

Europe at war and after the war: the origin of the European League for Economic Cooperation and the future of Europe.

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1. Two key moments of the European construction compared.

The occasion of the reconstitution of the Italian section of the *European League for Economic Cooperation* (ELEC) lends itself well to comparing two historical events with significant similarities, namely the 1940s with the 2020s. Indeed, in the 1940s, specifically in 1946, the "Independent League for Economic Cooperation", which would later change its name to become ELEC, was born. This association played a decisive role in the decade for the development of that European Movement, supported by civil society, business and public opinion, which led not only to the first concrete achievements on the road to European integration (the Council of Europe, the College of Europe, the European Cultural Center, the European Council for Nuclear Research CERN, etc.). But it also laid the foundations for subsequent action by governments in the 1950s, which later resulted in the creation of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC), the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the European Economic Community (EEC), etc. That is, the foundations of the European Union of today, and of that of tomorrow.

The climate of those events, and of the whole period of the 1940s, was definitely influenced by World War II (WWII), a European civil war that became global, as well as by the victory over Nazi-fascism and the post-war social and political economic reconstruction. The European events of the 20th of the 21st century are also strongly influenced by the war underway. We refer not only to the Russian aggression of Ukraine, but also to the terrorist attack on Israel and the Gaza war. These two seemingly different conflicts can be configured as two episodes of the same war, the ultimate goal of which is the unhinging of the international liberal order that has accompanied us for the past 80 years.

Today's war, just as the Cold War and WWII, is primarily a war of ideology, of opposing worldviews, of values considered incompatible. Putin's aggression and the terrorist attack on Israel, and the support or indifference they garner around the world, and even in Europe, represent an attack on the universal values underlying the international order of the past decades (enshrined, for example, in the UN Charter), and on the Western world that, albeit with often conspicuous divisions inconsistencies and mistakes, has upheld and promoted those values.

2. Before and after the war: the search for peace and Europe.

This dramatic context and the resulting geo-political crisis have three relevant consequences on the search for peace and the postwar reconstruction, which emerge even more clearly when put in relation to the historical events of the past, and which are rich in lessons for the future. We highlight them to explain the usefulness and extraordinary poignancy of the comparison between the two decades we consider:

- a) First, to arrive at peace, the ideological conflicts underlying war will have to be addressed and resolved, as was the case with the conflict between Nazi-fascism and liberal democracies, and that between Soviet communism and capitalism, the two wars that preceded the current conflict. One can legitimately (and in my personal opinion should) aspire that the din of arms, the destruction and casualties of armed clashes cease, a truce be reached, and the ideological conflict move from the battlefields to the institutional and political arenas of diplomacy and dialogue. In short, let the current war become "cold," as the war between capitalism and Soviet communism was. But getting to "peace" will require much more than a truce: it will require that the universal values under attack today be reaffirmed and reconstructed, as was the case with the Resistance movement, the liberation from Nazi-fascism and the victory over totalitarian communism. This "ideological war" must be fought

and won in order to achieve effective *peace-building* and reestablish a new and better international order.

- b) Second, this approach means that one should not wait for the end of armed clashes to begin post-war recovery and reconstruction. This is what happened at WWII (the Ventotene Manifesto dated back to 1941) and the Cold War (support for dissent and social democracy played a key role in defeating communism). It is therefore necessary as of now to concretely design and initiate the "postwar period." Indeed, the post-war has already begun (on this see our volume "*Europe after the War*" of 2023).
- c) The third reason concerns Europe, its position in this war and its role in fighting and resolving it. Even today, as in the past, Europe is not only the theater and institutional framework of the conflict, but also the site of movements for post-conflict recovery and reconstruction. Europe can play a key role in redefining the global order in the direction of multipolarity, stability and development. Comparison with the 1940s will show this clearly. The current global geopolitical crisis can also be seen as a European or rather Euro-Mediterranean civil war. Indeed, it involves both the East with the Black Sea (Russia and Ukraine), and the South of the Mediterranean, we should better call it the Euro-Mediterranean (Israel, Palestine and the Arab world) (on this see Garonna 2024 forthcoming).

All this considered, the reference to the 1940s, to the European Movement that was created in that period, and in particular to the role that ELEC and its interlocutors played, allows for reflections of great utility, and I believe important lessons, for dealing with the delicate and difficult decisions that await Europe. Decisions, where its very survival is at stake, and the essential contribution that Europe could and should make to reshaping the future of the global order. The comparison also helps us understand what the *mission* and agenda of the activities of the newly formed ELEC Italia should be, which will have to measure itself against, and bring its contribution to, important challenges at the European and global level. These challenges appear unprecedented in nature and scale, but when placed in the light and framework of our continent's secular evolutions they can inspire us with the passion, enthusiasm and confidence that guided our postwar European forebears.

In our historical reconstruction we will meet some leading figures in European thought and action of that period, whose contributions have not always been sufficiently analyzed and appreciated. The history of the European construction is not only the history of mass movements, national leaders, governments and political parties. It is also the history of a "European ruling class" in formation and in action, widespread and motivated, made up of remarkable people who made the "European dream" their personal, professional and family history, and devoted their wits, their works and their very lives to it. This is a true "social class" in the Hegelian sense of the term, held together not only by common needs and interests but above all by a "class consciousness," a common passion and vision. It is to this new ruling class that Elec Italia *primarily* addresses and intends to give voice and soul. This new elite is already alive, active, creative and growing in Europe and in Italy, although it often does not find in the economic and institutional reality of national systems space credit and representation. This is where ELEC Italia and its mission in Europe stem from.

3. The campaign of the Congresses" and the European Movement revolution of 1947-1949

"Just as the revolution of 1848 was preceded by a 'campaign of banquets,' so one hundred years later, the European revolution was heralded by a 'campaign of the Congresses' in the years 1947 to 1949" (de Rougemont 1967, p.329). Thus Denis de Rougemont (DdR) in his "The Campaign of the European Congresses," written in 1967, in which he reconstructs the climate of opinion of the period and the events, including personal and human events that led to the establishment of a unified European movement in those years. DdR also explains the impact of this climate on subsequent achievements and developments.

DdR is the first character we meet in our personal gallery of pro-European characters. I am attached to him because he is the first European great figure I met up close (intellectually) in Geneva where I lived for many years and about whom I dealt at length in my 2010 book "Coppet's Europe" (see Garonna 2010). A Swiss writer and philosopher, he is among those nonconformists of the 1930s who fought against all totalitarianisms and tried to delineate a third way between unregulated liberalism and illiberal Marxism. His philosophical approach is inspired by and falls within the so-called Personalist school of Mounier and Maritain, which he then pours into his best seller "*L'Amour et l'Occident*." To the European construction he devotes much of his professional life with a fixed nail: to build Europe we need a third leg after those of politics and economics, i.e. culture, which is the foundation of European values and identity, and in which the Christian thought plays an essential role.

The campaign of banquets, - DdR recalls, -was the mode by which intellectuals in France in the 1840s mobilized in the face of the prohibition of rallies and political meetings, leading to the fall of the July Monarchy and detonating the revolutions of 1848 throughout Europe. Similarly, the campaign of European Congresses (Montreux, Amsterdam, Paris, Geneva, London, The Hague, Lausanne, etc.) was from 1946 onward the instrument and mode by which the European Movement was created and operated, also representing the secret of its successes. "A heterogeneous and many-sided movement, curiously inefficient in its tactics but direct in its strategies, to which the Council of Europe owes its existence. Thanks to it, the EEC was able to take shape and gain acceptance by the public opinion and then by the parliaments and governments that depended on it" (*ibid.*). The explanation for this extraordinary achievement lies in the movement's ability to create intellectual energy and political drive in civil society and the ruling classes of the time. "A strange driving passion," writes DdR, "unknown to the generation of the time inspired the militants of Europeanism, and induced them to prefer the nightly labors of committee meetings to receptions and concerts" ... "If we are to grasp the historical and psychological reality of the Congress campaign and pay the tribute it deserves to the influence it exerted, we must understand and be able to communicate the profound sense of this driving passion ..." (*ibid.*). In other words, a European ruling class was being formed and could only be formed through direct engagement, intellectual confrontation and dialogue, and the mobilization of civil society elites, capable of maturing a common consciousness and culture. This common culture was then to be able to influence public opinion by pushing governments and politics into action. This is the engine of history for DdR. And it was this engine that gave birth to postwar Europe.

Contrary to the opinion of historians, - DdR explains, - who think that from the Seminars, from the round tables and meetings of pro-Europeanists and intellectuals of the 1940s "nothing was concluded," these activities were important because they generated emotional and cultural capital essential to the processes of structural transformation. The "*driving passion* [of the pro-Europeans]" - DdR argues-is not comparable to the action of generals conquering territories, or parliamentarians passing reforms, or doctors administering drugs that cure diseases." Instead, it is "a concerted concentration of psychic and psychological factors that prepares the ground and makes it possible for the organism to reabsorb and expel harmful substances, overcome inhibitions and release new energies." It is these profound metamorphoses that actually deserve the name "revolution," and lead us to say that a European revolution took place then. And the European construction because of its ambition and complexity required nothing less than this kind of commitment and revolutionary energy. "For it was precisely the naiveté and passion of a few federalist intellectuals that made Europe in 1948, and it would almost have succeeded altogether if it had not been for the shrewdness of politicians, who embraced the European cause in order to better be able to stifle it, and dragged down political passion by putting it firmly at the level of the "possible," the "realistic," where these politicians were sure that no more miracles and dreams could be worked and realized" (*ibid.*).

4. The Hague Congress and the unity of the European movement

The culmination of the Congress season was reached with the 1948 Hague Congress, which is rightly considered the most participatory, solemn and produced the most concrete visions and deliberations. DdR's diary describes the intense and strenuous preparatory work for the Congress, the synergies and conflicts among the many different components of the movement that were to be brought into common factor, the

frustrated expectations, betrayals, leaps forward. the wiles of politics, the vetoes of the Governments, etc. etc. The unfolding of the process provides a faithful mirror of the Europeanism of the time, with its different souls, not dissimilar to that of today, which still sees these different components coming together, confronting, dividing, coalescing and often even getting in each other's way.

The main division was between the federalists, who put political union first as a condition for any advancement, a prerequisite for economic social and cultural integration, and on the other side the unionists, who suggested instead gradualism, realism, the functionalism of the possible, and so on. DdR naturally sided with the former, imagining that unionism would eventually bow to the resistance of politicians and bureaucracies, and to the short-term conveniences of *vested interests*, in short, to the prevalence-as he calls it-of a "Europe that does not break eggs." Which was what largely happened. Mind you, however, that both approaches converged and agreed on what the ultimate goal of the integration processes should be, which is the same for all pro-Europeans of that generation, and which Churchill enunciated in his famous Zurich speech, namely, the goal of achieving "some form of United States of Europe."

The tools, however, envisioned by the two different approaches are significantly different: the federalists dreamed of people's movements, pro-European manifestos signed by millions of citizens, mobilization of the masses starting with intellectuals, business associations, cooperatives, churches, trade unions, young people, in short, "the living forces of Europe" (DdR). Unionists, on the other hand, preferred parliamentary halls and commissions, the intergovernmental method, the focus on economics and trade, harmonization from below and policy coordination.

On the one hand were the "States General of Europe" (a formulation that Stendhal originally attributed to Mme de Stael's Coppet circle), constituent assemblies, and standing committees on specific topics such as economics, politics, and culture, committees that at that time were thought to preconstitute the hard core of a future European government. On the other hand, the inter-governmental coordination committees, the definition of voting mechanisms, advisory groups of technicians and intellectuals, intergovernmental dialogue, etc., were all part of the process. Recall also that even though there was an important participation of socialists in the European movement, a significant component of those expressed deep and growing reservations if not open antagonism to the European project under the stifling influence of the anti-capitalist Soviet Union.

DdR's account makes it clear that in the face of splits and oppositions the spirit of compromise, the search for common points of view, and the concreteness of the small steps forward to be taken played a decisive role. DdR himself was the architect of this approach when at the instigation of Sandys and Churchill he had to agree to remove from the initial Message or Preamble of the Hague conclusions he had prepared the reference to common defense (which, however, later found its way into the committees' documents). Or when the idea of launching a Manifesto that could be signed by millions of citizens was shelved. And yet, widespread irritation and disappointment at the tripping of politicians and power games did not prevent most from recognizing that the postwar "European revolution" had ultimately been launched at The Hague and that the Europe of Congresses, Seminars and civic passion would go forward. In small steps, with uncertainties and delays, but it was moving forward.

5. The first steps of the new Europe

Many of the concrete advances on the road to European integration in the 1940s found their foundation, their ideal anticipation precisely in the work and documents of the Hague Congress. The Council of Europe was created, which produced the European Charter of Human Rights. The European Court of Justice was established that would play its institutional role "above the states" -as DdR puts it. The European Cultural Center chaired by DdR himself was created in Geneva under whose impetus the College of Europe in Bruges and CERN were to be born. On the economic level, "thanks to the genius of Jean Monnet and the three Christian Democrat ministers of France Germany and Italy" (ibid.), the ECSC was created; an Authority with effective supranational powers, a model of economic governance. And then the EEC, the common market with important matters reserved for the exclusive competence of the European level, foreign trade, state aid, the Common Agricultural Policy, EURATOM, competition, etc., were born. Certainly, those achievements

remained below the expectations of the European Movement, and DdR used harsh words to point this out. But the Europe that had been created then moved forward, mainly because the European Movement had given and continued to give proof of unity, resilience, ability to compromise, determination, and patience.

The strength of the movement laid in the clear "vision" of where Europe was to go, the accomplished political union of the continent, the essential point without which "the Union of Europe will always appear premature" (DdR, op.cit.), the vision of "a federation of 25 nations and 500 million inhabitants, which will ensure the autonomy of its component nations and regions, and at the same time exercise in the world that power and capacity to create balance and stability which emanates from that immense conglomerate of values, traditions and creativity [that is Europe]" (*ibid.*, p.348).

6. The bridge between federalists and unionists: the role of ELEC's founders

In the yellowed souvenir photo of the protagonists of the Hague Congress (see photo), which DdR looks at with nostalgia (when he wrote his diary in 1967, he was the only survivor of that group), we find another important figure in our history. Applauding Winston Churchill, president of the Congress, in addition to DdR, we find in the photo Raoul Dautry, former railroad director and French minister, president of the French Council of United Europe, the movement created by Churchill; Paul Ramadier, French prime minister, socialist, former militant in the Resistance, he caused the Communists to leave the government and joined the Marshall Plan, he chaired the political committee of the Hague Congress; Duncan Sandys, Churchill's son-in-law and aligned with him; Salvador de Madariaga, Spanish anti-Franco writer and diplomat; Pieter Kerstens (Dutch and Congress *rapporteur*); and Joseph Retinger (Polish), the latter two among the founders of ELEC.

Retinger can truly be considered the main architect of the success of the Hague Congress. A great mediator, "grey eminence", cosmopolitan and polyglot, Retinger is emblematic of that group of committed intellectuals who were capable of weaving relationships and building bridges. He made a reputation as an honest broker and above all kept firm in his pragmatic endeavors, the inspiring principles of his political ideal. It was him who formed in preparation for The Hague the "International Joint Committee of Movements for European Unity," inclusive of all the different components of the European Movement, which played a key role in keeping the movement united and prevented the Congress from getting lost in divisions and conflicts within the movement itself. When he then realized that the realist and Unionist currents led by the British and supported by the major governments were cornering the Federalists by blocking all supranational ambitions, he took it upon himself to mediate and bring the movement to unity on advanced positions. A thankless task, but one that he accomplished skillfully, above all with great honesty and transparency, holding the bar firmly on the movement's ultimate common goals, which were to move Europe forward anyway. And he succeeded through those mediations in making friends and admirers on both sides, because he convinced the pro-Europeans that in the face of the many powerful enemies of Europe's political unity, it was necessary to put up a united front.

In his view, the Union of Federalists would have in any case never been allowed to completely won its federalist battle in Congress, but it could not and should not be let to lose. It was necessary to avoid isolating and marginalizing the Federalists. Those for their part were not to resign themselves to becoming a "sect" of pure hard-liners, condemned to remain perpetually in the minority. Instead, the strong ideas of federalism needed to be credibly introduced into all congressional documents: such as the need to cede national prerogatives, starting with the perhaps limited but relevant fields of energy, coal and steel; the opening of integration processes to all European peoples East and West, North and South; the authority of a High Court and supranational jurisdiction; common defense, a federal charter of rights and a common citizenship for all Europeans, etc. As DdR recognized, "federalism triumphed in the Hague documents," although it later stalled in reality.

It was this fundamental task of building bridges in the direction of the European Union that prompted Retinger to create ELEC, the organization of dialogue between pro-Europeans and pro-Europeanisms of all kinds, a dialogue that would manage to advance the Union and neutralize or circumvent the resistance of nationalists, sovereignists and the illiberal anti-European and pro-Soviet internationalists.

But behind the figure of this staunch pro-European, Polish patriot, defender of Western values, lies a "*leyenda nigra*" that surrounded him with mistrust and suspicion, seeing him as ambiguous and scheming, and denying him the recognition he would have deserved. In his lifetime and even afterwards. Let us see how and why.

7. Joseph Retinger: Europeanist, mysterious and controversial

Retinger (R) was born in Krakow, Poland, when it was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire to a Jewish family converted to Catholicism. In his studies (in Paris, London and Munich) he proved to be a genius, the youngest Ph.D. from the Sorbonne (at age 20) and befriended the most brilliant writers and intellectuals of the time (Gide, Mauriac, Ravel, and especially fellow countryman Joseph Conrad in London). He lived through the two world wars on his own skin over the course of his life, especially the tragic impact they had on his beloved and battered Poland. With lucidity and dedication, he threw himself into political action having two constant points of reference: peace and a united Europe. He discovered that he had great gifts of negotiation mediation and persuasion, and thus placed his action between movements, public opinion and the role of political adviser and analyst supporting policy leaders and decision making. This placement exposed him to an adventurous, frontline life that did not escape the threats and pitfalls of his time. Since I cannot expand on his biography (adequate studies are lacking), I will refer only to three emblematic episodes that reveal key aspects of his mode of operation, the "Retinger method."

In 1916 R. played a significant role in the attempt to stop World War I and negotiate a peace treaty. The "*Sixtus affair*" (as it came to be called) started from an initiative of the Vatican, later supported by Austria, England and France. Retinger mediated between Sixtus of Bourbon-Parma and the Jesuit Superior General Ledochowski. R. had studied several months in Rome in the Jesuit seminary (he wanted to become a priest) and thus gained experience and contacts there, which he was able to put later to good use. But the attempt failed, because the Governments that could not be involved (especially Russia) wanted war at all costs, and this was enough to prevent the end of hostilities. R.'s involvement in this attempt earned him not only expulsion from France and England and exile in Mexico (he remained there for more than seven years), but also a reputation for being a spy of the Vatican and the Jesuits, which his enemies blamed on him throughout his life. Young R. had demonstrated his gifts as a tenacious and persuasive diplomat and his ability to commit himself body and soul to the goal of peace in Europe, in which he firmly believed. R. in Mexico worked in the service of the labor movement and Socialist President Calles, carrying out, among other things, the nationalization of the local oil industry, something that would earn him many conservative and anti-socialist enemies in the U.S.

The second episode takes place during WWII when, after bringing General Sikorski, prime minister of the Polish government-in-exile, from Nazi-invaded France to London and helping to evacuate Polish troops from France, R. became Sikorski's right-hand man, advising him in all his ventures and accompanying him on all his movements. This episode occurred in July 1941, a critical and crucial moment for the fate of the war. We were then in fact just days after the beginning of the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union (Operation Barbarossa), which forced Stalin into an abrupt change of alliances and implied the end (in reality only apparent and symbolic) of the formal occupation of Poland. The latter circumstance entailed the need to free and manage hundreds of thousands of Polish prisoners or deportees who had been created as a result of the 1939 partition of Poland between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union. This huge mass of people represented an enormous economic and social problem, as well as a source of considerable political embarrassment for the Soviets, who had now become allies of the West. Bear in mind that the Katyn massacre, when the Soviets eliminated all Polish officers, would have not been discovered until much later.

R. negotiated in London the Sikorski-Mayski Pact (named after the Soviet Ambassador in London) under which a Polish military expeditionary corps of more than 40000 men, the so-called Anders Battalion, would be created at the Allies' expense, to be transferred from Poland to the Middle East and employed in the exigencies of war. Here the patriot R. could take charge of an important and sensitive social problem affecting his people, who from one day to the next had been forced by the exigencies of war to see their Soviet invader and oppressor transformed into an ally. Solutions had to be found and opportunities created that would allow for the survival, a new beginning, and the recovery of dignity of Anders' Polish army. At the same time the new wartime collaborative relations between the Soviets and the Western allies had to be strengthened and freed from embarrassment. As we know, the Anders Battalion after many hardships and sufferings was employed and behaved valiantly during the course of the conflict, contributing to many important battles, including that of Monte Cassino in Italy, and to the final victory of WWII. We still see evidence of this today in the large Polish cemetery on the hill beside the Benedictine Basilica of Monte Cassino, first destroyed and then rebuilt. The lesson R. draws from this (as written in his memoirs) is crystal clear and meaningful: "An inherent and persevering patriotism must become our weapon of choice, but we must also respect the meaning and value of compromise ... Sikorski said that emotions pass and it is geography that remains. Geography put Poland between Germany and Russia, and that is why we strongly pushed the signing of the Sikorski-Mayski Treaty."

The third episode has the unbelievable, showing how ruthless war can be, and how it obliges to ungrateful, almost "*mission impossible*" tasks. Reacting to adversity and building confidence requires often superhuman strength and unwavering faith. Of both R. said proof. A premise: In 1943 R. escaped death because the helicopter in which he was supposed to board to accompany Sikorski-as he always did-and in which he did not board-because Sikorski preferred to bring his daughter with him-crashed, killing all its passengers. R. was devastated by this accident and the loss of his friends. So he volunteered in April 1944 for a very difficult secret mission in occupied Poland: he had to meet with the Polish resistance, bringing money and equipment to the militants. Above all-this was the most delicate almost suicidal part of his mission-he had to explain to his fellow citizens fighting for the resistance "how we [Poles] are going to lose this war" (these are the terms R. used to describe his task). It was the inevitable outcome of the war, of the alliance of the West with the Soviets, of the necessity of fighting and winning the war. The final victory in fact of the Allies, for whom the Polish resistance was fighting, would mean for the Poles an end to the Nazi occupation, but also a return to some form of Soviet occupation, into whose sphere of influence Poland was to enter. It was a tragic truth operation that was necessary to prepare the ground for the success of the alliance with the Soviets and the victory over Nazi-Fascism. R. was to explain and prepare his people to come to terms with the Soviet-presence after the war and after "victory." It was a tremendous message that to be conveyed in a non-destructive way required unwavering faith and a long view of the history of liberation and Europe. Consider also that the mission required R. to be parachuted into Polish territory, he who was already 56 years old and had no experience nor training in this regard. The mission was accomplished, but it will come as no surprise that R. ended up threatened with death and wanted not only by the Gestapo, but also by the most radical components of the Polish resistance itself. There were several attempts to assassinate him, and eventually a poisoning attempt succeeded, paralyzing R. and leaving him crippled for the rest of his life.

These three pieces of evidence among many explain not only R.'s tragic mask and boundless courage, but also his long vision and firm pro-European determination, his insistence that a united Europe should also include the eastern part of the continent that fell under the Soviet orbit, his conviction that Europe should invest not only in economics and finance, but also in politics and peaceful coexistence. Europe as a peace project of justice and development for the entire continent.

One day his friend DdR, as much a friend as he was different from R., jokingly asked him, "Joseph, my friend, they say you are a Freemason, a secret agent in the service of the CIA and the Vatican, and that you collaborate with the Communists. Sometimes they also whisper that you are Jewish and homosexual. What is the truth about you?" R. laughing replies, "What can I tell you? Tell them that this is but a part, and that there is much more!"

8. The Italian contribution to the European Movement

A little-known episode from the post-Hague period allows us to touch on the Italian contribution to postwar Europeanist ferment. It concerns R.'s visit to Rome on October 21, 1948, shortly after the Hague Congress. The main purpose of the visit was to meet with Prime Minister Alcide De Gasperi and Foreign Minister Carlo Sforza. To De Gasperi R. wanted to solicit support for the European movement and for the follow-ups to the Hague Congress, bringing him in particular the invitation of the European Movement to become Honorary President of the Movement itself, an invitation that De Gasperi gladly accepted. During the visit R. would also have had meetings and talks with the Italian political and business world, with the Vatican, and with interlocutors from the galaxy of the European Movement in Italy. How important this visit was can be inferred from the fact that it was only after this visit, and after securing De Gasperi's consent, that in the same month of October, on the 25th, the constitution of the European movement would be formalized, with the name "International Committee of Movements for European Unity," and its organizational chart with Duncan Sandys, Churchill's son-in-law, as President, Retinger as Secretary General, and with the honorary presidencies of Léon Blum, Winston Churchill, Alcide De Gasperi and Paul-Henri Spaak.

The meeting with de Gasperi, an enthusiastic Europeanist, went very well, as did the meetings with Sforza, Nicolò Carandini (founder of the postwar Italian liberal party, and entrepreneur), Altiero Spinelli (author of the Ventotene Manifesto), Luigi Gedda (President of the Catholic Action), and Riccardo Astuto (Christian Democrat President of the Italian Institute for Africa). Consider that the Italian participation in the Hague had been numerous and qualified: Adriano Olivetti, Ernesto Rossi, Bruno Visentini, Spinelli and his wife Ursula Hirschman, Enzo Giaccherio (Christian Democrat and Federalist), Carandini himself (he was the head of delegation), as well as intellectuals such as Ungaretti Quasimodo Silone and others. It was the cream of the new postwar Italian ruling class that was being formed. It presented on the scene as a European ruling class by actively interacting with the nearly one thousand participants of the Congress. Among these participants we find the leading personalities of the new postwar Europe. They included Jean Monnet, Francois Mitterrand, Konrad Adenauer, Bertrand Russell, etc. etc.

Another highlight of R.'s visit to Rome was the meeting in the Vatican with the Secretary of State, Msgr. Giovanni Montini, the future Pope Paul VI, the 20th century Apostle of the Gentiles, the holy diplomat who spent his priestly life almost entirely in the rooms and on the issues of the Secretariat of State, the internationalization of the Roman Church, ecumenism. Paul VI, putting aside the very brief pontificate of John Paul I, has been the last Italian pope after centuries of tradition of Italian popes.

R. established a very good relationship with Montini, also a convinced pro-European, who had already been very active and constructive in the conversations and negotiations at the Hague Congress, in which he had participated. I would like to emphasize that throughout the decade and throughout this phase of the revival of European unity Catholic thought, the social market economy, personalism, ordoliberalism, the popular and Christian Democrat parties, the social doctrine of the Church, etc. played a fundamental role. In a climate in which by now the Cold War was clearly emerging, placing in difficulty those socialist parties that had remained conditioned by their relations with Moscow, and liberal forces that had not yet freed themselves from the shocks and contaminations suffered between the two wars, the influence of Catholics proved decisive. Particularly relevant and pertinent to *institution building at the European national and global levels* is the Catholic concept of supranationality at this stage. Pius XII insists on it a great deal with reference to the nature and prospects of the Church of Rome (cf. Pius XII, see also Einaudi). Supranationality is a key concept for understanding the meaning and shape to be given to the institutions arising after the war. It is a fundamental value of the European construction, which, even in its most difficult moments, has never been reduced to a mere intergovernmental organization. It also played an important role in the design of the new institutions of the postwar liberal international order, such as the Bretton Woods institutions and the United Nations (see Garonna 2024). There was a widespread and shared view then that in postwar institution building there was a need to break away from the obsessive application of the principle of national sovereignty. It was this principle that had led to the failures of the interwar period (protectionism, nationalism, competitive devaluations, etc.), eventually leading to war. Supranationalism is a fundamental feature of the political philosophy of European construction and the international order in the early postwar period (see Garonna

2024). Too bad that in the subsequent period this feature became diluted and ended up being lost in the face of resistance from national governments and bureaucracies, holding back integration processes.

The relationship between Montini and R. would merit further study. Montini in the 1920s was a diplomat at the apostolic nunciature in Warsaw. In addition, during the war period he was actively involved with civilian and military prisoners of war, refugees, Jews and other persecuted people, workers and trade unions. Pope Montini traveled extensively, to all continents. All these biographical and experiential elements document how the relationship between Montini and R. had solid common foundations and may have nurtured exchanges and collaborations. A relationship to be further and more-in-depth analyzed.

9. The exile of politics: Paul Zeeland and Pieter Kerstens.

A *flashback* is necessary at this point, because in the preparatory activity of the Hague Congress and subsequent developments we find the relevant role of ELEC, the origin of which, however, goes back much earlier, to the autumn of 1946, a few months after the end of WWII. Of this birth in 1946 we must give account, a birth that dates from a period therefore prior to the Congress campaign, a period that is dense with events and decisive choices for the fate of the postwar recovery and of Europe. In the fall of 1946, we meet two other figures in our history that it is good to look at more closely, Paul van Zeeland and Pieter Kerstens. Both had leading political positions in their countries, Belgium and the Netherlands; both were in exile in London where in the distance from the mother country, in the brotherhood of exile and the fractures of war, and in the retreat of reflection, they matured together the awareness and vision of a common destiny and the initiative to reconstruct the socio-economic and political framework both at the national and the European level. Let us look at some specific features of these two characters, who with Retinger are the founders of ELEC.

Paul van Zeeland (PvZ), Flemish, Catholic, former prime minister of Belgium (later to become foreign minister and senator), in the Hague Congress he chaired the economic commission. PvZ is an economist, but he also studied law, political and diplomatic science, and Thomist philosophy, earning as many degrees. He became a professor of economics and law at his university, the Catholic University of Leuven. He also graduated from Princeton in the US with Kemmerer, focusing on monetary and central banking issues, and later became Deputy Governor of the Bank of Belgium, and then a private sector banker. In the 1930s he was the leader of the Christian Social Party and as such became prime minister of a government of national unity that included the three major parties, the Catholics, the Liberals and the Socialists. He faced not only the economic and monetary crises of the time, but also the attacks of rising extremism from the right (the fascist Rexist Party) and the left (the revolutionary unionism of wild strikes and factory occupations). He advocated a program of social reforms, a kind of New Deal based on financial redressing, devaluation of the currency (he is pointed to as a model by Keynes in this), social reforms (reduction of working hours, minimum wage, etc.), liberalization of international trade. He was a champion of the values of freedom and the West, and strongly protested the condemnation of Cardinal Wyszyński in Poland and the arrest of the primate of Hungary Mindszenty by communist governments: "By serving the cause of the West, we serve all humanity ... peace, human fraternity, the raising of the standard of living of the masses and, not least, the defense of Human Personhood against the attacks of totalitarianism." We find here the ideals of Christian personalism, the red thread that binds many of the most interesting protagonists of the early postwar period. From 1946 to 1949 he was the First President of ELEC, of which he was the founding father and main creator.

A fervent pro-European, we will find him active and proactive in all the major processes and appointments of European reconstruction and integration. He participated in the formation of Benelux, the Council of Europe, the OEEC ancestor of the OECD, the European Payments Union and NATO. He actively participated in the preparatory work for the establishment of a European army but left the Foreign Ministry in 1954 shortly before the French refusal to ratify the European Defense Community (EDC) Treaty.

The third founding father of ELEC, along with van Zeeland and Retinger, is Pieter Kerstens. Not many traces of him remain in the literature. A Dutch politician and professor, he is Minister of Economy, Agriculture and Fisheries in the Gerbrandy government in exile in London from 1942 to 1944, a government of national unity, which played an important role in supporting the resistance especially through Queen Wilhelmina's radio messages. After the war he became a senator in the ranks of the Dutch Catholic People's Party. Naturally Kerstens played a key role in the preparation and conduct of the Hague Congress. He delivered one of the keynote speeches as Vice-President of ELEC. And he worked to bring the Association's headquarters to Holland from London. But the Dutch government did not approve of the initiative, fearing that the Soviet Union excluded from membership in the continental association might overshadow it. The secretariat, therefore, remained in London until 1949 with Retinger in the post of secretary-general, later moving to Brussels.

And so, the triumvirate of Retinger, van Zeeland and Kerstens presided over the formal birth of ELEC, which took place at Maison flamande, van Zeeland's residence in Brussels, on October 17, 1946.

10. ELEC's beginnings through trial and error: the value of independence

The fledgling association changed its name several times until it settled on the name ELEC in June 1948. These uncertainties and the founders' proceeding by trial and error testify to how, while the long-term vision of the association's purpose appeared clear, delicate problems of defining the more specific *mission* and short-term achievements had to be addressed.

A common feature of the early names adopted was to always include the word "independent": "Independent European Action Association," "Independent Economic Cooperation League," etc. The concept of independence seemed to have preeminence over any other, outweighing even the reference to Europe. Independence basically meant independence from governments, politics and political parties. While the inspiration and political affiliation of the personalities involved was clear, and the goal of building a political perspective for Europe with concrete constitutional, legislative, policy and organizational goals was a priority, there was a desire to stay away from national governments, politics and national logics. This almost obsessive insistence can be linked to the situation of national governments and policies in the dramatic events of the 1940s, WWII and the causes of the war, and reconstruction. There was a very strong and widespread belief at that time that the war had destroyed the whole credibility, the very meaning and reputation of politics. Many governments were fascist, Nazi or communist, totalitarian and undemocratic. Others were collaborationist governments, imposed by force and kept in place by military occupation. Others were in exile, without territories, without peoples, subject to the heroic pockets of resistance that had to be sustained and led. The war, and the responsibilities of the regimes that had led to it, had left politics in ruins, a heap of intellectual and moral rubble, in the face of which the most sensitive and capable politicians basically felt a sense of guilty insufficiency or inadequacy.

Opportunisms, polarizations, fragmentations, populism, indifference, and the blame-shifting of behavior had deviated and degenerated to such an extent as to create an unbridgeable gulf between the people and the leaderships, a deep crisis of democracy. This had eventually succumbed to the lure of totalitarianism not only because of attacks from outside, but also because of hollowing out and consumption from within. From the depiction of this climate, *mutatis mutandis*, one can sense a significant point of contact between the 1940s and the present.

11. The reconstruction of the ethics and credibility of politics

On the urgently needed reconstruction of the credibility and ethics of politics, ELEC's founders had some strongly held convictions:

- a) First, the revival of politics had to take place at the **European level**, before-or at least at the same time as-at the **national level**. National politics and policies had been at the root of the tragedies of

the 20th century, conditioned by nationalism and a logic of international relations bound by the absolute sovereignty of states. Politics therefore had to be reconstructed on a different basis, on the principle of shared sovereignty among nations and on an international order based on supranationalism. This is the main reason why the idea of Europe was not associated at that time, nor even later, with the concept of nation, as was the case in the United States. Europe does not feel like a nation and does not become a nation. It does not want to be one. It is constructed on the assumption of overcoming nationhood and nationalism. Habermas calls it a postnational construction. There may be different models for configuring Europe (we have already seen the distinction between federalism and unionism), and there are different models of federalism, e.g. the Swiss model, dear to DdR, or the American model, etc.. But in all cases the model and pathos of nationhood, *nation-building*, and nationalism (both the so-called good and the bad nationalism) do not find citizenship in the European movement. Even today we still find it difficult to associate the concepts of national sovereignty or European national champions or European protectionism, etc., with Europe.

- b) The reconstruction of politics is primarily the task of the ruling class in the private sector. It, in fact, presupposes the cohesion and unity of purpose of the entire ruling class, and not the opposition and partisan competition of political forces, or the polarizations of election campaigns. Citizens must remain vigilant against politicians to avert the risks of totalitarian involution and populism, to affirm the right-duty of resistance, to promote active democratic participation, and to counter indifference, "qualunquism" or, worse, complicity and corruption motivated by opportunism, interest and/or quiet living.
- c) Economic cooperation is the inescapable prerequisite for political cooperation. A necessary condition, though not necessarily sufficient. Europe is that of the four basic freedoms of movement (goods capital services and labor), of free markets, of "single" institutions of regulation and supervision, guarding the functioning of markets and correcting their imperfections. Thus, the single market, the single currency, but also defense and common foreign policy.

These beliefs matured all along the WWII, because of the war, and deeply marked the postwar period through painful and complex processes, characterizing entire generations of leaders. Those leaders rooted their strength and political vision precisely on the direct experience of war, exile, and related persecutions and humanitarian tragedies.

ELEC acted as promoter and repository of this heritage of convictions, which are thus reflected in the campaign of the Congresses, in the deliberations of The Hague, and in the branching follow-ups that were set in motion. It operated with more or less autonomous national sections in the different countries of Western and Eastern Europe; it dialogued with governments and international institutions, produced reports and documents. On several occasions it tried to convene a large Congress of members and stakeholders, but eventually after several attempts this ambition was abandoned in favor of more focused strategies of study and reflection, such as Seminars and working groups, or to contribute to unified European Movement initiatives and congresses or to pro-European partnerships. At the Hague Congress, for example, ELEC took over the chairmanship of the economic committee (with van Zeeland) leaving the other committees to others under an agreement with Churchill and Sandys, which ELEC itself had promoted. The preferred working method was that of "supranational commissions on specific issues composed of experts drawn from national committees, so that these issues are discussed *ab initio* from a European and not purely national point of view." With this approach the Marshall Plan and the Schuman Plan were discussed.

12. The open issues of the ELEC agenda in the 1940s

Many problems remained open, which ELEC always addressed through trial and error:

- a) Relations with Eastern countries, which were an integral part of the European continent but remained under the Soviet sphere of influence. How to engage them?
- b) The Soviet Union issue, which as an ally country was to be treated with respect, but as a totalitarian regime could not be part of the European project. Meanwhile, the Cold War started. The Soviets negatively affected the entire Europeanist process by having an impact especially on countries with strong communist parties, such as Italy, and therefore strong ties to Moscow. Think for example of the plight of Altiero Spinelli, a communist and yet a convinced and recognized leader of European federalism.
- c) The issue of the United Kingdom, which, apart from Churchill's acknowledged leadership (Labour had gone into government in the meantime) often kept itself with one foot in and one foot out, deluding itself that it was still a major global and colonial power.
- d) And there was the relationship with the United States, essential and very positive, because the Americans initially believed in the European project almost more than the Europeans themselves. Among the national sections of ELEC, the U.S. section was one of the first to form, chaired by Adolf Berle, a professor jurist and member of Roosevelt's "Brain Trust." But disagreements and suspicions arose later between Americans and Europeans; this was the reason that led Retinger to found the Bilderberg Group, which was supposed to allow a frank and confidential high-level exchange of views between the two sides of the Atlantic, and which often instead aroused mistrust and accusations of opacity and undue influence.

In general, the Anglo-Saxons always found it very hard to accept the principle of supranationality. On the contrary, they did their utmost to obstruct it not only in Europe but also in the international order by trying to persuade European governments to hold on to all their prerogatives, which, naturally, the latter had no difficulty in going along with, the French in primis. From this point of view, the gradual transformation of the Council of Europe into a purely consultative and intergovernmental body is emblematic of the involution of the postwar liberal order, its loss of effectiveness and credibility, until its current collapse under the blows of unilateralism, double standards and blatant violations of the UN Charter, starting with the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

13. The Italian section of ELEC and its first president Enrico Falck.

As we have said, Italian participation and contribution to the European movement has been numerous and qualified. After all, the first version of the Ventotene Manifesto dated back to 1941, and the commitment of Italian federalists has always been appreciated and recognized. I recall en passant the fundamental contribution of Luigi Einaudi who, not only played a leading role in the political and moral reconstruction and in the economic and financial recovery of Italy, but in the same 1940s he strongly and eloquently supported Europe, Italy's membership in the IMF and NATO, and claimed with clear accents the value of supranationalism in the new international order (on this see Garonna 2024). Einaudi inspired and supported the Ventotene theses mainly through his student and university assistant Ernesto Rossi, one of the authors of the Manifesto.

The Italian section of ELEC was created a little later, in 1950, at the end of the period we have been considering. It was created with the impetus mainly of Enrico Falck, the first president of ELEC Italy, the last of the portraits of protagonists of our history that appear in the small gallery we have reconstructed.

Last, but not least! A boy of '99 in World War I, a graduate in agrarian studies in Milan, an anti-fascist and adherent of the neo-Guelphian Catholic movement founded by Malvestiti, which drew on the Risorgimento thinking of Gioberti and Rosmini, Enrico Falck first took care of the management of his country estates in Veneto, then of the family group by taking care of the administrative side. He was president of Acciaierie e Ferriere Lombarde "AFL Falck" until 1948 when he was elected senator in the Lecco constituency for the Christian Democrats (DC). Falck followed in his father's footsteps in the company and in Parliament redeeming his reputation (his father had had to resign from the Senate for his collaboration with Fascism during the war).

Enrico, on the other hand, had played a leading role in the Resistance, and he worked hard and constructively for the democratic transition. It was at his Milan home that the Christian Democracy, which became the main Italian political party of the postwar period was born on September 1, 1942, of which he was the clandestine supporter and treasurer, also participating on behalf of the party in meetings of the National Liberation Committee of Upper Italy.

Falck is remembered for the role he played in the reconstruction by fighting to internationalize the new political class born from the ashes of the dictatorship and the horrors of the war, a role to which the presidency of ELEC Italy certainly contributed significantly. His political positions, open, inspired by liberal Catholicism, "boldly moderate," and his commitment to the city of Milan (with the creation of the Ambrosianeum Foundation) make him stand out well among other national and European ELEC leaders of the period.

14. Two decades in comparison: Europe at a turning point

From our brief reconstruction, the climate, the great intellectual and political work, and the cultural and value foundations on which the prospects for European integration were built in the 1940s that would later develop in the postwar period to the present day clearly emerge. The role that ELEC with the European Movement played in creating solid roots for the construction of a united Europe also emerges. Without these roots, one would not understand the achievements of the decades that followed and the ability that Europe has shown not only to be able to cope with challenges and obstacles, but also to reinvigorate and strengthen itself in the face of the crises and shocks it has run into.

The comparison between that critical decade and the present gives us an opportunity to highlight some significant similarities and to draw from them insights into the challenges facing Europe's future at such a delicate moment in its history as the present. Let us see what these analogies and possible lessons from history are. We summarize them in three main points.

First, Europe faced a turning point in its history. Then, as now. There was in the 1940s, with the wounds of war still open and painful, a widespread awareness that Europe was facing a turning point, a clear discontinuity from the past. A united Europe could and should have been built, capable of exercising shared sovereignty, and thus with real transfers of prerogatives from the national level, and with a shared process, from below, in a multipolar logic. The principle of national sovereignty, which was then believed to have been responsible for all anti-democratic involutions of the interwar period, protectionism, aggressive nationalism, competitive devaluations, and ultimately the war itself, therefore had to be replaced by the principle of supranationality. The hegemonic struggle among the various European states, with the goal of supremacy and power, needed to be replaced by cooperation dialogue and the conviction that only union, the sacrifice of hegemonic ambitions, the renunciation of muscularity and bullying of individual states, would make it possible for Europe to safeguard the diversity of cultures and traditions, and to play an equal role with the big countries on the global chessboard. Of course, there were resistances and closures even then, but they were ultimately minority.

There were also different models of institutional frameworks to draw inspiration from, such as the Swiss model, advocated by DdR, and the U.S. model, which the federalists looked to. In the former, decentralized, it was in the cantons that the main seat of government, representation and democracy was located, while the confederal government played a guarantor role, a guarantee of cantonal autonomy and diversity (language, culture, referendum, social policies, etc.) that the Swiss value enormously. The confederal government exercises those functions that can only be effectively fulfilled at the central level, such as defense, foreign policy, currency, market regulation, tax policy, etc. Thus, the principle of subsidiarity applies. In the second model, federation is arrived at by direct popular investiture, a Constituent Assembly, a constitution, a political federal government (not just one of national unity), a parliament elected by the people, etc.

In Europe today, too, the question of strengthening the federal or confederal level of government, the prerogatives of the European Parliament, other institutions, and the question of transferring competencies and responsibilities for this purpose, arises with a sense of necessity and urgency. This is the case in foreign policy, defense, fiscal and budgetary policies, market regulation and supervision (think for example of the completion of the Banking Union and the Capital Markets Union). Contributing to this need now as then is the war. War makes the need to invest in European public goods such as health security and environmental protection compelling. War makes us feel vulnerable, in need of protection and mutual solidarity, because now as then the war we face is a war in Europe and against Europe, against its values, its identity, its standard of living, a war that strikes deep into Europe's democracy, freedom and global role.

15. The responsibility of the ruling classes to politics

The degradation of politics and the need to rebuild its credibility and democratic function is another analogy between the two decades we consider. On the quality of politics depends the ability to exercise leadership and respond effectively to crises, the cohesion of society and the promotion of shared values, and the creativity and innovativeness of human capital. Politics emerged in Europe from Nazifascism devastated, torn by divisions and polarization, militarized by the need for resistance and liberation from totalitarianism. But the war effort and the sacrifices it had required, the victory and liberation from Nazi-fascism allowed postwar politics to regenerate itself, to give itself new leaders, often formed from exile and in exile, strengthened by the heroism of resistance, the humanitarian tragedies and the aspiration for democratic normalcy and pacification.

Even today, politics is in crisis. It is referred to in the literature as a "democratic recession" (cf. Larry Diamond). In many countries, polarizations, the inability of dialogue and peaceful confrontation between different ideas, the hegemony of extremist positions in opposing camps, and visceral partisanship, have led to a distancing of citizens from politics, a discrediting and low attractiveness of the work of democratic representation, and a pressing demand for moralization often ridden by populist and illiberal leaders themselves. The high abstention rates from voting, the virulence and sometimes even the violence of oppositions, the spread of corruption and vulgarity testify to this. As then, it is a priority today to rebuild trust and ethics in politics, to isolate extremist and populist groups, to promote popular participation, especially of young people, respect for different opinions, and the value of cohesion, solidarity and dialogue.

Finally, an important similarity between the two decades concerns the renewal of the ruling class and the fundamental role of the private sector and civil society, not only in economic and financial activities, but also in public life and social relations. In the years of the WWII and preparing for the war, the private sector's responsibility for the degeneration of politics and the advent of totalitarianism were clearly highlighted. In the literature of the time, this was called the "betrayal of clerics" referring to the passive and opportunistic role of intellectuals (this is the title of Julien Benda's famous book that was so successful in those years). Incidentally, Benda, the author of the book, is among those who actively participated in the European Movement and was present at the Hague Congress. The indifference, opportunism, pursuit of quiet life, and selfishness of the ruling classes of the time resulted in complicity with regimes and authoritarian drifts. The ruling class then assumed precise responsibilities with its passivity and connivance to Nazi-fascism. There was a need then, as there is a need today, for the postwar ruling classes, the experts, the professionals, the world of economics and finance, to assume their responsibilities and actively engage in the reconstruction, including the moral reconstruction of countries, and especially in supporting European unity. In this, too, we see the value and significance of the European movement, and ELEC's role in it. A new European renaissance was then set in motion, that we also greatly need today.

16. Conclusions: lessons for the future of Europe and the mission of ELEC Italy.

Comparing the two historical periods also reveals many substantial differences. We cannot deny this. But it is on the similarities that we want to leverage to emphasize how the original inspiration and mission of ELEC, as it originated and manifested after World War II, can find confirmation and validity today as well.

Today, as ELEC Italy is reborn, we want to recall and reaffirm this original mission and inspiration that dates back to the 1940s and retains all its validity. We feel that the past can provide a solid basis for developing future initiatives and defining work programs. We summarize them in the following five long-term goals of the association:

- a) First, the goal of building bridges between public opinion, movements and political forces on the one hand, and the ruling class, technical, intellectual, cultural and especially economic-financial elites on the other. We need to invest in the creation of a European and pro-European ruling class, meritocratic, transnational, with strong value roots, credibility and consistency in behavior. We could say that such a ruling class must be built neither from above nor from below, but from the heads and hearts of individuals.
- b) Second, to play a federating role in support of common actions with respect to the many different Europeanisms that confront each other today, and which must instead make a common front against the many anti-Europeanisms or Euroscepticisms.
- c) Focus on economic and financial cooperation as a necessary (though not necessarily sufficient) prerequisite for promoting political and social integration and cooperation.
- d) To contribute to the formation of a new and better European and pro-European ruling class.
- e) Investing in European culture and identity, starting with economic and financial culture, promoting education, training and research, and developing partnerships with think-tanks, universities, and research centers with similar goals for this purpose.

ELEC Italia's ability to play an important role on par with the one it played in the early postwar period by advancing the processes of European integration and enhancing Italian contributions to these processes will play on this agenda.

At stake on this agenda is Europe's ability to respond to the current challenges and crises by becoming stronger, broader, more authoritative, and more united, and by contributing as a protagonist to the new global order in the direction of multipolarity and supranationality.

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Congress of The Hague, May 1948.
Applauding Churchill's speech are, from left to right, Pieter Kerstens, Paul Ramadier, Joseph Retinger, Denis de Rougemont, Raoul Dautry, Duncan Sandys, Salvador de Madariaga.