

The Idea of 'Europe' and the Origin of the European Union – A Sociological Approach

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Abstract: According to the scholarly literature on the origin of the European Union, EU traces its beginnings to events during the years just after World War II and possibly also to various economic and political events during the interwar period. But there also exist a number of works which are often ignored in the academic debate and which claim that the European community has a very much more distant past – often stretching as far back as the Middle Ages or even to Antiquity. These works, which have developed into a discourse of their own, look at the development of what they call “the European Idea” and how this has developed over the centuries. This article presents and analyzes the discourse on the European Idea, mainly with the help of Emile Durkheim’s notion of “collective representations”. It is argued that there exist interesting affinities between this discourse and the type of collective representations that Durkheim was very interested in towards the end of his life, namely community creating collective representations. The works on the European Idea, it is claimed, often exaggerate how far back one can trace the European community. They nonetheless have an important contribution to make to the standard literature on the origin of EU through their emphasis on the role of ideas, ideals and cultural symbols.

A united Europe is not a modern expedient, be it political or economic, but an ideal which has been accepted since thousands of years by the best spirits of Europe, namely those who can see into the future. Already Homer described Zeus as “*europos*” – an adjectiv meaning “one who sees very far”.

Denis de Rougemont,
Vingt-huit siècles d'Europe (1961)

It is usually claimed that the European Union (EU) traces its beginnings to the years just after World War II and possibly also to various political-economic developments during the interwar period.¹ A recent and very valuable contribution to the literature on this subject is, for example, *Coal, Steel and the Rebirth of Europe, 1945–1955* by John Gillingham, where it is argued that the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) represents a solution to the so-called Ruhr problem. But there also exists a number of works which are often

ignored in the academic debate and which claim that today’s EU has a much more distant origin, as illustrated by the quote at the beginning of this article. These works look at what they call “the European idea” and its development over the centuries. Often they claim that the idea of a European community goes as far back as the Middle Ages – and sometimes even to Antiquity. One thing that is interesting with this latter type of literature is that it focusses more or less exclusively on the impact of ideas, ideals and cultural symbols as opposed to the more hardnosed political and economic forces, which play a key role in the standard literature on the emergence of EU. In this article I shall first present the literature on the European idea and then try to determine to what extent works of this type can complement our understanding of the origin of EU. In assessing this type of discourse I shall primarily be relying on Emile Durkheim’s sociology, especially his theory of how a society is constituted via symbols or “collective representations”. I will in particular try to determine if the European idea itself can be understood as one of these community creating symbols (or collective representations) that Durkheim was so fascinated by.²

¹ This paper has been written with help from HSRF in Stockholm and Centre Culturel Suédois in Paris. For the idea that one may use Durkheim’s notion of collective representations when analyzing the European idea, I thank Cecilia Gil-Swedberg. I also would like to thank Jean-Baptiste Duroselle and François Fontaine for kindly answering my questions. – The standard works on the beginning of the European Union include Haas ([1958] 1968), Diebold (1959) and Milward (1984). – The quote at the beginning of this article comes from Rougemont ([1961] 1990: 8).

² The concept of collective representation can be found in Durkheim’s work from its very beginning. The two places where Durkheim deals the most extensively with this concept are, however, “Représentations individuelles et représentations collectives” (1898) and *Formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse* (1912). In the former of these Durkheim emphasizes the differences between individual or non-social representations, on

1. The Birth and Development of a New Discourse: Studies on the European Idea (1940s-)

The very first work on the European idea appeared in 1947 and was written by the Italian historian Federico Chabod (1947). Its title was "L'idea di Europa" and the article represented the author's installation lecture at the University of Rome. Chabod (1947: 3) said that when studying the European idea one has to begin by looking at "the origin of the concept of Europe". And to decide the time of "the birth of Europe", one would have to know when Europe became conscious of itself. What mattered was not so much Europe as a geographical concept – much more central were "the political Europe, the cultural and moral Europe". Of particular importance in tracing the history of the European idea, Chabod added, was to realize that a concept always emerges in opposition to some other concept. "The concept of Europe is formed by counterposition to all that is not Europe, and it acquires its characteristics...through a confrontation with what is not Europe" (Chabod 1947: 4). In his analysis of the idea of Europe Chabod began with Antiquity and continued till World War I. He paid particular attention to what he called "the European Republic of Letters", that is, thinkers such as Machiavelli, Montesquieu and Voltaire. This Republic of Letters constituted the essence of Europe to Chabod as well as his own, personal ideal.

the one hand, and social or collective representations, on the other hand. In *Formes élémentaires* Durkheim investigates what he sees as the very close connection between the emergence of collective representations in states of so-called "collective effervescence" and the creation of a new community. (See Durkheim 1974; [1912] 1965: 427–8, 475–6, 483, 493). The secondary literature on collective representations is relatively small. For a very interesting attempt to analyze the epistemological dimension of collective representations, see Mestrovic (1988); and for an equally interesting attempt to focus on the cultural-communal aspect of Durkheim's concept, see Alexander (1988). As the reader will see, this article emphasizes – like Durkheim in *Formes élémentaires* and Alexander in *Durkheimian Sociology* – the community aspect rather than the epistemological dimension of collective representations. – For another attempt to apply Durkheim's theory of collective representations to the birth of the European Union, see Swedberg (1994). The emphasis in this latter work is on the link between collective representations and the vision of a single individual; it also contains a discussion of how new ideals (or collective representations) may emerge in revolutions.

The notion that one could trace something called the European idea throughout history quickly caught on, and during the 1950s three major works in this genre were produced: Heinz Gollwitzer's *Europabild und Europagedanke* (1951), Denys Hay's *Europe: The Emergence of an Idea* (1957) and Carlo Curcio's *Europa, storia di un'idea* (1958).³ Gollwitzer, who was mainly interested in the development of the European idea in 18th and 19th century Germany, emphasized that writing about the European idea must not be confused with writing the history of Europe. For the former task it was necessary to focus on "perceptions of Europe as a family of nations, a cultural unity and a political community of fate" ("*Europabild*") and also on "specimen of European consciousness as a community as well as proposals for organizing this continent" ("*Europagedanke*"; Gollwitzer 1951a: 8). While Gollwitzer saw his analysis as a straightforward history of ideas, Hay tried to analyze the emergence of the notion of Europe with the help of what Marc Bloch has called "historical semantics".⁴ For all practical purposes, however, the analyses of Hay and Gollwitzer were quite similar in that both presented themselves as professional historians while emphasizing the importance of studying the European idea as a specific form of consciousness. The approach of Carlo Curcio in his enormous 2-volume work *Europa, storia di un'idea* is in contrast more idealistic. According to Curcio (1958: 5), "Europe is above all an idea" and it is extremely hard to isolate an idea of this type ("Can you weigh a soul?"). In order to get closer to the essence or to the vital core of the European idea, it was particularly important to look deeply into "the thoughts and colors with which it has been formulated".

During the 1960s the discourse on the European idea continued to be popular. Chabod expanded his essay into a book and both Gollwitzer and Hay revised and reissued their studies.⁵ A few new important works were also published, including Den-

³ Both Gollwitzer and Hay have summarized much of their arguments in articles. See Gollwitzer (1951b) and Hay (1957b). Other works on the European idea from the 1950s include Bonnefous (1950) and Fischer (1957).

⁴ Bloch defined this term (which he had found in Fustel de Coulanges) as the historical study of meanings. See Bloch [1949] 1953: 157–89.

⁵ See Chabod (1961). The new edition of Gollwitzer's study appeared in 1964 and that of Hay's work in 1968. Other works on the European idea from this decade include Vuyenne (1964) and Foerster (1963, 1967).

is de Rougemont's *Vingt-huit siècles d'Europe* (1961), Jean-Baptiste Duroselle's *L'idée d'Europe dans l'histoire* (1965) and Henri Brugmans' *L'idée européenne 1918–1965* (1965). Both Rougemont and Brugmans had been active in the movement to unite Europe and their works reflect this involvement very strongly. Brugmans (1970: 11) thus defined the European idea as "the grand stages of the European consciousness, its hopes and its deceptions, its advances as well as its dramatic setbacks". And Rougemont's statement that "We shall only find Europe in making it, as the myth of Cadmus teaches us" could stand as the motto for his book on the twenty-eight centuries of Europe (Rougemont [1961] 1990: 8). Duroselle's work, on the other hand, is considerably more academic in tone even though the author emphatically states that "Europe is a construction of the human spirit" (Duroselle 1965: 25). The main novelty in Duroselle's work is otherwise that the author pays very close attention not only to the idea of Europe throughout history but also to European history in general. While this could be seen as refuting Duroselle's own statement that he is not in principle interested in what "objectively" happened in Europe but only to "represent the subjective views of thinkers and politicians in each of Europe's epochs", the potential contradiction is resolved by the author's statement that the most important task is to analyze how prominent political actors have viewed "Europe" during different periods in history (Duroselle 1965: 21).

Since the late 1960s several new works have continued to appear that draw their inspiration from the European idea-approach. Among the most important of these are Walter Lipgens' *A History of European Integration 1945–1947* (1982), the same author's *Documents on the History of European Integration* (1985–1986) and Jean-Baptiste Duroselle's *Europe: A History of Its Peoples* (1990).⁶ Lipgens' work is devoted to the efforts to unite Europe during the period 1940–1950, which in his opinion had been neglected by historians. The most outstanding part of Lipgens' work is his attempt to trace the European idea in the Resistance groups during World War II and among the political emigres in England and the United States during the same period. The result of his effort to cover these topics were two huge volumes in the series *Documents on the History of European Integra-*

tion.⁷ Duroselle's *Europe* from 1990 represents a further step in the author's attempt to integrate an account of the discourse on the European idea with a more conventional approach to the history of Europe. While Duroselle's 1965 book had been totally dominated by the material on the European idea, much more room has been given to ordinary material on Europe's history in *Europe*. Duroselle's latest work, it may be added, is also remarkable in that it was published in a lavish, textbook-like edition which appeared simultaneously in eight European languages. The extraordinary promotion of this book was made possible by the generous assistance of Frederic Delouche, a banker interested in the European idea. *Europe* has also received moral support from the Commission of the European Union, including its President Jacques Delors. That some of the key people in the European Union have been interested in associating themselves with the European idea is also clear from the fact that Jean Monnet wrote the preface to Duroselle's *L'idée d'Europe dans l'histoire* and Jacques Delors the preface to a recent reedition of Denis de Rougemont's *Vingt-huit siècles d'Europe*.

2. Main Themes in the Discourse on the European Idea

The discourse on the European idea differs on several scores from the accounts that one can find in ordinary historical works on the origin of the European Union, as mentioned in the introduction. While the latter, for example, tend to date the origin of the European Union to some time between 1920 and the 1940s, the writers on the European idea go very much further back in time. The title to Rougemont's book – *Vingt-huit siècles d'Europe* – gives an indication of the difference involved. There is also the fact that the more conventional histories of the European Community tend to focus on a rather narrow range of actors in the founding of the European Community – basically on politicians and leaders of various interest groups. Those who write in the tradition of the Eu-

⁷ Lipgens also had plans to edit two further volumes on the 1940–1950 period. Due to his premature death in April 1984, however, these two volumes have appeared under the editorship of Wilfried Loth: "The Struggle for European Union by Political Parties and Pressure Groups in Western European Countries 1945–1950" (vol. 3, 1988) and "Transnational Organizations of Political Parties and Pressure Groups in the Struggle for European Union, 1945–1950" (vol. 4, 1991).

⁶ A mention should also be made of Pegg (1983) and Nelson, Roberts and Veit (1992).

European idea, on the other hand, pay attention to a much broader set of actors, including poets, philosophers and artists – in brief, to anyone who has tried to express what “Europe” is, what it could be, and what it should be. Related to this is also the fact that the proponents of the European idea have a very different concept of what it means to create a European community than mainstream writers on EU. While the latter see this as a mainly a *political* task, it is perceived in a totally different way by the former. The writers on the European idea argue that the most important thing is to develop a *European consciousness* and to anchor this in appropriate institutions – something which necessitates a vision of what such a European community may look like so that people can be energized into action.

Even though there exist considerable differences between the various works on the European idea, it is still possible to construct an ideal-typical picture of the discourse they all are part of. In this kind of discourse one basically follows the different incarnations of something called the European idea, from Antiquity to the European Union of today. The European idea is typically defined as the consciousness of Europe that existed at some particular point in history. This consciousness has strong idealistic overtones and it is clear that the European idea cannot be fully realized by a dictator or in an oppressive Europe. The literature on the European idea usually discusses some or all of its dozen or so incarnations. These different concepts of Europe are, in all brevity the following:

(1) Europe as a word with a distinct etymology; (2) Europe as a geographical concept; (3) Europe as a concept in mythology; (4) Europe in the thought of Medieval Christianity; (5) Charlemagne as the Father of Europe; (6) Europe in the peace plans of the 17th and 18th century; (7) Cosmopolitan Europe; (8) Napoleon's attempt to unify Europe; (9) The Concert of Europe; (10) Europe and Nationalism (“The United States of Europe”); (11) Movements for a united Europe during the interwar period; (12) Hitler's New Europe; (13) The plans for a federal Europe in the resistance movements during World War II; (14) The revived European movement after World War II; (15) The creation of the European Union (the European Coal and Steel Community, Euratom, The European Common Market, the European Union). (See Table 1 for more information).

Readers of a list of definitions of this type may easily feel dizzy, and one is reminded of an ironic passage in one of Borges' writings where he quotes a “certain Chinese encyclopaedia” according to which “animals” are: “(a) belonging to the Emper-

or, (b) embalmed, (c) tame, (d) sucking pigs, (e) sirens, (f) fabulous, (g) stray dogs, (h) included in the present classification, (i) frenzied, (j) innumerable, (k) drawn with a fine camelhair brush, (l) *et cetera*, (m) having just broken the water pitcher, (n) that from a long way off look like flies” (Foucault 1970: xv). There does, however, exist a certain logic to the discourse on the European idea, and it is also clear that it contains a wealth of information about the concept of Europe, which otherwise would have remained unknown. Anyone familiar with the fine scholarship of people like Jean-Baptiste Duroselle, Denys Hay and Walter Lipgens also know that contemporary European historiography has become enriched by their works on the European idea.

3. The European Idea as a Collective Representation

If we now return to the problematique that was introduced at the beginning of this article – the origin of the European Union – what answer do we then find in the works on the European idea? The most obvious one is that the roots of the European community stretch very deep into the past, well beyond the common dating of the first institutions of EU. It should also be noted that there exist differences between the answers that can be found in the various works on the European idea. According to Carlo Curcio in *Europa, storia di un'idea*, for example, there was a sense of Europe as a community already in Antiquity. Rougemont sees the empire of the Franks in the 8th century as decisive in this context, while Duroselle sees the birth of Europe as occurring some time in the 17th century when the universalism of Christianity was replaced by the self-consciousness of the European nation states. Still, the origin does go centuries back in time, according to all the works on the European idea. This type of literature also insists on the relevance of a very broad range of material, including the Greek myths, peace plans from the Middle Ages, the writings by Voltaire and Montesquieu, and so on.

There also exist, however, certain qualities to the literature on the European idea which makes it difficult to accept its findings at face value. Some of this literature is, for example, based on rather dubious historical research. This is something that Geoffrey Barraclough (1963) has emphasized and which also Denys Hay addressed very early:

Table 1: The Different Meanings of „Europe“ in the Discourse on the European Idea

- (1) **Europe as a word with a distinct etymology**
Though the original meaning of the word „Europe“ is not clear, it is often thought that it comes from the Greek words „euros“ (meaning „broad“) and „opsis“ or „optikos“ (meaning „eye“, „sight“ or „face“).
- (2) **Europe as a geographical concept**
In Antiquity, „Europe“ was mainly used as a geographical concept. According to the Greeks, the world consisted of Europe, Asia and Libya (later called Africa).
- (3) **Europe as a concept in mythology**
According to Hesiod, Europe was a beautiful princess who Zeus took a fancy to. In the shape of a bull, he lured Europe away to Crete („Europe and the Bull“).
- (4) **Europe in the thought of Medieval Christianity**
During the Middle Ages the two concepts of Christianity and Europe started to merge. In the 1600s the terms were often used interchangeably.
- (5) **Charlemagne as the Father of Europe**
Charlemagne's empire in the 8th and 9th century is seen as an early incarnation of a united Europe. The famous epitaph that a court poet bestowed on Charlemagne („Rex pater Europae“) is often approvingly cited.
- (6) **Europe in the peace plans of the 17th and 18th century**
The famous peace plans by such people as Henry IV (Sully), Abbé de Saint-Pierre and William Penn are seen as early attempts to unify Europe.
- (7) **Cosmopolitan Europe**
Cosmopolitanism is seen as associated with **les philosophes**, especially Voltaire („I see with joy that an immense republic of cultivated minds is being formed in today's Europe“).
- (8) **Napoleon's attempt to unify Europe**
Some people argue that Napoleon's real aim was to unify Europe – including Metternich according to whom Napoleon wanted to create an empire like that of Charlemagne.
- (9) **The Concert of Europe**
Some of the statesmen who met in the Congress of Vienna in 1814–1815 were positive to some kind of united Europe, such as Castlereigh who spoke of the need to create a European Commonwealth.
- (10) **Europe and Nationalism („The United States of Europe“)**
While the rise of nationalism threatened the ideal of a united Europe, some literary figures (e.g. Victor Hugo) tried to fuse nationalism and Europeanism („The United States of Europe“)
- (11) **Movements for a united Europe during the interwar period**
The interwar period was very difficult for the European ideal. Nonetheless, there were some attempts to unite Europe, such as those by Aristide Briand and Count Coudenhove-Kalergi.
- (12) **Hitler's New Europe**
In the early 1940s the Nazis started to use the notion of „Europe“ as part of their anti-Bolshevik propaganda. Hitler, however, said that what matters is blood, not if one is born in Europe.
- (13) **The plans for a federal Europe in the resistance movements during World War II**
In practically all of continental Europe the resistance movements had a united Europe as their ideal. At a conference in Switzerland in 1944 the unification of Europe was discussed.
- (14) **The revived European movement after World War II**
There existed strong sentiments for a united Europe during the years just after World War II. High points include Churchill's plea for a United Europe in 1946 and the founding of the Council of Europe in 1949.
- (15) **The creation of the European Union (the European Coal and Steel Community, Euratom, The European Common Market, the Single Market, the European Union)**
In 1950–1951 Jean Monnet began the creation of today's European Union by helping to form the European Coal and Steel Community. Despite various ups and downs during the years after the early 1950s, the European Union has continued to advance.

Sources: Brugmans (1970), Chabod (1947, 1961), Curcio (1958), Duroselle (1965, 1990), Foerster (1963), Gollwitzer (1951a), Hay (1957a), Lipgens (1982, 1985–86), Rougemont ([1961] 1990, Vuyenne (1964).

There seem to be a number of new myths in the making in the 'European idea' books which have recently appeared. Their authors are concerned to promote European unity; they try to do this by invoking great generalizations about the past. (Hay 1957: xvii).

There is also the fact that the typical work on the European idea is structured in a rather peculiar manner. Different interpretations of "Europe" are removed from their original contexts, and then presented one after the other in a way that often gives a strange rhythm to these works. The reader is forced to wrestle with the problem of how to make sense of something that makes its first historical appearance as a Greek myth, then becomes a geographical concept, a Frankish empire and so on.

One also wonders whether the word "Europe" is not treated a bit like a fetish in the literature on the European idea – or as a flag, to use Curcio's apt formulation (Curcio 1958: 1).⁸ Everything that has ever been called "Europe" is thus presented in enormous detail, while little or no effort is made to discuss those phenomena that may very well be part of "Europe" but which happen to be called something else. There is finally also a strong link to activism and idealism in this type of literature, often leading to a mixture of values and facts. "A united Europe", to cite Rougemont ([1961]1990: 8), "is [...] an ideal which has been accepted since thousands of years by the best spirits of Europe".⁹

But many of these "drawbacks" to the discourse on the European Idea take on another meaning if they are analyzed with the help of Durkheim's theory of community creating symbols. These collective representations usually display, for example, a mixture of values and facts since their main function is to create a society by energizing people into action. The motto of one of the works on the European Idea captures the purpose of this mixture per-

fectly: "The truth shall set you free" (Albonetti 1963).

The European idea literature typically also contains appeals to higher moral values and it displays a strong aversion to utilitarian concerns – two attitudes that are fundamental to the construction of a new community, according to Durkheim. A society can only be constructed on a foundation of morality and non-individualistic values, in the French sociologist's opinion. The obsession with finding and citing passages which contain the word "Europe", also has an explanation from a Durkheimian perspective: the symbol of "Europe" is used as a *totem*. A totem, Durkheim says, is not only a symbol of something that is holy to the believer, but it is part of this holy itself. Consequently it has to be located and safeguarded, wherever it may be.

Durkheim's approach may be of help in explaining why the discourse on European Idea is structured in such a peculiar way, with section after section on the various incarnations of "Europe". Could it not be that a reason for this is that *strength* is gathered among those interested in European unity when they read about earlier attempts to create a European community – similar to the way that "the believer is a man who is *stronger*" (Durkheim [1912] 1965: 464)? Durkheim also describes collective representations in terms of "energy" and "electricity": they are as if charged with currency and they attract one another. In the works on the European Idea the word "Europe" positively seems to glow with energy. The different "Europes" are strung along, one after the other, in such a way that the whole effect becomes a little bit like when several lamps are placed next to one another: festive and celebratory.

4. The European Idea and Collective Effervescence

Durkheim's theory of collective representations is also of value in that it points us in novel directions when looking for the origins of the European Union. What we have in mind is especially Durkheim's notion that collective representations, which are involved in the creation of a community, are born at particularly intense moments in history which are characterized by so-called "*collective effervescence*". Where, then, does this theory lead us in relation to the literature on the European idea? For a start, we know that the European idea literature came into being something like during the

⁸ See also Hay (1957a: xiii): "The name [of Europe] was then to grow into a symbol [and like] the faith...capable of attracting loyalties and hatreds, missionaries and martyrs".

⁹ Even Duroselle, who usually presents himself as a professional historian rather than as an activist, is quick to point out in *L'idée d'Europe dans l'histoire* that "if I write this book it is because there exists today a burning and passionate problem of European unity" (Duroselle 1965: 19). In the epilogue to *Europe*, co-written with Frederic Delouche, Duroselle (1990: 413) writes: "the only remedy [to Europe's problems] is to build a Europe which at first will be confederal and later federal".

years 1943–1951.¹⁰ Durkheim thus invites us to view this period – World War II and its immediate aftermath – in terms of collective effervescence.

World War II clearly gave a “collective shock“ to Europe, to use one of Durkheim’s terms for collective effervescence (Durkheim [1912] 1965: 241). The destruction and collective suffering that took place in Europe from the 1940s and onwards was enormous and profoundly unsettling: whole populations were exterminated, societies were dismembered, and new brutal regimes were imposed in many countries. That a new political ideal, such as that of a united Europe, was to be born in opposition to the Nazis’ glorification of the national state is perhaps not so peculiar.¹¹ The resistance movements with their notion of a federal Europe actually appear more or less simultaneously with the first works on the European idea, namely in the early 1940s. Lippens (1985: 15), for example, dates the emergence of the first resistance groups of importance in Europe to 1942. The ideals of the resistance movements also display that moral purity and aversion to utilitarian concerns which is so typical of community creating collective representations, according to Durkheim. Lippens describes, for example, the goals of the resistance movements in the following way:

the arguments of the resistance differed from those of most of the individuals who, between the wars or in exile from Hitler’s Europe, had pleaded or were still pleading for the unification of the continent on rational, geopolitical or economic grounds. The resistance writers did not want the kind of association of European states which would accommodate the latter’s economic and political ex-

pansion while ‘limiting’ their sovereignty as cautiously as possible. On the contrary, they wanted firmly to restrict sovereignty as such by means of a federation which would destroy the foundation of the state’s claim to absolute authority. (Lippens 1985: 18–19)

The immediate postwar period did not initially lead to any attempts to construct a united Europe. Instead all energy was concentrated on reconstructing the nation states in the various countries which had been occupied by the Nazis. This policy was supported by the United States which discouraged all attempts to unite Europe, in accordance with its 1943 agreement with the Soviet Union (in exchange for which the United States had received Stalin’s promise of support for its plans for the United Nations). But there is also the important fact that the resistance movements themselves did not advance any plans for how to unite Europe immediately after the war. Henri Brugmans (1970: 102–103) points out that in the political parties, which grew out of the resistance movements in Europe just after World War II, it was felt that national reconstruction represented the most urgent task.

By early 1946 it was as if there never had existed any plans for a federal Europe, Brugsman (1970: 105) notes. This, of course, did not mean that the ideals of a united Europe, which had emerged during World War II, had suddenly disappeared. On the contrary, opinion polls from 1945–1950 show that an absolute majority supported some form of a United States of Europe during the post-war period (Vilemeier 1991: 581). And all that was needed for this opinion to become visible again was that someone so-to-speak tapped into this consciousness and gave it a political expression. As things turned out, this someone happened to be Churchill, and his historic speech in favor of a United States of Europe at the University of Zurich in September 1946 galvanized the whole pro-European movement into action. Alluding to the fact that the relationship between the United States and the Soviet Union was rapidly deteriorating, Churchill emphasized:

Time may be short. At present there is breathing-space. The cannons have ceased firing. The fighting has stopped; but the dangers have not stopped. If we are to form the United States of Europe or whatever name or form it may take, we must start now. (Churchill 1948: 201)

In direct response to the electrifying speech by Churchill, several important organizations for a united Europe were formed in 1947 and Coudenhove-Kalergi revived his Pan-European Union. The United States also changed its policy towards European integration in 1947, now argu-

¹⁰ Federico Chabod – who is generally seen as being the initiator of this type of literature – held his first lectures on the European idea in 1943. Independently of Chabod, Heinz Gollwitzer began to work on what was to become *Europabild und Europagedanke* in 1944. For information on Chabod and Gollwitzer, see the preface to Sestan and Saitta (1963) and the preface to the first edition of Heinz Gollwitzer, *Europabild und Europagedanke*. – As to the question whether there did not exist writings on the European idea before Chabod, let it suffice to cite Denys Hay: “The ‘European idea’ was, of course, not entirely neglected by statesmen and their sympathisers before [World War II]. But the tone of such formal discussion as took place was very different from those held after 1945“ (Hay 1957a: xiv).

¹¹ Other ideals that emerged during the last part or just after World War II include the notion of a world government, a new economic world order and of truly democratic nation states. These resulted in the formation of the United Nations, the Bretton Woods institutions and in many new national constitutions.

ing that some kind of cooperation between the individual countries in Europe was desirable (e.g. Hogan 1984, Kindleberger [1947] 1984).¹² A strong wave of enthusiasm for a united Europe was clearly mounting and the whole thing culminated in a congress at the Hague in May 1948. This meeting was to become extremely important for the unification of Europe, and according to Jacques Delors (1992: 9), "the congress at the Hague in May 1948 set off that whole process [of constructing a European Union] that is still occupying us today". For this reason and also because it represents such a pure case of collective effervescence, we shall present the congress at the Hague in some detail.¹³

The historical meeting at the Hague opened on May 7, 1948 and was to last for four hectic days. The core participants consisted of some 800 prominent politicians, including Churchill, Adenauer, Mitterand and Macmillan. All in all about 7,000 people attended. The atmosphere was immediately so heavy with emotions and enthusiasm that Rougemont, who was one of the speakers, felt that the whole thing was more like a dream than an ordinary congress. Describing the initial meeting in the magnificent *Ridderzaal*, where usually the Dutch parliament convened, his thoughts began to swirl: "Where am I? In what epoch? In a dream?...Someone speaks in front of a microphone and I hear a voice saying... 'We must here and now resolve that a European Assembly be constituted'...Yes, it is a dream" (Rougemont in Brugsman 1970: 135; cf. Rougemont 1966–67). Also other people who were present describe the high emotional level at the meeting. Churchill had tears in his eyes when he spoke. There was a "climate of enthusiasm and fervor", Brugsman (1970: 134) says; and "for a time, anything and everything seemed possible", according to the usually so sober Duroselle (1990: 384). The meeting reached its climax in the dramatic closing session. "The final session ended in a unanimous *élan*", Brugsman (1970: 134) says, "and a terrible thunderstorm drowned

the voices of the speakers, even that of Churchill".

Many resolutions were taken at the Hague meeting, including one that demanded the convening of a European Assembly. But as was pointed out by one of the participants, the resolutions were not as important as the tremendous sense of enthusiasm that existed at the meeting.¹⁴ This enthusiasm continued unabated during the rest of 1948 and probably inspired the important decision by the French government, a few weeks later in July, to support the creation of a European Assembly. "This is a moment in history, which is perhaps unique – when it is possible to unite Europe", said the French Minister of Foreign Affairs Georges Bidault (Duroselle 1986: 15). In Duroselle's opinion, the decision in July 1948 by the French government truly represented a historic moment and was crucial to the future history of the European Union. About a year later the Council of Europe was created and Europe now got its Parliamentary Assembly. A real step towards the unification of Europe had been taken – or so it seemed.

But as we know, the Council of Europe immediately got bogged down in trivial details while the important decisions were vetoed by England and other countries (e.g. Milward 1984: 393, Duroselle 1990: 394). After a promising beginning the whole movement for a united Europe now came to a standstill. Why the momentum was suddenly lost, once the Council of Europe had been created, has been explained in different ways: England had only allowed the creation of the Council for Machiavellian reasons and it was now time to stop the game; the rules of procedure at the Council forbid majority decisions; and the traditional politicians had soon outwitted the European activists. What happened after the Council came to a standstill is also well known. By operating behind the scenes Jean Monnet succeeded in launching the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) in 1950–1951. This event took place far away from the noisy Council and the effervescence at the meeting at the Hague. Indeed, Monnet himself had only contempt for the inefficient Council of Europe and he had deliberately stayed away from the Hague (Monnet 1978: 281–82, 495).

¹² According to Kindleberger, there was a change of mind which preceded the change of course in U.S. policy towards Europe in 1947. We are, for example, told that "in early 1946 Walt Rostow had a revelation that the unity of Germany could not be achieved without the unity of Europe" (Kindleberger [1947] 1984: 115).

¹³ In doing this we shall draw on the works by Jean-Baptiste Duroselle, Henri Brugsman and Denis de Rougemont. The two latter, it may be added, were present at the meeting.

¹⁴ "The essential was not in the texts that were approved at the meeting. It was in the esprit, in the atmosphere at 'this historic gathering', as Churchill put it" (Brugsman 1970: 134).

5. Concluding Remarks

It is clear that Jean Monnet's plan consisted of a fairly narrow, economic agreement on how to coordinate the French and German coal and steel industries; and that, as such, it could hardly arouse very much enthusiasm and usher in a new community. But as many historians have noted, the European Coal and Steel Community was immediately surrounded as if by magic – the magic of "Europe" – and ECSC did become the starting point for today's European Union:

At the very moment of its announcement the Schuman Plan proposal [which was to lead to the formation of ECSC and which had been inspired by Monnet] became an established part of the context of events, a force for change, and a myth: The word "Europe" would never be spoken in quite the same way again. The power of the message impressed even skeptics at the time and has since made it difficult to disentangle the realities of the coal-steel negotiations from the aura enveloping them. (Gillingham 1984: 231; cf. Milward 1984: 237).

From a Durkheimian viewpoint, it seems that the pragmatically oriented Monnet had somehow succeeded in tapping into the enthusiasm that already existed for Europe and let it infuse his own plan (cf. Milward 1984: 397).¹⁵ Insofar as our central query is concerned – how far back does the history of EU reach? – we would then end up with the following answer: the European Union has its roots in the post-World War II period, as mainstream historiography suggests. The European Coal and Steel Community was founded in 1950–1951 for a number of economic and political reasons having to do with the *Realpolitik* of the time, as e.g. Milward (1984) and Gillingham (1991) have shown – but it also drew inspiration and strength from the collective effervescence that grew out of World War II and which came to such an intense expression at the congress in the Hague in May 1948. While the literature on the European Idea may not be ultimately convincing in its claim that the European Union has indeed its origin in the very distant past, it does prove one very important point: that our knowledge about the birth of major social institutions – such as the European Union – can be *complemented* and *enriched* by insights into the role that ideas, ideals and cultural symbols do play in history.

¹⁵ "Much of the emotion which was so quickly attached to [the Schuman Plan] was attracted because it seemed to offer some prospect of European unity and peace at the very moment when those ideals seemed no longer to have any political force" (Milward 1984: 397).

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