

1945–1949 The pioneering phase

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At the end of the Second World War, Europe was totally drained of vitality and exhausted. Age-old trade links had been cut off, and any heavy industry or vital manufacturing sector that had not been destroyed was operating below capacity in a Europe that lay bloodied and ill-prepared to deal with the millions of people made homeless both during and after the war. The continent was now relegated to playing second fiddle on the international stage owing to the increased might of the United States and the Soviet Union and the growing rivalry between those two countries. In this context, a divided Western Europe quickly realised that the path to its survival lay in pooling its economic resources and establishing effective, common institutions, where necessary with US financial, technical and military support. They were times of great political instability accompanied by heightened social tensions, and innovative diplomatic solutions were urgently needed, even at regional level. The debate on the status of Germany, where, from 1961, the division of Berlin was the symbol in Europe of the Cold War between the two Great Powers, together with the inexorable demise of colonial rule made the continent's dependence on external aid all the more striking. It was at this point that pro-European movements and supporters of federalism moved into action and vigorously promoted the idea of European unification. Closely associated with financial circles and demonstrating allegiance to a particular political tendency or, on the contrary, seeking to mobilise the general public, these movements, some of which originated in the Resistance, established in 1947 an International Committee of the Movements for European Unity. In May 1948, they also convened the Hague Congress, from which emerged the European Movement (EM), founded in Brussels on 25 October 1948.