

Federalism

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“DIE WELT WAR MEINE GEMEINDE”

Willem A. Visser 't Hooft

**A Theologian for Europe between
Ecumenism and Federalism**

Preface by Hans Küng

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Introduction

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Ecumenism and Federalism: a Historical Convergence

A great Alsatian scholar and prominent interpreter of the Bible, Oscar Cullmann, wrote that “the objective of every form of ecumenism is unity, more or less,” but he also warned that confusing unity with uniformity meant “simplifying the fundamental need of ecumenism.” He claimed that “the *Una Sancta* is not *uniformitas sancta*. To avoid this confusion – Cullmann explained – it should be clarified that unity is unity in diversity. In turn, diversity can then be simplified in terms of inconsistent plurality, which leads to dispersion, to separation. In that case, diversity must be specified as diversity in unity.” The two terms: unity and diversity, the Lutheran theologian concluded, “must be taken very seriously. [...] The objective to which I aspire, which should not be provisional but permanent, is a unity in which each Church retains its own precious and inalienable features as well as its own structure. In the absence of a better term, I called it a ‘federation’.”¹ Cullman’s proposed federation of the various Christian denominations in the hope that Christians would restore unity in the Spirit and life of the Church, ideally goes hand in hand with the old Kantian project of a federation of free states², aimed at achieving the political unity of the peoples of Europe, without diminishing their historical, cultural and religious differences. This means a federation with the aim of promoting that “perpetual peace” which is able to work towards the prosperity and happiness of its citizens, while preserving the many different cultures, traditions and languages that have always characterised the countries on the old continent.

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¹ Cullmann O., “L’ecumenismo dell’unità nella diversità secondo il Nuovo Testamento”, in *Protestantesimo*, a. XL, No. 3 (1985), pp. 129-130. In addition, Cullmann O., *L’unità attraverso la diversità. Il suo fondamento e il problema della sua realizzazione*, Brescia, Queriniana, 1987.

² Kant I., *Scritti di storia, politica e diritto*, Bari, Laterza, 2002, pp. 163-207. Regarding Kant and his federal thought, see in the same series Castaldi R. (ed.), *Immanuel Kant and Alexander Hamilton, the Founders of Federalism. A Political Theory for Our Time*, Brussels, Peter Lang, 2013.

Like Cullmann, the founding fathers of the first European Community – which laid the foundations of continental peace and reconstruction at the end of the Second World War – Robert Schuman, Konrad Adenauer and Alcide De Gasperi, were naturally inclined to strive to overcome the linguistic, cultural and hence political borders and, albeit politicians and not theologians, were equally inspired by cosmopolitical values as well as Christian faith and beliefs. They paved the way for the political choices that triggered the integration and unification process of the European continent and resulted in the creation of the European Union at the end of the “Short Twentieth Century” and the proclamation of the motto “unity in diversity”, which is strikingly similar to the spirit that has driven ecumenism and can now be identified as a common sign and path of suffering and redemption of the European (secular and religious) consciousness of the last century.

It is no coincidence that another great protagonist of recent European history, Jacques Delors, deeply rooted in his Christian values, recalled that “les origines mêmes, les racines de notre réflexion politique sur le fédéralisme, la subsidiarité et la démocratie ont [...] de forts ancrages dans la pensée chrétienne et oecuménique”. These words clearly reflect the deep bond between Christian tradition and culture and federalist thought and federalism, regarded as a philosophy and politico-institutional theory of the modern State. In fact, as Delors explained, “chaque groupe chrétien” gave “un apport décisif indispensable et spécifique dans l’élaboration de ces concepts fondamentaux à travers la rationalisation du droit naturel, qui a permis de dégager des principes communs métapositifs à la théorie de l’organisation politique contemporaine.”³

Despite this unquestionable mixing, European federalism still remains a well-defined political theory that, thanks to Altiero Spinelli and Ernesto Rossi’s clear reflections, evolved into a political programme in the Ventotene Manifesto, which undertook to demonstrate the possibility of transforming the utopian ideal of peace in a rational and concrete project⁴.

By starting from these assumptions and equating federalism with ecumenism, historicising the time of their convergence in terms of ideals and at the political level within the context of the Second World War and the activities of the Ecumenical Movement, this collection of essays is

³ Delors J., “Message au Congrès”, in Citterio F. and Vaccaro L. (eds.), *Quale federalismo per quale Europa? Il contributo della tradizione cristiana*, Brescia, Morcelliana, 1996, p. 34.

⁴ Cf. Spinelli A. and Rossi E., *Il Manifesto per un’Europa libera e unita*, (preface by Eugenio Coloni), now known as *Ventotene Manifesto*, Milano, Mondadori, 2006. On the subject, Morelli U. (ed.), *Altiero Spinelli: il pensiero e l’azione per la federazione europea*, Torino, Giuffrè Editore, 2010.

meant to provide a broader definition of the European Resistance concept, which paves the way for the new historiographical perspectives that will be mentioned in the second part of this introduction⁵. To introduce the subject and content of this collection, it suffices to remind readers that by the late 1930s in Geneva the ecumenical prospects of the Orthodox and protestant world had already gravitated around Dutch Reformed Pastor Willem A. Visser 't Hooft, Secretary of the Provisional Committee of the World Council of Churches (WCC) from 1937 to 1948 (and later Secretary of the WCC from 1948 to 1966) as well as one of the most emblematic personalities of 19th century ecumenism, and closely intertwined with the Europeanist and federalist prospects of Anglo-Saxon world of political and religious culture as well as of anti-Fascist circles throughout Europe.

In the first part of this collection which outlines the religious, cultural and political debate on Europe between the two world wars, it is clear from the outset that both at the religious and the historical-political level the premises and objectives of the supporters of ecumenism and Europeanism and federalism converged regarding the analysis of international relations. In addition to the Phariseism of the Churches, deplored by the Ecumenical Movement, the supporters of a unified and supranational (federalist) vision of Europe criticised nationalism condemning the suppression of the individual in terms of identity and reasserting, in spite of the absolute and all-encompassing demands of the nation-state, the Kantian principle of man as an end (Morelli, Malandrino). Ecumenism was expressed with equal consistency through a Christocentric vision that transcended religious divisions in order to affirm the unity of believers (Ricca) and refuted, using Barth's theology, the rationalisation of God, that national Churches (not confessing Churches) had gone astray and, even worse, that religion was being idealistically reduced to an instrument of secular ideologies (Miegge).

For the sake of clarity, three introductory essays precede this first part, providing the readers not only with a remarkable biographical and intellectual profile of Visser 't Hooft (Giampiccoli), but also with the conceptual tools to outline federalism in philosophical-(cosmo)political (Henry) and theoretical-political (Levi) terms, launching a critical comparison with its religious counterpart, i.e., ecumenism, in terms of comparative principles and ethical values. In this way, readers can understand the far-sightedness of personalities such as Visser 't Hooft and others, who from federalism and ecumenism managed to move, even in their actions, towards the common ideal of universal brotherhood and political cosmopolitanism, overcoming the fictitious divisions of mankind. However,

⁵ Cf. Rognoni Vercelli C., Fontana P. G., Preda D. (eds.), *Altiero Spinelli, il federalismo europeo e la resistenza*, Bologna, il Mulino, 2013.

a dual challenge that is still underway will also become evident: first, to institutionalise interreligious dialogue worldwide⁶ through ecumenical practices and based on common structural elements⁷; and second, to adopt a rational standard – already identified in federalism, albeit with room for improvement – so as to overcome international anarchy resulting from both the policy of the States and regional organisations as well as the world of finance, something which they have not been able to do thus far, and democratically govern the relationships among peoples. In addition, there is the difficult but essential goal of defining a global code of ethics which can spread to the greatest extent possible an order of universal values shared worldwide and create aggregation and unity among the various religious and political realities which are engaged in dialogue and are cooperating⁸.

The second part of the book focuses on the historical events and the setting for the efforts of the Dutch Pastor, weaving around him a dense network of contacts and relationships with many members of the various Christian Churches and of the European Resistance movements involved in the struggle against Fascism; the contexts and circumstances that helped create the ideal and material conditions for the positive convergence of federalism and ecumenism (Castro, Bosco). This convergence led to the drafting of the Federalist Declaration of the European Resistance Movements, signed in Geneva on May 20th, 1944 at Visser 't Hooft's house (Braga, Caraffini, Dell'Acqua), which demonstrated the firm adherence of the WCC Secretary and part of its leadership to federalist ideas (Giordano).

The last section contains specific contributions from the Protestant world regarding the idea of European federation in a climate of ecumenism, including Denis de Rougemont's Personalist experience (Bouchard) and that of the Waldensian federalists and the Barthian Italians, led by theologian Giovanni Miegge, with the "theological days" of 1945, focused on "Ecumenism and Federalism" (Giordano). Another essay highlights the plans of groups and Christian churches concerning the political future of Europe. Starting with Walter Lipgens's⁹ powerful documentary research, this essay points out that in the 1930s the need

⁶ For an introduction to this issue, see Cullmann O., *Le vie dell'unità cristiana*, Brescia, Queriniana, 1994.

⁷ Küng H., *Cristianesimo. Essenza e storia*, Milano, Rizzoli, 1994, pp. 38-70.

⁸ Cf. Küng H., *Progetto per un'etica mondiale*, Milano, Rizzoli, 1991.

⁹ Cf. Lipgens W. (ed.), *Documents on the History of European Integration*, Vol. 1, *Continental Plans for European Union 1939-1945*, Berlin-New York, Walter de Gruyter, 1985; Id. (ed.), *Documents on the History of European Integration*, Vol. 2, *Plans for European Union in Great Britain and in Exile 1939-1945*, Berlin-New York, Walter de Gruyter, 1986.

to overcome the narrow-mindedness of nationalism and find some form of political unification of the continent (Dell'Acqua) was already almost unequivocally felt throughout the Christian world. Finally, an essay and a personal account are presented. The first provides the Ecumenical Movement's perspective on the potential of and recent developments in the European integration process (Spini), the second sheds light on some aspects of the life of the great architect of the WCC (Visser 't Hooft), this time through the personal memories of his grandson.

In conclusion, this collection dedicated to Visser 't Hooft also invites readers to form a broader and more articulated vision of the relationship between federalism and ecumenism, one that is more complex than the simple combination of two complementary practices. In order to provide some thoughts for reflection, which are the cornerstone of this collection, we would like to draw attention to two aspects in particular which underscore a drastic change in perspective for Protestant supporters of the Ecumenical Movement with respect to their approach to political issues compared to the liberal Protestantism of the previous century. In fact, we believe that the understanding and acceptance of federalism by some members of the Ecumenical Movement developed at the religious level along two lines: that of Barth's theology on the one hand and Christian Realism on the other. Barth's theology, which will be better and more thoroughly addressed by Mario Miegge in his essay, has already been alluded to. As for Christian Realism¹⁰, an almost moral consequence of the "theology of crisis" and one of the possible political positions offered to the believer by the Barthian approach, it is still difficult to assess its true significance in the WCC members' process of approaching federalism. However, in Anglo-Saxon Protestantism (especially in the US), between the two wars, it represented a major leaning towards political activism. Reinhold Niebuhr himself, one of the greatest representatives of Christian Realism, followed the ecumenical phenomenon with interest and participated in its activities, helping to orient the movement towards dialogue and interdenominational mediation. Therefore, like Visser 't Hooft and other Protestant ecumenical members – including William Paton, John Foster Dulles, Marc Boegner and many others –, he was forced to direct his Christianity during the tough years of war and faced with the aberrations of totalitarianism towards hard realism and political pragmatism, while agreeing to take part in the commission chaired by

¹⁰ Cf. Niebuhr R., *Moral Man and Immoral Society: A Study of Ethics and Politics*, New York, C. Scribner's Sons, 1932; *Id.*, *The Nature and Destiny of Man; a Christian Interpretation*, New York, C. Scribner's Sons, 1943. Regarding Niebuhr, Rubboli M., *Politica e religione negli USA. Reinhold Niebuhr e il suo tempo*, Milano, Franco Angeli, 1986; Stone R. H., *Reinhold Niebuhr Prophet to Politicians*, New York, Abingdon Press, 1972.

Dulles “for a just and durable peace” (Federal Council’s Commission on a Just and Durable Peace), which proposed a federal union to the peoples of Europe. On the other hand, it should not be forgotten that Visser ’t Hooft, the WCC members and his entourage were active in the ecumenical world in tackling the problem of organising the fight against Nazi-Fascism and defining a realistic strategy of pacification and the political reconstruction of the international community.

These considerations regarding the influence of Barth’s thought and Christian Realism on the political willingness of ecumenical Protestantism are certainly just food for thought and rough ideas on which new and future research may be launched. However, regarding the prospects for world peace to which ecumenism and federalism aspire, we can only agree with Hans Küng who stated that ecumenical dialogue based upon the search for the common foundations of the various denominations can help restore Christian unity and promote peace among nations, contributing significantly to an ideal global ethical heritage. However, it is also evident, as Visser ’t Hooft himself already understood at the time, that without a politically realistic approach to this problem, i.e., with efforts designed to promote the establishment of supranational democratic institutions able to settle international disputes between nation (and continental) states – or tomorrow among larger regional organisations – on the basis of a higher, shared law, the process of world pacification will only be partial, if not completely pointless.

[FMG]

The European Resistance and Historiography. A “Federalist” Interpretive Perspective

A Historicising Europe at war and the erosion of its long-standing central role in the decisive years between 1914 and 1945 means re-reading our Continent’s history using approaches to research and historiographical interpretation that establish a more appropriate link between the phase of Europe’s disintegration and destruction and its subsequent path towards integration.

Regarding those dramatic decades, according to some interpretations, the Second World War was simply a continuation of the First, a consequence of the issues that were left unresolved or questionably addressed under the Treaty of Versailles. Defining the two conflicts and the entire period between 1914 and 1945 as the “20th Century’s Thirty-Year War” is a widely accepted historical opinion. This expression, first used by Sigmund Neumann in 1946 and subsequently by George Hans

Gadamer and Winston Churchill, came to be regarded as a true category of historiographical interpretation (e.g., in Arno J. Mayer and Fritz Stern)¹¹.

The European balance of power that had repeatedly succeeded in restraining the various national ambitions in the past, definitively collapsed with Nazi expansionism. It became clear that nation-states had proved incapable of ensuring the security of their citizens and their own liberation solely by their own efforts. The only way to overthrow the enemy was to broadly combine their forces, with the crucial contribution of non-European powers. In the words of Toynbee, these were the signs of a lack of power between the First and Second World War that “extended throughout all of continental Europe.”¹²

This periodization establishes a strong link between the causes of both world wars, left unresolved by that sort of truce, in the Kantian sense of the word, which took place in the years between the two wars, and highlights the beginning of the process of the creation of a modern and effective European consciousness, which can also be traced back as far as 1914, i.e., when the balance of power which rested upon a world order based on European hegemony was broken up.

According to the history of political ideas, it is now widely agreed that common notions on new international institutions and Europe’s federal unity, dating back as far as 1918¹³, culminated during the Second World War with the great progress made in terms of quantity and quality in the debate on European unity, with demands, reflections and theoretical developments that may be identified as typical of the “European Resistance”.

We certainly are not talking about unity from an organisational and military point of view, i.e., unifying the struggles and guerrilla, sabotage and opposition efforts carried out alongside the real conflict between opposing armies.

However, the historiographical category of the “European Resistance” certainly comes into play at different levels, from the simple initial observation that the common goal of countering the Nazi troops

¹¹ Mayer A. J., *Il potere dell’Ancien Régime fino alla prima guerra mondiale*, Roma, Laterza, 1999.

¹² Toynbee A., “Introduction”, in Toynbee A. and V., *The Realignment of Europe*, London, Oxford University Press, 1955, pp. 16 and ff.

¹³ Regarding Italy, the first articles by Luigi Einaudi in the *Corriere della Sera* and criticisms of the League of Nations by Giovanni Agnelli and Attilio Cabiati appeared for the first time in 1918. During the 1930s, the English federalist school flourished, which had among its main exponents Lord Lothian and Lionel Robbins. Cf. Pistone S. (ed.), *L’idea dell’unificazione europea tra la prima e la seconda guerra mondiale*, Torino, Fondazione Luigi Einaudi, 1975.

throughout the Continent had already characterised the Resistance as a phenomenon on a European level, and always against a single and certainly not simply national opponent. Alongside fascist Europe, there was also anti-fascist Europe, to quote the words of Thomas Mann, “an internationally unanimous resistance against the disgrace of their country, against the shame of a Hitlerite Europe and the horror of a Hitlerite world” who “wanted more than simply ‘to resist’, feeling themselves to be the vanguard of a better human society.”¹⁴ Many common reasons, tensions in striving towards ideals and the convergence of beliefs can be found in the book introduced by Mann, *Lettere di condannati a morte della Resistenza europea*, or in Albert Camus’s introduction to his *Letters to a German Friend*: “When the author of these letters says ‘you’”, the French author writes:

he means not “you Germans”, but “you Nazi”. When he says “we”, this signifies not always “we Frenchmen”, but sometimes “we free Europeans”. I am contrasting two attitudes, not two nations, even if, at a certain moment in history, these two nations personified two enemy attitudes. To repeat a remark that is not mine, I love my country too much to be a nationalist. And I know that neither France nor Italy would lose anything – quite the contrary – if they both had broader horizons¹⁵.

However, we cannot refuse to see the ideological differences among the various parties involved in the Resistance: in addition to wanting to eradicate the cause of nationalism and the two world wars, identified in the international system of balance of power based on the absolute sovereignty of the states, they also had other basic objectives, such as the traditional, patriotic desire to return to the pre-war order, the political and revolutionary struggle and class struggle for a social palingenesis erected on the ruins of war. It was a melting pot of varying influences, temporarily brought into harmony by the urgency of the fight, where the lines of demarcation did not divide one party from the other, but crossed them all, or almost all.

While it certainly cannot be historically argued that federalism was, according to what Hubert Halin tried to assert in his short, concise book¹⁶, the main goal of all the Resistance movements, the same cannot be said, as British historian Alan Milward stated, of “the idea of resurrecting the conquered nations and restoring them to their former individuality” and

¹⁴ Mann T., “Prefazione”, in Malvezzi P. and Pirelli G. (eds.), *Lettere di condannati a morte della Resistenza europea*, Torino, Einaudi, 1954.

¹⁵ Camus A., “Prefazione all’edizione italiana di *Lettere a un amico tedesco*”, in Camus A., *Ribellione e morte. Saggi politici*, Milano, Bompiani, 1961.

¹⁶ Hubert H., *L’Europe unie, objectif majeur de la Résistance*, Paris Bruxelles, Urpe, 1967.

the fact that “surely the feelings most engendered by resistance were patriotism and even nationalism.”¹⁷

Actually, there is no political thought that may be seriously considered a unifying and prevailing ideology within the Resistance in Europe. Rather than losing ourselves in “quantitative” assessments, what historiography can and should do is “qualitatively” emphasise discontinuity and the originality of the changes in the historical process, even in terms of the history of ideas.

The historic transnational contacts and encounters, not only to coordinate military action or seek diplomatic contacts, but also to explore ways to “build” peace and re-establish the future of the Continent on new foundations, mark a profound break with the past.

If, for example, the Europeanist and federalist pact of friendship and cooperation signed on May 22nd, 1944, in Barcelonnette between Duccio Galimberti’s Italian partisans and the French partisans of the Ubaye Valley or the Italian-French collaboration in the *Libérer et Fédérer* movement, promoted by Silvio Trentin, perhaps seems to be of minor importance, the same certainly is not true of the contacts that developed between Pastor Willem Visser ’t Hooft and the German and Dutch Resistance on the one hand and with British and American figures on the other, the Geneva meetings in the spring and summer of 1944 at the Dutch theologian’s house attended by members of the Resistance from nine different countries on the Continent as well as the first European Federalist Conference in Paris, when the city had already been freed but the war was not yet over¹⁸.

A number of studies have helped create a comprehensive overview, rich in ideals and change-oriented (the main architect of this historiographical orientation was German historian Walter Lipgens, carried on into the present by his student Wilfried Loth)¹⁹ which also represent a real quantum

¹⁷ Milward A. S., *The European Rescue of the Nation-State*, London, Routledge, 1992, p. 16.

¹⁸ The historic meeting held in the *Maison de la Chimie* from March 22nd to 25th, 1945, attended by approximately thirty people: in addition to five or six Spanish emigrants, there were also Greeks and Germans, British politicians and intellectuals such as Labour MP John Hynd, William Beveridge and George Orwell, French attendees such as Vincent Auriol, André Philip, Henri Frenay, Albert Camus, Emmanuel Mounier, André Ferrat and Robert Verdier, the Italian Altiero Spinelli with his partner Ursula Hirschmann as well as German and Swiss figures. The meeting ended with a Resolution drafted by Spinelli and the establishment of the International Committee for European Federation.

¹⁹ Lipgens W., *Europa-Föderationspläne der Widerstandsbewegungen 1940-45*; Lipgens W. and Loth W. (eds.), *Documents on the History of European Integration*, 4 Vols., Berlin-New York, Walter de Gruyter, 1985-1991.

leap in theoretical elaborations on European federalism, in which unity, peace and statehood merge in a single plan oriented towards the future.

Although not all of them were quite as widespread, some positions reveal significant theoretical depth and great ideal, cultural and historical value, such as the Italian *Il Manifesto per un'Europa libera e unita* (Manifesto for a free and united Europe) composed by Altiero Spinelli and Ernesto Rossi on the island of Ventotene, Mackay's book *Peace Aims and the New Order*, the documents drafted by the *Kreisauer Kreis*, the anti-Nazi faith-based political circle founded by Count Helmuth James von Moltke, the message launched by Léon Blum from Vichy prisons to Socialist groups in hiding, the manifesto of Silvio Trentin's *Libérer et Fédérer* group, the Programme of the *Combat* group led by Henri Frenay from Lyon, the volume *Der Wiedergeburt von Europa* written in German by Dutch Hans Dieter Salinger in 1944 and the *Projet de déclaration des Résistances européennes* resulting from the international meetings held in Geneva in 1944, which have been discussed above.

While the phenomenon of the European consciousness of the Resistance is well-known, on the other hand there are very few works that include an analysis of American views on post-war Europe in addition to that of the Resistance programmes. However, analysing the American stand on Europe is essential, as is a greater understanding of the connections and influences between European views of the non-communist Resistance on the subsequent construction of European unity and the role of the United States during the war.

These issues are central to Veronika Heyde's recent study, based on a number of European and American documents, which has already highlighted a whole galaxy of reciprocal influences²⁰.

Continuing as we must along this path, the key role of Dutch Pastor Willem Visser 't Hooft begins to emerge, since he was at the heart of a dense network of relationships and connections, which still have not been well-explored, linking U.S. intelligence services with several members of the Resistance in France, Italy, Holland and Germany.

In addition to the intelligence work he participated in, we should not overlook his series of reflections, made along with many other members of the World Council and of the Resistance, on the intentions behind the political unity of the future Europe which were to be implemented on a federal basis at the conclusion of the war so as to definitively overcome the risks arising from nationalism and establish a new continental order on the political and religious solidarity of the European peoples. Therefore,

²⁰ Heyde V., *De l'esprit de la Résistance jusqu'à l'idée de l'Europe. Projets européens et américains pour l'Europe de l'après-guerre (1940-1950)*, Bruxelles, Peter Lang, 2010.

the historical events, during which Visser 't Hooft served as the Secretary of the World Council and acted as a nexus among the various members of the European Resistance, should be reconstructed using episodes and facts which so far have been neglected or poorly studied, in addition to comparing the rather original relationship between European Federalism and Protestant Christian Ecumenism which developed between the 1930s and 1940s using a politico-ideological analysis.

The aim of the papers that have been brought together in this volume, and the main reason for the organisation of the Conference in Turin for which they have been prepared, is to shed light using such an important figure as Willem Visser 't Hooft on the relationships and contacts among the Ecumenical Movement, the Resistance and European Federalism as well as between the European Resistance and the Allies, through which information was filtered, as well as political ideas on the future institutional reconstruction of Europe.

It is only through an interpretation of the historical and political processes that is not entirely national in nature that new historiographical perspectives may be opened up, enabling us to see in the flourishing of Europeanist and federalist ideas in the Resistance the characteristics of ethical nobility and political legitimacy of a new aspect of the Continent's identity and its process of unification, according to the intent already expressed by Jean Baptiste Duroselle for example, when he was certain that "after more detailed studies are conducted, some germ that will explain this flourishing after 1945 will be undoubtedly found within the Resistance Movement."²¹

This would clearly illustrate that the actual beginning of the European integration process cannot be considered merely from the point of view of the history of international relations as the outcome of the clash between the East and West, but also from the point of view of the history of ideas as a result of a far-reaching critical rethinking and the great desire for renewal that emerged after the collapse of the European nation-states.

[SDA]

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