

The European idea

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The ideal of European unity, which had already been popularised by certain elite circles during the inter-war period, spread rapidly just after the Second World War. Thousands of young people dreamed of a united Europe, sometimes even of a unified and peaceful world. While reconstruction was an immediate priority in the post-war period, many people advocated the creation of an autonomous European entity. In order to avoid the world being divided into two antagonistic blocs and to prevent the inevitably ensuing war, it seemed essential to establish a third European pole. In this context, voices were heard calling for Western countries to adopt a neutral stance in the face of American materialism and Soviet totalitarianism. However, non-alignment, which became increasingly difficult to implement as the Cold War intensified, was soon defended only by the pacifist and internationalist movements. These groups were fully behind the *Stockholm Appeal*, which the World Peace Council launched in March 1950 to demand a total worldwide ban on nuclear weapons.

With regard to the form of and procedures for European unification, ideas often diverged according to political and ideological affiliation. While some favoured a federation led by a federal authority — or even a European government — others preferred a simple association of sovereign States. In 1946, various supporters of European federal unity, who were conscious of the need to promote the European ideal in the political world and before the general public, founded the Union of European Federalists (UEF), bringing together some 50 federalist movements. Many international congresses were also organised in order to bring this idea to fruition.

Within national parliaments, particularly those of the Netherlands, Belgium, France and Italy, the number of supporters of federalism was progressively increasing. In 1947, Richard Coudenhove-Kalergi, founder of the Paneuropean Union in the early 1920s, decided to unite these Members of Parliament in the European Parliamentary Union (EPU). Being organised more efficiently, they could now bring pressure to bear on national governments.