German problem and said that in his view it consisted in restoring the economic life and the former good name of the German people and freeing Germany’s neighbours from the fear of a revival of German military power<sup>26</sup>.

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<sup>24</sup> R.R. James (edited by), *Winston Churchill. His Complete Speeches 1897-1963*, vol. VII 1943-1949, cit., pp. 7635-7639 (for the quotation, see p. 7637). On The Hague speech, see also Churchill papers, 5/18, CAC, CC, Cambridge and W. CHURCHILL, *Europe Unite. Speeches 1947-1948*, edited by R. Churchill, Cassell, London, 1948, pp. 310-317. The recording can be found in BBC Written Archive Centre, Library, n. 12174-12175, Reading.

<sup>25</sup> Churchill had already tackled the German question on 14 May 1947 at the Royal Albert Hall in London; on this occasion, he declared that this problem was resolvable through a «united Europe», the only «constructive and peaceful outlet» to prevent its wish of revenge. See R.R. JAMES (edited by), *Winston Churchill. His Complete Speeches 1897-1963*, vol. VII 1943-1949, cit., pp. 7483-7488 (for the quotation, see p. 7485).

<sup>26</sup> See K. ADENAUER, *Memoirs: 1945-1953*, London, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1966, p. 109.

According to the British statesman the Hague Congress symbolized «the voice of Europe» which had to be raised upon the scene of chaos and prostration, caused by the mistakes and hatreds of the past, and among the dangers which hung over the present and future. Furthermore, he pointed out: «We shall only save ourselves from the perils which drawn near by letting national rancours and revenges die, by progressively effacing frontiers and barriers which aggravate and congeal our divisions, and by rejoicing together in that glorious treasure of literature, of romance, of ethics, of thought and toleration belonging to all, which is the true inheritance of Europe, the expression of its genius and honour»<sup>27</sup>. Moreover, in the Dutch town the conservative leader proposed again the idea of the «Council of Europe» including Great Britain with her Commonwealth: «I have always believed, as I declared in the war, that a Council of Europe was a subordinate but necessary part of the world organisation»<sup>28</sup>.

The idea of the «Council of Europe» was pursued by the British statesman above all in 1948; in a letter to Attlee dated July 27, Churchill considered such institution «an important and concrete step forward» on the path towards the reunification of the Old Continent»; it was able to favour «a feeling of solidarity» binding European peoples in view of growing dangers, *in primis* the communist one<sup>29</sup>. Even if on 17 November – at the Dorland Hall in London – he affirmed that the new institution would imply «no transfer of sovereignty»<sup>30</sup> from the member States. In this regards, it is worth underlining that he never denied a political strategy based on the “diversity” of Great Britain, namely a Country able to defend its role as a world power. So much so that on 20 April 1949 during the economic Conference of the European movement, held in London, he hoped for his country to «enter far more forcefully into European life», without anyway abandoning the «paramount and sacred» ties with its Dominions: «There are three circles which are linked together: the circle of the British Empire and Commonwealth, the circle of the English-speaking world, and the circle of united Europe»<sup>31</sup>.

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<sup>27</sup> See R.R. JAMES (edited by), *Winston Churchill. His Complete Speeches 1897-1963*, vol. VII 1943-1949, cit., p. 7636.

<sup>28</sup> Ivi, p. 7637.

<sup>29</sup> The text of this letter can be found in *U.K. and European Assembly*, in «The Times», August 26<sup>th</sup>, 1948.

<sup>30</sup> See R.R. JAMES (edited by), *Winston Churchill. His Complete Speeches 1897-1963*, vol. VII 1943-1949, cit., p. 7744.

<sup>31</sup> See R.R. JAMES (edited by), *Winston Churchill. His Complete Speeches 1897-1963*, vol. VII 1943-1949, cit., pp. 7810-7811. This speech can be found also in Churchill papers, 5/25, CAC, CC, Cambridge.

On 5 May 1949 the Council of Europe was set up in London<sup>32</sup>; it was an institution of consultative and confederal nature, whose main aim – as one could read from the article 1 of its Statute – was to achieve a strict union among member Countries through «agreements and by means of a common action in the economic, social, cultural and scientific fields». Among the bodies foreseen by the Council, the consultative Assembly and the Committee of Ministers, it was up to the latter to deliberate unanimously by pursuing its fundamental goals. The new institution permitted Churchill to strengthen his relationships with the main Europeanist movements and the national governments; in this regards, Harold Macmillan pointed out Churchill's resolute intention of «gaining the favour and the esteem of his new parliamentary colleagues» and at the same time of «fascinating and striking them favourably»<sup>33</sup>.

### 3. The Beginning of the European Integration Process

Despite the expectations aroused by the Council of Europe, the Schuman Declaration of 9 May 1950<sup>34</sup> was given a cold welcome in the United Kingdom, most of all inside the Labour Party; the Attlee government refused to take part in negotiations that would lead to the establishment of the *European Coal and Steel Community (1951) composed by Belgium, France, German Federal Republic, Italy, Luxembourg and Netherlands*. This decision stirred up the criticisms of the Conservative Party; at the House of Commons Anthony Eden underlined that organizations such as the Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force and NATO, had already implied an «assignment of sovereignty» for individual Countries. Therefore, he did not justify Attlee's and Bevin's fears towards the project devised by the French Foreign Minister, considered by the Labour Government an impediment to the

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<sup>32</sup> At present the Council of Europe has become a forum to strengthen the relations on the themes of the human rights; it is composed by forty-seven countries (the Western Europe ones and post-communist ones). On the Council of Europe, see P. DUCLOS, *Le réforme du Conseil de l'Europe*, Paris, Pichon & Durand-Auzias, 1958; U. LEONE, *Le origini diplomatiche del Consiglio d'Europa*, Milano, Giuffrè, 1965; J.E.S. FAWCETT, *The Council of Europe and integration*, in «Rivista di Studi politici internazionali», XLI, 1974, n. 2, pp. 270-278; M.-T. BITSCH, *Le rôle de la France dans la naissance du Conseil de l'Europe*, in R. Poidevin (sous la direction de), *Histoire des débuts de la construction européenne 1948-1950*, Bruxelles, Bruylant, 1986, pp. 165-198; A. VARSORI, *Il Congresso dell'Europa dell'Aja (7-10 maggio 1948)*, in S. Pistone (a cura di), *I movimenti per l'unità europea 1945-1954*, Milano, Jaca Book, 1992, pp. 311-341.

<sup>33</sup> See H. MACMILLAN, *Tides of Fortune 1945-1955*, London, Macmillan, 1969, pp. 170-175.

<sup>34</sup> In *Pour l'Europe*, Schuman emphasized as follows the British statesman's contribution in favour of the European unity: «On May 9<sup>th</sup> 1950 the French government chose Europe: the continent rescued by Hitler, thanks to the Winston Churchill's untameable energy». See R. SCHUMAN, *Pour l'Europe*, Paris, Nagel, 1963, pp. 13-14.

nationalization of the heavy industry<sup>35</sup>. Initially Churchill declared that national sovereignty «[was] not inviolable» and that the Conservative Party was ready, if necessary, to «accept its abrogation»<sup>36</sup>; therefore, it was necessary for Great Britain to participate to the negotiations concerning the *European Coal and Steel Community*. But he soon took up a prudent position regarding the Schuman Plan; on 27 June 1950 at the House of Commons he pointed out: «If one asked me: “Would you agree to a supra-national authority which has the power to tell Great Britain not to cut any more coal or make any more steel, but to grow tomatoes instead? I should say, without hesitation, the answer is no”». If, on one hand, he defined «right in principle» the proposal put forward by the French Minister of Foreign Affairs, on the other he believed it was absolutely necessary to evaluate whether the presence of the United Kingdom in the *European Coal and Steel Community* implied «a lowering of British wages and standards of life and labour»<sup>37</sup>.

On 11 August 1950, at the Assembly of the Council of Europe in Strasbourg, Churchill aroused great expectations among the supporters of the functionalist and federalist method; in view of the Korean war and a possible Soviet offensive in the Old Continent, he proposed the creation of a European army subjected to «a unified command and [...] to a proper democratic control»<sup>38</sup>, acting in full cooperation with Canada and the United States. Such proposal was justified also by the need of the Franco-German reconciliation; as a matter of fact, two days later, he confessed to the American President Harry S. Truman that the idea of a European Army represented the culmination «of what he had laboured since his 1946 Zurich speech»<sup>39</sup>. But, as it had happened on the occasion of the Schuman Plan, the British statesman expressed a critical judgement about the project of the *European Defense Community* meanwhile supported by the French Prime Minister René Pleven. On 15 August Churchill confided to Sandys that British people could not rely on «any kind of authority to make

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<sup>35</sup> See *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, 5th ser., vol. 476 (1950), cols. 1907-1922.

<sup>36</sup> Ivi, cols. 2141-2159.

<sup>37</sup> With regard to the speech of June 27<sup>th</sup>, 1950, see R.R. JAMES (edited by), *Winston Churchill. His Complete Speeches 1897-1963*, vol. VIII 1950-1963, New York-London, Chelsea House Publishers-Bowker Company, 1974, pp. 8013-8026 (for these two quotations, see p. 8018 and p. 8021).

<sup>38</sup> Ivi, p. 8069. As regard the Strasbourg speech, see also Churchill papers, 5/37, CAC, CC, Cambridge and W. CHURCHILL, *In the Balance, Speeches 1949 and 1950*, edited by R. Churchill, cit., pp. 347-352. The recording can be found in BBC Written Archive Centre, Library, n. 15815, Reading.

<sup>39</sup> “My dear Harry”, August 13<sup>th</sup> 1950, Churchill papers, 2/32, CAC, CC, Cambridge.

such a plan»<sup>40</sup>; a thesis confirmed two days later, when he declared to Macmillan that «the problems [concerning the common army] belonged to executive Governments»<sup>41</sup>. During the long and lively debate on *the European Defense Community* Churchill reaffirmed his negative judgment; on 10 September 1951, during a meeting in Paris with Paul Reynaud, Jean Monnet and the general Paul Stehlin (strict collaborator of René Pleven), the conservative leader defined the European Defence Community as «a sludgy amalgam» able to generate «an inefficient and ineffective force», owing to the lack of an effective team spirit deriving from the merging of national armies. On the contrary, Monnet stated that the European Defence Community could determine «a real and genuine growth of the European mentality»<sup>42</sup>. And the day after, in the presence of Dwight D. Eisenhower – at that time commander of the NATO forces in Europe –, Churchill declared that a European army, without national contingent, wouldn't have owned «a fighting spirit»<sup>43</sup>.

In the meantime, Alcide De Gasperi and Altiero Spinelli proposed to introduce the article 38 into the European Defence Community treaty; it foresaw the creation of a democratic over-national authority able to go beyond the contradictions of the functionalist method which predicted a European army without solving the problem of its political control. Churchill's opinions were not shared by De Gasperi, as underlined by his State Secretary Giulio Andreotti: «Concerning Churchill, [the Trentino statesman] considered him too attached to the old forms of nationalism and prestige of the “great England”, to be able to share or at least to welcome enthusiastically the importance of a federated Europe»<sup>44</sup>. When he returned to Downing Street, in October 1951, Churchill continued to criticise the functionalist method which had inspired the new European integration process. In a memorandum of the Ministerial cabinet dated 29 November he reaffirmed Great Britain's will not to become an «integral part» of the Europe of the Six, in order not to compromise its «insular character»<sup>45</sup>. This

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<sup>40</sup> “Telephone the following to Mr Sandys at Strasbourg”, August 15<sup>th</sup>, 1950, Churchill papers, 2/32, CAC, CC, Cambridge.

<sup>41</sup> *Letter of 17<sup>th</sup> August 1950*, in MACMILLAN, *Tides of Fortune 1945-1955*, cit., p. 219.

<sup>42</sup> “Programme, Monday 10<sup>th</sup> September”, British Embassy, Paris, 10 September, 1951, Churchill papers, 1/86, CAC, CC, Cambridge.

<sup>43</sup> “Mr Winston Churchill. Luncheon at the British Embassy (General Eisenhower and myself)”, September 11<sup>th</sup> 1951, Churchill papers, 2/221, CAC, CC, Cambridge.

<sup>44</sup> See G. ANDREOTTI, *De Gasperi e il suo tempo. Trento, Vienna, Roma*, Milano, Mondadori, 1956, p. 314 (translation from the Italian by Claudio Giulio Anta).

<sup>45</sup> Cabinet Memoranda, November 29<sup>th</sup>, 1951, CAB 129/48, Public Record Office (from now on PRO), London.

latter statement was confirmed the following month, when he agreed with the Minister of Foreign Affairs Antony Eden, that the United Kingdom would never join the project of the European Defence Community, due to its supranational characteristics<sup>46</sup>. Not by chance, after the failure of the European army project owing to the vote against of the French Parliament in August 1954, the British government proposed to widen the Brussels Pact to Italy and German Federal Republic through the establishment of the Western European Union; nevertheless it was an inter-government organization that left armies under the control of their national governments.

Churchill's considerations about the *European Economic Community* and *European Atomic Energy Community* were equally prudent; on 9 July 1957 in Westminster, few weeks after the signature of the Rome treaties and the birth of two new European Communities, he highlighted: «We all welcome the formation of a common market by the six nations, provided that it is a step towards the creation of a free trade area, to which the whole of free Europe will have access»<sup>47</sup>. He believed that a «free trade area» had a merely commercial aim, instead of constituting a fundamental application of the functionalist method. The successive governments headed by Eden and Macmillan tried to thwart the European common market with an alternative organization. In 1960 there was the establishment of the European Free Trade Association<sup>48</sup>; but at that time the commercial power of the United Kingdom was starting to decline. If in the postwar years the British governments had favoured the relationships with the Commonwealth, after the Suez crisis Great Britain realized that it was no longer a world power; therefore, in 1973 it joined the *European Economic Community* after a long and difficult negotiation concluded by the Edward Heath government.

In summary, Churchill's idea of European unity can be interpreted differently: a means to maintain his prestige on a world scale in the years when the Conservative Party was to the opposition, a way to outline – after the second world war – a new political balance among the Countries of Western Europe with the external support of Great Britain, an attempt to defend the status of world power of

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<sup>46</sup> Cabinet Conclusions, December 11<sup>th</sup>, 1951, CAB 128/23, PRO, London.

<sup>47</sup> See R.R. JAMES (edited by), *Winston Churchill. His Complete Speeches 1897-1963*, vol. VIII 1950-1963, cit., p. 8681. As regards the Westminster speech, see also Churchill papers, 5/61, CAC, CC, Cambridge and W. CHURCHILL, *The Unwritten Alliance. Speeches 1953 to 1959*, edited by R. Churchill, *op. cit.*, p. 300.

<sup>48</sup> In addition to Great Britain, the European Free Trade Association comprises Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Switzerland, Austria and Portugal.



the United Kingdom or the combinations of all these elements. These reflections aroused a lively debate during which the British historians supported two main theses. On one hand, Lord Max Beloff, Anthony Seldon, Clemens A. Wurm and John W. Young did not consider Churchill's opinions necessarily in contrast with the new European integration process; the British statesman thought that Great Britain hadn't lost any real opportunity to join the new European communities, because his Country had continued to claim its role of world power and favoured the relationships with Washington and the Commonwealth<sup>49</sup>. On the other hand, Robert Harrison and Nigel Ashford asserted that Churchill had sincerely advocated the progressive weakening of national sovereignties; after all the Franco-German reconciliation supported by him since the Zurich speech, represented also the inspiring principle of the Schuman Plan, namely a fundamental step of the functionalist method. In their opinion, he showed a prudent attitude towards the European integration, because he feared the missing support of the political class of his Country<sup>50</sup>.

I share the first thesis. Churchill's thought on the European unity put down deep roots in the historical tradition of the United Kingdom: just remember the metaphor of the «three circles» (United States, Commonwealth and Europe), the political strategy based on the “diversity” of a Country that intended to maintain the role of world power and to protect the «sovereign and inviolable» bonds with the States belonging to its empire, its «insular character», the will not to make «any transfer of sovereignty» to supranational institutions. If we consider his decision-making capacity and his charisma, the hypothesis according to which Churchill was “conditioned” by the British political class seems scarcely realistic. In short, the conservative leader inspired a sense of membership to Europe and he conferred a farsighted political value to his proposals, raising the attention of Europeanist movements and national governments. Besides it is worth reminding that The Hague Congress, promoted by Churchill, represented an important launching pad not only for the birth of the Council

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<sup>49</sup> See M. BELOFF, *Churchill and Europe*, in R. Blake, W. Roger Louis (edited by), *Churchill. A major Reassessment of his Life in Peace and War*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1993, p. 444 e pp. 453-455; A. SELDON, *Churchill's Indian Summer. The Conservative Government 1951-55*, London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1981, pp. 413-414; C.A WURM, *Great Britain. Political Parties and Pressure Groups*, in W. Lipgens, W. Loth (edited by), *Documents of the History of European Integration 1939-1950*, vol. III, Berlin New-York, Walter de Gruyter, 1989, pp. 634-635; J.W. YOUNG (edited by), *The Foreign Policy of Churchill's Peacetime Administration 1951-55*, Leicester, Leicester University Press, 1988, pp. 130-131; ID., *Britain and European Unity 1945-92*, London, Macmillan, 1993, pp. 37-40.

<sup>50</sup> R. HARRISON, *Winston Churchill and European Integration*, Ph. D., University of Aberdeen, 1985, pp. 346-358; N. ASHFORD, *The Conservative Party and European Integration 1945-1975*, Ph. D., University of Warwick, 1983.

of Europe but also for the creation of the *European Coal and Steel Community*. The British statesman demonstrated courage and daring, since he considered Germany on the same level as the other European countries; therefore, he did not hesitate to risk his own political credibility in the United Kingdom and on a world scale. Just few years before, in 1940, the *Luftwaffe* had bombed London and the *Wermacht* had occupied Paris by military force, but a new period of peace was beginning; Churchill did not hesitate to undertake this path of epochal importance for a continent tormented by long and bloody conflicts.



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