

'The basic issue remains' from Esprit (November 1948)

Caption: In November 1948, the French periodical Esprit publishes an article by Henri Brugmans, President of the Union of European Federalists (UEF), in which he explains the reasons that have led him to take the federalist route towards European unity.

Source: Esprit. dir. de publ. Mounier, Emmanuel. Novembre 1948, n° 150; 17e année. Fontenay-aux-Roses: Imprimerie Bellemand. "Toujours la question préalable", auteur:Brugmans, Henri , p. 624-625.

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The basic issue remains

Immediately after the war, we campaigned for the renewal of our national life. We dreamed of great new political formations capable of refocusing the energies awoken by the Resistance. In Holland, for example, individualism appeared to be the way forward for all those seeking a fruitful compromise between the traditional and the revolutionary. We were driven by a common will, and we had a common manifesto. Our movement came to power along with the Schermerhorn Government.

The failure was total, but why? Was it on because of our personal inadequacies? In part, perhaps, it was. Basically, however, just as new wine should always be put into a fresh bottle, we were ultimately forced to accept the fact that *national structures have been overtaken by history and can no longer bring about real renewal, that every aspect of the old-fashioned organisation of the nation state is inevitably based on outmoded structures and obsolete policies and that, consequently, any revolutionary efforts made within this framework are, from the outset, bound to end in failure.*

On the other hand, the real problems of our age — those of rational economic organisation and security — are essentially global problems. It is absurd to tackle such problems with inadequate political tools such as those of the national political parties. The hope that French diplomacy can mediate between the two world powers is futile. Czechoslovakia, prior to the coup, harboured vain illusions that it could ‘build a bridge between East and West’. No individual European power is able to put forward reasonable solutions for the salvation of its people any longer. Europe must establish unity if it is to find its way back onto the global stage.

What is the point, then, of criticising political parties or national governments, creating yet more ‘fronts’, ‘groupings’ or ‘forces’ in our respective countries? And what is the point of dwelling on individual rivalries, when no one has yet faced up to the basic issue — the federation of Europe?

I am well aware that federalism is far more than just a way of hitting out at national sovereignty. It is a complete set of beliefs, born out of the philosophy of individualism and attempting to bring about a particular concept of man and society. Not only do I accept that, but I am also well aware that a European Federation will not solve every problem. I would even go so far as to admit that it will create new problems, and big ones at that. We should certainly keep that firmly in mind so as not to be caught off guard. However, in today’s Europe, brutally truncated and torn apart by nationalism, all such thoughts are likely to remain hypothetical or, at best, remain in their infancy.

So, why am I a supporter of European federalism? Because I want to help put in place a political system responsive to the future needs of the individual.