



CHURCHILL AND THE UNITED STATES OF EUROPE, 1904-1948

Churchill y los Estados Unidos de Europa, 1904-1948

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The call for a “United States of Europe” is a recurring theme in the writings and speeches of Sir Winston Churchill from at least 1930, and reaches its culmination in his opening address to the Congress of Europe held at The Hague in May 1948. This article analyses Churchill’s own writings and oratory to trace the origins of his support for closer European union. Initially he envisaged Britain as a guarantor and facilitator of European unity, but by 1948 he had become an advocate of a role for Britain within Europe. This shift in thinking is followed through analysis of his language and explained in terms of the historical context.



Abstract

Winston Churchill; European integration; United States of Europe; oratory; rhetoric; speeches. *Winston Churchill; integración europea; Estados Unidos de Europa; oratoria, retórica; discursos.*



Key words

La propuesta de unos Estados Unidos de Europa es un tema recurrente en los escritos y discursos de Sir Winston Churchill a partir de al menos 1930, y culminó en su discurso inaugural ante el Congreso de Europa que se reunió en La Haya en mayo de 1948. Este artículo analiza los escritos y la oratoria de Churchill con el fin de rastrear los orígenes de su apoyo a una integración europea. Inicialmente, Churchill imaginaba que Reino Unido actuaría como garante y promotora de la unidad europea, pero en 1948 ya se había convertido en defensor del rol británico dentro de Europa. Este artículo describe el cambio de su pensamiento a través del análisis de su lenguaje y lo explica en relación con el contexto histórico.



Resumen

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Fechas

“We must build a KIND of United States of Europe”

Winston S. Churchill, University of Zurich, 19 September 1946

This article was written in May 2016, ahead of the United Kingdom referendum on membership of the European Union, when the subject of Winston Churchill and Europe was an especially emotive one. Both the leave and remain campaigns were trying to posthumously enlist his support. The ghost of Churchill was simultaneously being summoned both as an icon of modern British independence, and as a founding father of European unity. Boris Johnson, the former Mayor of London, and leading Brexit campaigner had perhaps already forgotten that his own chapter on *“Churchill The European”* in his 2014 biography of Sir Winston concluded that it was absurd to speculate on what Churchill would have thought about the European debate of today, writing, “We cannot tax the great man in this querulous way. He cannot hear us. The oracle is dumb” (Johnson, 2014).

This article seeks to explain the origin, development and changing meaning of the Churchillian phrase “United States of Europe” within the context, not of the recent debate, but that of the times in which Churchill was living and operating. It takes as a starting point the first appearance of the phrase in Churchill’s papers in 1904 and follows the concept through to its fullest expression by him at the Hague Congress of 1948. Wherever possible, the author has tried to let Churchill speak for himself, and so this article is grounded in his own writings, as preserved in his papers at the Churchill Archives Centre (and now published online by Bloomsbury) or published in the multi-volume complete edition of his speeches by Robert Rhodes-James.

On the 12th October 1904 Mr Jameson of Leadenhall House, London, sent a letter to Winston Churchill, the young twenty-nine year old MP for Oldham. In his covering letter he explained that he was enclosing a paper “which will shortly appear in the German daily press” written by “a friend of mine”. The title was *The United States of Europe* and in a handwritten codicil Jameson explained that its author was formerly a German army officer and a veteran of the war of 1890. The main thrust of the ensuing seven pages of typescript was to argue that the economic well being of Europe was being sapped by the huge proliferation of military expenditure on separate armies and navies, and suggesting a defensive alliance of Britain and France that would see the former supply the bulk of the navy and the latter the main army (CHAR 2/18/36). We cannot know for sure that Churchill read this article but it is interesting that it survives, preserved among his general political papers, with its title and theme perhaps lurking somewhere in his subconscious, just waiting for him to take up his pen on the same concept almost twenty seven years later.

Winston Churchill’s early life was not marked by any obvious particular political interest in European affairs. Between 1895 and 1900 he served as a soldier and war correspondent in the Victorian Empire, seeing action on the Indian North-West Frontier, in the Sudan and in South Africa, and his early books discuss these campaigns with only occasional reference to underlying European great power rivalries. He visited the United States of America twice, in 1895 and again in 1900-01, and so was at least exposed their federal system. As a young member of Parliament his first major Government position was as Secretary of State for Colonies (1905-1908), and thereafter as President of the Board of Trade (1908-1910) and Home Secretary (1910-1911) his focus was very much on domestic issues. From 1911, as First Lord of the Admiralty, he had a global brief, and one that bought him to focus more on Europe as he wrestled

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with the question of Anglo-German naval rivalry. Even so, like the rest of the British Cabinet, he was taken by surprise when the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand on 28 June 1914 triggered the complex web of ultimatums and alliances that plunged Europe into war.

It was only really after the First World War, and after his own fall from power in 1922 with the collapse of Lloyd George's national government that Churchill started to express strong views about the future of Europe. Perhaps unsurprisingly, they were views that were highly coloured by the military and financial devastation of the continent in the aftermath of the Great War, and by the threat to the established order now posed by communist and socialist revolution. Speaking at the Aldwych Club Luncheon in London on 4 May 1923 he criticised the socialist government for trying to prove "that Germany was innocent, that France was guilty, and that Britain was duped..." and he argues that, "The whole solution of European difficulties lies in a reconciliation between France and Germany. The only possible policy for Britain, and, I will add, for Italy, is to promote, to hasten, to press, as far as they possibly can to insist upon that reconciliation" (Rhodes-James, 1974). And the following year, addressing an English-Speaking Union event at the Savoy hotel in honour of the United States Ambassador, Frank Kellogg, he countered accusations that it was reparations payments to the United States that were ruining Europe by stating:

There is only one hope for the revival of Europe. That is in the growth and cordial cooperation of Britain, France and Germany [...] it is only by a great renewed attempt to revive the concord and harmony of the European family that we and the world are to be saved from a continuous procession of privation and misfortune. (Rhodes-James, Vol. IV, 1974)

In the 1920's Churchill was clearly not promoting pan European unity, but in identifying the need for greater European cooperation to advance peace and prosperity he was echoing the paper from 1904.

By 1930 he was prepared to go further, and, consciously or unconsciously, took the title of the 1904 paper for his own piece; an article for the *Saturday Evening Post* called "The United States of Europe". There were clear parallels with his speeches from the early 1920's. Churchill was once again out of government, having served as Chancellor of the Exchequer in Baldwin's Cabinet from 1924 to 1929, and Britain and Europe were once again suffering severe economic depression. But this time Churchill had just returned from a lengthy tour of the United States.

In 1929 he crossed Canada by train, entering the United States in Seattle and then worked his way down the West Coast to Los Angeles before crossing the country to Chicago, Detroit, New York, Washington and Richmond. He was entertained in Hollywood and at San Simeon by William Randolph Hearst, and arrived in Manhattan in time to observe the unfolding of the Wall Street Crash. These journeys gave him an overview of the Great Republic, which he wrote up as a series of newspaper articles (partly as a response to the money he had lost in the crash). What is interesting is how he sees the country in these "American Impressions".

Naturally, he was opposed to prohibition, and on American food he expressed mixed feelings. Yet what really caught his eye was the level of technological sophistication prevalent in the United States, and the strength and vibrancy of American business and industry. He toured the Bethlehem Steel Factory, with its mechanised production line, and contrasted this with the outdated practices of British heavy industry, and wrote:

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The structure of American industry has qualities of magnificence not to be seen elsewhere and never seen before. In no other country has science so wide a field in which to range as in the vast territories of the United States. (CHAR 8/593/120)

His article *The United States of Europe* is a product of this same time and was first published in the *Saturday Evening Post* on 15 February 1930. He opens the article with a metaphor: describing the idea of “The United States of Europe as a spark that has set alight the “rubbish heap” composed of “the immense accumulation of muddle, waste, particularism and prejudice which had long lain piled up in the European garden”. He contrasts the condition which the three hundred and eighty million Europeans have reduced themselves to through their “quarrels and disunion” with the potential of scientific advances like electricity and aircrafts to improve life, and with what has been achieved in the United States. He writes about the need to preserve the best of European civilisation by stripping away “the tangled growth and network of tariff barriers designed to restrict trade and production to particular areas” thereby reverting to the “old foundations of Europe”, with the unity imposed by the Romans, the “catholicity of Christendom”, the Holy Roman Empire, and by Napoleon. Nationalism he sees as an agent of change in Europe, but as “a process and not a result”. The Treaty of Versailles has marked the “apotheosis of nationalism” and has had led to a reordering of Europe “upon a purely nationalistic basis” which is “more onerous and less economically efficient than it was before the War”, increasing customs barriers by more than seven thousand miles and introducing new obstacles to travel and trade, made more complex by a multiplication of currencies and languages. Later in the article he references the twenty million soldiers who are now guarding these new frontiers and national units, and the risk that poses to peace, perhaps harking back to the article he first read in 1904.

To Churchill progress is about moving towards ever larger units and loyalties, about preventing the revival of the conflicts that have just consumed the continent, and about working together on economic integration that will make it easier for all in Europe to meet wartime debts to the United States. He specifically references Count Koudenhove-Calergi’s Pan European movement and states that “The form of Count Calergi’s theme may be crude, erroneous and impracticable, but the impulse and the inspiration are true”.

What is interesting is where he sees the role of Britain, for “We are with Europe, but not of it. We are linked, but not comprised. We are interested and associated, but not absorbed.” Like the Shumanite woman “we dwell among our own people”. Because of the British Empire, itself a larger unit within the organisation of the world, Britain is simultaneously a leading European power, a “great and growing” American power, “the” Australasian power, “one of the greatest” Asiatic powers, “the leading” African power, and “an equal partner of the English-Speaking World”. His position is clear and is grounded in Britain’s historical approach to the continent. We see ourselves as a guarantor of European peace and stability and we should support moves towards greater unity as these will reduce the risk of further conflict, into which we would be dragged, and will increase the opportunities for trade and economic prosperity from which we will benefit. But we are not part of the proposed “United States of Europe” (CHAR 8/303/3-11).

This then was the view that Churchill carried forward into the nineteen thirties. On the 2nd February 1938 he received a letter from Count Coudenhove-Kalergi asking for a meeting and suggesting Churchill accept the Chairmanship of the British Pan European Group:

*To Churchill
progress is about
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continent*

As you will know, I formerly propagated the idea of a continental union cooperating on the basis of an entente cordiale with the British Empire. In the meantime things have changed. Actually it seems impossible to organise any kind of European union without the participation and even the leadership of Great Britain. (CHAR 2/328/30)

What had changed of course was the rise of the fascist powers, and particularly the resurgence of a militaristic Germany, and Kalergi goes on:

On the other hand, for Great Britain the risk of an isolation has become greater than the risk of a European participation. If things go on as they do, a war is inevitable and Great Britain would be entangled in this war as in 1914. (CHAR 2/328/30)

Kalergi ends by pointing out that the alternative might be a European Union under Bolshevik or Nazi hegemony.

This letter was cleverly crafted to appeal to Churchill's anti fascism and to his view of Europe, and it certainly led to further correspondence and a meeting. Interestingly it did not lead to Churchill assuming the Chairmanship. Nor does he accept the vacant Presidency of the Pan European movement in January 1946. It seems that both before and after the war, Churchill was prepared to say nice things about Kalergi and his movement but was not prepared to get actively involved. When he does take a clear interest in a United Europe movement between 1946 and 1948, it is on his own terms and to serve his own agenda.

During the war, there is no doubt that Churchill played a role in unifying Europe against Nazi hegemony. Britain offered shelter to the governments in exile of various European countries, as well as their armed forces, and in the dark days of June 1940 Churchill's government went as far as to offer a union with France. Max Beloff is surely correct to argue that this was the result of an all embracing determination to keep the struggle going, and to keep France in the fight, rather than a product of a deliberate policy, and this is clearly born out by the speed at which the suggestion is grasped and offered, but the bigger picture is that Churchill was desperate to construct a European alliance against the Axis powers (Beloff, 1993). By the end of the war he could see the need for the continuation of such an alliance in Western Europe against soviet domination of Eastern Europe.

Churchill travelled to Zurich in September 1946 to speak at the University. Yet his real interest lay in making an important intervention in the debate on the future of the continent. In his remarks, entitled *The Tragedy of Europe* he picks up on some of his pre-war themes, commenting on how Europe had squandered its natural advantages and rich inheritance in a "series of frightful nationalistic quarrels" (though his typescript carries the telling handwritten addition, "originated by the Teutonic Nations") and become so reduced that, "over wide areas a vast quivering mass of tormented, hungry, careworn and bewildered human beings gape at the ruins of their cities and homes, and scan the dark horizons for the approach of some new peril, tyranny or terror". His remedy is to recreate the European family, to build "a kind of United States of Europe" based around Franco-German reconciliation.

The idea of Franco-German reconciliation was of course controversial. Many in France, including De Gaulle, were not ready to forgive, and nothing was more calculated to raise the suspicions of Stalin, especially when coupled to the observation that "Time may be short... In these present days we dwell strangely and precariously under the shield [and protection] of the atomic bomb". For of course the Russians did not yet have the bomb.

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Yet on Britain, Churchill simply said that “We have our own British Commonwealth of Nations” and equates his new European grouping with this British bloc as two comparable but distinct groupings under the United Nations organization. In his conclusion he asserts that France and Germany must take the lead together and that Great Britain and the British Commonwealth of Nations “must be the friends and sponsors of the new Europe”. This then is still essentially a vision of a Britain that is with Europe but not of Europe (CHUR 5/8/144-246).

Alan Watson is right to argue that Churchill’s Zurich speech was a key moment in his return to the international stage, after his defeat in the British general election of July 1945, and part of his strategy for combatting the threat of Soviet domination (Watson, 2016). It is not at odds with his speech at Fulton, Missouri, just a few months earlier, where on 5 March 1946 he famously described the “iron curtain” that had descended “From Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic” and called for a strengthened post-war Anglo-American political and military relationship as the “sinews of peace” (CHUR 5/4A/51-100). On the contrary, both addresses must be seen as part of his overall strategic framework in which the Soviet Union was to be contained by a united Western Europe and a strong Anglo-American alliance, with both working under the nominal umbrella of the new United Nations organization. It is also clear that he saw these arrangements as vital for the regeneration of Britain, which derived its power from sitting at the focal point of the three overlapping circles of Europe, the English-Speaking world (by which he increasingly meant the United States), and the Empire and Commonwealth. The three circles concept was one that he explicitly spelt out in a speech to the Economic conference of the European Movement on 20 April 1949, and which can be seen as underpinning all of the speeches quoted in this article (Rhodes-James, 1974). Though both the Fulton and the Zurich speeches were controversial, breaking with a wartime ally and urging reconciliation with an enemy, they can also be seen as a continuation of his pre-war thinking, which was itself built on a very traditional British foreign policy of building alliances to maintain the peace in Europe.

So far then a consistent line can be traced in Churchill’s thinking from the 1920’s, if not before, to the 1940’s. Yet in the aftermath of the Zurich speech, I think there is a shift in emphasis. Having assumed the Chairmanship and leadership of the British United Europe movement, Churchill was the main speaker at the rally for this cause at the Royal Albert Hall on 14 May 1947. The statement that had been issued on the formation of the movement in January of that year, and which Churchill had approved, stated that:

United Europe would have the status of a Regional Group under the Charter of the United Nations Organization (...) It would be premature to define the precise constitutional relationship between the nations of a United Europe. (...) Britain has special obligations and spiritual ties which link her with the other nations of the British Commonwealth. Nevertheless, Britain is part of Europe and must be prepared to make her full contribution to European unity. (CHUR 2/18/6)

Now, in his speech, Churchill set out a new vision of Europe that defined the continent not by its geography but by its values, “a system of beliefs and ideas which we call Western Civilisation”, and which surely included Britain. Europe would be one of “the four main pillars of the world temple of peace” under the United Nations, along side the United States and its dependencies, the Soviet Union, and the British Empire and Commonwealth, but crucially “there is Europe with which Great Britain is profoundly blended”. He refuses to be drawn on detail, stating that he is interested in the big picture, and that it is “for the statesmen to deliver

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the structure of constitutions”, but even so this seems to me to mark a significant shift, and to accept that Britain will be a part of a United Europe and not just a guarantor (CHUR 2/18/6).

The immediate culmination of the work of the United Europe movement across the continent was the Congress of Europe at The Hague in May 1948, which was attended by seven hundred and fifty delegates, including some from Germany. Once again, Churchill signalled his leadership of the movement by delivering the opening address, and he began by acknowledging that events had moved on: “Since I spoke on this subject at Zurich in 1946, and since our British Europe Movement was launched in January 1947, events have carried our affairs beyond our expectations.” He was clear that, “It is impossible to separate economics and defence from the general political structure. Mutual aid in the economic field and joint military defence must inevitably be accompanied step by step with a parallel policy of closer political unity”, while now he saw not four pillars of world government, but three: the Soviet Union, the United States, and “The council of Europe, including Great Britain linked with her Empire and Commonwealth, would be another.” He also identified the aim of the Congress as being the constitution of a European Assembly that would “make itself continuously heard” (Rhodes-James, 1974). Though still deliberately vague on structures, Churchill was more clearly advocating a Britain in Europe.

It seems clear that several factors came together to bring about this shift. Firstly, the Britain United Europe movement had developed a clear momentum and there was no doubt that Churchill was enjoying riding this new wave. The success of Churchill’s intervention in Zurich and the role it played in helping to relaunch him on the international stage gave him a platform and a cause that helped him consolidate his position as an active political leader in both the United Kingdom and in Europe after his election defeat. But it also did so in such a way that advanced his three circles argument: if Britain wanted to maintain her influence with the United States and avoid further retreats from Empire, then she had to involve herself more in Europe, participating in initiatives that would restore trade, increase stability and security and oppose the Soviet Union. This is perhaps captured by Leo Amery in a letter he wrote to Churchill’s son-in-law and political aide Duncan Sandys on 20 September 1946, stating:

Winston has indeed done the big thing in a big way. There was a stupid leader in the Times this morning and the French are naturally shocked by the boldness of his suggestion about Germany. But they will get over it and what he has said may save Germany from Bolshevism (...) I do not see why he shouldn’t develop the idea further at Blackpool [Conservative Party Conference], possibly treating the theme of a European Commonwealth or United States in the light of a justification of the British Commonwealth and Empire. (CHUR 2/18/43)

To Amery, the creation of a more united Europe provided a justification for the continuation of the British Empire and Commonwealth, against American objections, as a similar regional bloc, which he described in his accompanying letter to Churchill as “a preferable alternative to a mere black and white ideological fight between American mid-Victorian individualism and Russian State Slavery” (CHUR 2/18/44).

The idea of a United Europe allowed Churchill to rally a cross section of political forces behind him in a cause that opposed Bolshevism, and although he was careful in his set piece speeches to avoid the specifics of how greater union might be achieved, the reports being produced by his movement’s committees naturally tended towards a greater British participation. Thus the

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draft political report of 1948 “embodying results of discussion at meeting of Joint International Committee in London on March 6th and subsequent exchanges of view in Paris on March 12th”, which survives among his papers, stated that:

No scheme for European union would have any practical value without the full participation of Great Britain. The United Kingdom is an integral part of Europe. At the same time she is the centre of a world wide Commonwealth. But Britain’s dual position need raise no insurmountable difficulties.

Economically, Europe and the Commonwealth would be greatly strengthened by being associated together. Politically, the Dominions have as much to gain as the peoples of Europe. Twice in a generation, they have had to send their young men to die in wars which started in Europe. (CHUR 2/19/109-110)

However difficult to implement, you can see why Churchill would have embraced the concept of a United Europe that involved not just Britain but also the Commonwealth. It played directly to his strategy of preserving and maximising Britain’s three circles of influence. By 1946, the third circle was the United States, and here there was also a shift in policy that supported greater British involvement in Europe. The Marshall plan signalled a more active American intervention in the continent, and one that was predicated on greater economic cooperation between the European powers receiving Marshall Aid. General George Marshall at his news conference of 12 June 1947 credited Churchill’s Zurich speech with helping to inspire his programme to provide thirteen billion dollars of aid to Western European economies. Churchill referred to the plan and its centralising effect in his Hague speech when he said, “It is necessary for the executive governments of the sixteen countries, associated for the purposes of the Marshall plan, to make precise arrangements” (Rhodes-James, 1974). The United States, first through Marshall and then through the creation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, was driving Western Europe towards greater union as a means of resisting Soviet encroachment, and in Churchill’s view, in both security matters and economic matters, it clearly served Britain’s interests to be at the heart of these developments, standing along side the United States, rather than on the periphery, even if it meant some loss of political independence.

You can see these strands being drawn together in Churchill’s correspondence with Prime Minister Clement Attlee about his new movement. On 27 November 1946, Churchill wrote that “Europe must federate or perish! I cannot think it is contrary to party interests of any kind that such an all-party movement should be started” (CHUR 2/1862-63). There is no indication here of the British role within such a European federation, but his letter of 27 July 1948, written after the Hague congress, and regarding proposals for convening a European Assembly was much less ambiguous

The creation of a European assembly would represent an important practical step in the advance towards a United Europe, and would greatly help to create a sense of solidarity among the European peoples in the face of the increasing dangers which beset them. In this the lead should be taken by Britain. (CHUR 2/18/76)

He enclosed a paper by a group of members of the British delegation, and he made the link to the Foreign Secretary’s initiative after the Marshall Plan as proof of the influence of such British leadership (CHUR 2/18/76). It is difficult to draw any other conclusion than that, after the Marshall Plan, he supported British involvement in a European Assembly. Attlee’s respon-

se was that the time was not right and that any such move should be led by governments not parliaments or independent organisations; a debate that has its echoes today (CHUR 2/18/77).

In conclusion, while Churchill was always in favour of greater European unity for the Europeans, and in favour of Britain taking a great power role in European affairs, there was a shift in his view between 1946 and 1948 in favour of Britain being a part of a United Europe. Of course, this has to be seen in the context of its time, as a response to the Soviet domination of Eastern Europe and the American desire for a more unified Western alliance, and of the hope of using European unity to help preserve the Commonwealth. Assuming Churchill's foreign policy was dictated by his three circles argument, and the need for Britain to maintain a simultaneous relationship with Empire and Commonwealth, Europe, and the United States, then the most effective way to do this post 1946 was to try and shape the new unified Europe to meet British needs from within. This is certainly what worried the French left wing statesman and former Prime Minister Leon Blum by 1948 who warned in the socialist newspaper *Le Populaire* that:

Mr Churchill has a character too original and too powerful for him not to leave his mark on everything he touches...The stamp of his approval brought with it the danger that the European federation would have a character too narrowly Churchillian. (CHUR 2/18/102-110)

This article should be regarded as a first draft. A researcher with more time could go through additional material, in the Churchill Papers and in other relevant collections, and see if these initial conclusions stand up. It is also beyond the scope of this article to examine whether and to what extent Churchill's views on Europe changed on his return to Office as Prime Minister in 1951. Nor, as was indicated in my introduction, is it right to speculate here on his possible views on Europe today. This essay would suggest that it would certainly be completely wrong to regard him as anti European Union, the question is how he saw Britain's role in such a union. My view is that by 1948, faced with a Labour government that was retreating from Empire, a strong external Soviet threat, and an American ally that wanted a stronger Western alliance, Churchill had accepted that Britain's immediate future lay not just with Europe but in Europe.

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