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Max Kohnstamm's New Europe

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After the Second World War European ideology was still closely linked to transatlantic thinking. Many people, especially those born at the beginning of the twentieth century, had been inspired and influenced by the ideas and politics of Woodrow Wilson and Franklin D. Roosevelt. Among them was Jean Monnet, whose career had started with Wilson's League of Nations and who had many friends in America – including President Eisenhower. The Dutch historian and diplomat Max Kohnstamm, a great admirer of Roosevelt's New Deal, was to become one of Monnet's most trusted assistants and colleagues over several decades. He was Secretary to the High Authority of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) in the 1950s, and before that had been a private secretary to the Dutch Queen.

This chapter explores the views and attitudes of this man, who worked so closely with Monnet, but who was initially far more interested in American politics than in those of Europe. Nevertheless, Europe was to become by far his most important field of action, on which he would have a significant impact. The question posed here concerns the extent to which Kohnstamm's Europe, which he laboured, together with Monnet, to create after the war, was one attuned directly to the problems and issues of Europe, or whether it was more affected by his earlier and continuing impressions of United States politics. Was his Europeanism connected to the political problems and realities of the European countries, or, at least to some degree, to the politics of America?

Kohnstamm's Europe, in the first place, was influenced by his war experiences. In the Netherlands, where he was born (Amsterdam 1914) and where he lived, he was imprisoned in 1942 by the Nazis, and so developed strong anti-German feelings. Nevertheless, after

the war, the misery in Germany shocked him and led him to become a supporter of the idea that Germany had to be built up, and should be integrated into Europe. Of major importance for Kohnstamm's ideas was the coming of the Organization for European Economic Co-operation (OEEC) in 1948, which guaranteed American involvement in European politics, and economic help for European countries, including Germany. But the ECSC, launched by Robert Schuman in his famous Declaration on 5 May 1950, was an even more important event for Kohnstamm, despite the fact that it came as an unexpected surprise for him, or, as he put it, 'like a bolt from the blue' (Harryvan and Van der Harst 2001, 90). He was inspired by Schuman's memorable words:

Europe will not be made at once, or according to a single plan. It will be built through concrete achievements which first create a *de facto* solidarity. The coming together of the nations of Europe requires the elimination of the age-old opposition of France and Germany. (Schuman Declaration, 1950)

In Kohnstamm's writings – letters, articles and memoirs – the Europe he had in his mind was almost synonymous with peace, unity and common action. At the end of the 1950s his ideas were given momentum by a prodigious new technology: atomic energy. More than ever Kohnstamm thought that common action was a necessity, but that action on atomic energy would have to be taken in collaboration with the Americans.

The new society

To understand Kohnstamm's ideas on Europe, it is of importance to go back to the years 1938–9, when he first visited America as a student. From the letters he sent to his family in the Netherlands we learn that, as with so many tourists today, he immediately fell in love with New York. After his arrival by boat, on 30 October 1938, he wrote enthusiastically to his father:

We entered New York harbour very late at night on the 25th. And what a magnificent entry it was. A fairy tale, the skyscrapers rising up into the dark night, defined by their illuminated windows. It was impressive. [...] New York also has something friendly about it,

something welcoming. [...] There is a feeling of openness that Paris and London lack. (Kohnstamm and Kohnstamm 2003, 11)

He was to stay nine months in America, and already during his first weeks he had the feeling of living in another part of the world, far away from the problems of Europe and the threat of a new war. A 'New Society', one inspired by Roosevelt's New Deal, was growing up there, and it made life fascinating. To his father he wrote:

Where is Europe? Is there nowhere anything familiar? This could be Mars. What is happening here is indescribably important and incomprehensibly new. I live among people who are superbly educated and, with an unprecedented courage and unprecedented power, are building a state that bears as little resemblance to our capitalist society as Russia does. [...] The difficulties are enormous, the dangers are great, but the commitment to the struggle makes life here more fascinating than anywhere else in the world. The New Society, if it is to be built anywhere, will be built here. (Kohnstamm and Kohnstamm 2003, 15)

Kohnstamm was impressed not only by the revolutionary character of the New Deal – the activism, the dynamics, the enthusiasm – but also by the problems the government had to cope with: the power of the pressure groups, the opposing factions, labour versus capital, farmer versus big business. The knowledge he acquired in America gave him a better insight, he wrote to his father, into 'the social forces at play', and released him from a heavy burden: that of 'post-Munich hopelessness'. What he learned was that the only way open for democracy appeared to be the 'slow, difficult and gradual changing of old and deeply rooted habits through schooling and persuasion. [...] The question arises with everything I see here: to what extent is it possible within the existing system to introduce changes little by little?' (Kohnstamm and Kohnstamm 2003, 54–5).

Kohnstamm met various New Dealers, Democrats and Republicans, and also people from the Far South, who, according to him, seemed to live in the Middle Ages. America definitely had its dark side. This observation is illustrated in one of his letters:

In Chattanooga I was a guest at a very interesting dinner hosted by George Fort Milton and his wife. He is one of the outstanding southern New Dealers. A typical Washington liberal, moderate

humanitarian [...]. Wealthy, hospitable, a lovely house – and appalling Negro shacks outside the door. A first-rate raconteur but, in the end, despite the charm and despite the lively, intelligent and attractive wife, powerless in his epicurean wisdom and a doomed man if the realities of life were ever to strike next door to his peaceful home. (Kohnstamm and Kohnstamm 2003, 52)

Yet Kohnstamm was fascinated by America, and for the rest of his life would continue to admire that country. When he sailed back to Europe, after several requests from his father to come home, he wrote: ‘There is so much here that I will always look back upon with nostalgia: the space, the openness, the youthfulness and the ease of living.’ But there was also his ‘hunger for a deeper dimension, for people who not only *do* things but also can and want to excel by thinking deeply’. Ironically, as we will see below, this was the only thing he could do in the first years after his return to Europe. Homesickness also made his goodbye to America easier: ‘There is my hunger for music and painting and the secure, settled life. The moist air of August in Holland – the farms among the trees with their little flower gardens – and the dahlias blooming again.’ Unfortunately for him, there would be no secure and settled life in the Netherlands in the near future, no freedom to enjoy nature. His father had already warned him before he came home: ‘... while the month of August will be brightened by your return, internationally there are many dark clouds’ (Kohnstamm and Kohnstamm 2003, 90–1).

Reflection

For many individuals the war was a time of reflection. It certainly was for Max Kohnstamm, although not by voluntary choice. As a student with open anti-German feelings, he was arrested in 1942 and imprisoned for a long time. First he was held as *Strafhäftling* in the *Polizeiliches Durchgangslager* in Amersfoort. He suffered the hardships of a very cold winter and was badly treated during his imprisonment. After some months he was released (on Hitler’s birthday, 20 April 1942), but he was soon arrested again and kept prisoner as a civilian hostage in Haaren, and then, until September 1944, in the Sint-Michielsgestel camp. Civilian hostages’ lives were at risk when illegal acts were committed; some hostages were indeed put to death, though most of them survived the camp. For Kohnstamm it was not the severe cold in Sint-Michielsgestel he found most difficult to cope with, but the insecurity

and the isolation from the outer world. Besides, life in prison was tedious, even though there were opportunities to study, read and talk with the other hostages – many of whom belonged to the Dutch political elite. However, as he wrote to his family, 'Maybe we will be needed after the war, and we will be mentally and physically fit and longing for action then' (Kohnstamm 2005, 28).

So there was time to read, and one of his favourite books was E.H. Carr's *The Twenty Years' Crisis* (1939). It was a remarkable preference, because he was also highly interested in Clarence Streit, who in many ways contradicted Carr's ideas about international problems in the twentieth century. Both authors were to have a deep impact on Kohnstamm's thinking about post-war Europe (Harryvan and Van der Harst 2001, 83). During his stay in America his father had advised him to read Streit (Kohnstamm and Kohnstamm 2003, 70), the author of *Union Now*, also published in 1939. Streit was through and through a liberal, and stressed the importance of founding a Federal Union to defend the principles of democracy and freedom in the world (Lebbing 1996, 38–41). The future was the responsibility especially of people in democratic countries: the United States, the British Commonwealth, France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Denmark, Norway, Sweden and Finland. These countries, so Streit argued, 'include the world's greatest, oldest, most homogeneous and closely linked democracies'. Geographically they have 'the enormous advantage of being all grouped [...] around that cheap and excellent means of communication, a common body of water' (Streit 1940, 130). They also shared a common history, and a common concept of the state, based on principles of freedom, equality and representation. Together they should set up a powerful union. The future, according to Streit, was in their hands:

If we [the democratic countries] cannot unite, the world cannot. If we will not do this little for man's freedom and vast future, we cannot hope that others will; catastrophe must come and there is no one to blame but ourselves. But the burden is ours because the power is ours, too. If we *will* Union we can achieve Union, and the time we take to do it depends only on ourselves. (Streit 1940, 60)

E.H. Carr, to whom Kohnstamm frequently refers in his letters to his family, seems far away from this utopian way of thinking. Carr was very close to Keynes, and stressed the importance of politics and power, the realities and the facts of life. In a letter to his father, Kohnstamm wrote: 'You don't like Carr, do you? But I am very impressed by his book, and

think we can learn a lot from it' (Kohnstamm 2005, 84). According to Carr, the failure of the League of Nations and the liberal economic system had made clear that liberal thinking was over, that it was something of the past. The real problems were those between the 'haves' and 'have nots' among the powers in the world. Priority number one was international cooperation, including with Germany, the international outlaw after the First World War. International conciliation was directly connected to successful economic reconstruction. In accordance with Keynes, he argued: 'Not for the purpose of earning profit, but for the social purpose of creating employment, and so sound politics.' The welfare of all countries – including the defeated ones – was at stake. 'This too is "utopian",' he admitted, but 'it stands more directly in the line of recent advance than visions of a world federation or blueprints of a more perfect League of Nations.' 'Those elegant superstructures,' Carr concluded, 'must wait until some progress has been made in digging the foundations' (Carr 2001, 219).

Kohnstamm liked Carr's analysis of international politics, but, at the same time, he had great difficulty with the latter's lenience towards Germany. Therefore he wrote to his father that he was of the opinion that Carr was right in his analysis of pre-war politics, especially in his criticism of utopias, but that he underestimated Germany's lust for power. He concluded that what 'we' needed after the war was 'a very strong Anglo-American hegemony'. 'This will bring order in the first place, not yet order based on law. Simply order' (Kohnstamm 2005, 87–8).

Kohnstamm would eventually come to accept Carr's point of view regarding Germany, but not without an intense struggle. Naturally, prison is not the ideal place to engender love of the enemy. 'It's a sort of a comfort,' he wrote, full of bitterness, 'to realise when you fall asleep that also for thousands of German families joy in life has again been destroyed this day.' In another letter he wrote that since that cold winter in 1942 it had become difficult for him to accept a German as a fellow man. It was as if he had 'nothing in common with him, and that he was simply a creature from another planet' (Kohnstamm 2005, 140, 160).

Nevertheless, it was soon after the war that he changed his opinions regarding Germany and seemed completely to accept Carr's way of reasoning. This U-turn was the result of a visit he paid to Germany in 1946, when he could see with his own eyes what happened to a defeated country: the human misery, children living on the streets, a damned country. Kohnstamm, who came to work for the Dutch government after the war, was one of the first to plead in favour of German

participation in a united Europe. His views on Germany can be learned from the so-called 'Hirschfeld nota', published in 1947 and named after his superior, E.H. Hirschfeld. This note, which we know was drafted by Kohnstamm (Harryvan and Van der Harst 2008, 115), was a plea, without any reservations, for the integration of Germany into Europe. Europe would profit both economically and politically and would become more secure. After the launch of the Marshall Plan in 1947, Kohnstamm became an ardent supporter of the idea of Europe as one common market, and to that end, of countries having to curtail their national sovereignty (Kohnstamm 1949, 656–70). Streit had pointed in that direction, and Carr had taught him that it had to be a union based on politics (so with Germany), not on a utopia. The Marshall Plan, offered to defeated Germany, did not seem a utopia. Besides, Kohnstamm had seen from very close range a smoothly functioning common market, in the United States. Kohnstamm's biographers, A.J. Harryvan and J. van der Harst, are therefore of the opinion that his ideas for post-war Europe had been born in the United States (Harryvan and Van der Harst 2008, 53). However, it was the realities of the Cold War that limited his ideas to Western Europe, and made the common market a Western affair.

Action now: the United States of Europe

Two European plans had a great impact on Kohnstamm: the Stikker Plan and the Schuman Plan. The Stikker Plan (1950), named after the Dutch Minister for Foreign Affairs, Dirk U. Stikker, stressed the necessity of liberalizing the European market functionally, that is, by removing quotas and tariffs, sector by sector. Some lines of industry were ready to liberalize; others would have to wait. As Stikker put it in his article 'The Functional Approach to European Integration', 'unification must be carefully planned and carried out step by step [...]. The program cannot be constructed by analogy from antiquity or the Middle Ages, nor even from the impressive example of the United States. It must fit the particular circumstances of the Continent' (Stikker 1950, 439). Kohnstamm joined the Department of Foreign Affairs after the war as a civil servant, helped to prepare the plan and learned to understand the specific European economic and financial problems. It was not possible simply to copy the American economic model; moreover, it became clear after the launch of the Stikker Plan in the OEEC that the European countries were not yet willing to take majority decisions towards creating a real common market.

The Schuman Plan came as a major surprise to Kohnstamm, and he immediately believed in its potential for success. The ECSC was to pave the way to a fully integrated, federal Europe. 'Wir bauen eine neue Stadt' was the title of a popular song in his youth (from Hindemith's charming Kinder Oper of the same name) (Hofland and Keller 2003). Monnet was now the architect, the founder of that new city, which would, Kohnstamm hoped, soon include Great Britain, alongside France, Germany, Italy and the Benelux. In the years when he was working for Monnet – from 1952 Kohnstamm was his secretary – a special relationship developed between the two men. Kohnstamm lost his father in 1951, and considered himself the 'son' of Monnet; he fully supported Monnet's pragmatic approach, which was so close to his own functionalist ideas (Van Heerikhuizen 2007). Monnet, in his turn, appreciated Kohnstamm because of his loyalty, and because of his skills. In his memoirs he wrote: 'Kohnstamm was able to understand the French, the Germans, and the British in their own languages [...]; he was also familiar with their literature and their press. The misunderstandings to which we were liable owing to ignorance of each other's customs held no pitfalls for him: he was an invaluable intermediary. Everyone was impressed by his great open mindedness and his deep moral qualities. I found in him a colleague and a friend, unshakeably and permanently loyal' (Monnet 1978, 376).

After the failure of the European Defence Community, Kohnstamm followed Monnet, who had left the ECSC 'in order to be able to take part with complete freedom of action and speech in the achievement of European unity' (Monnet 1978, 399). Their attention was directed especially towards political parties and trade unions, in order to achieve the support of the 'social forces at play'. Monnet founded the 'Action Committee for the United States of Europe', and Kohnstamm became his vice-president. This committee, a select group of politicians and union leaders, had all the characteristics of a real 'coupe de cadre', and presented itself as something totally new, far from old-fashioned politics and national divisions (Fontaine 1974, 54). The Action Committee's aims directed towards atomic energy were clearly future-oriented:

The development of atomic energy for peaceful uses opens the prospect of a new industrial revolution and the possibility of a profound change in living and working conditions. Together, our countries are capable of themselves developing a nuclear industry. They form the only region in the world that can attain the same level as the great world Powers. Yet separately they will not be able to overcome their

time-lag which is a consequence of European disunity. (Monnet 1978, 419)

A happy coincidence for Monnet and Kohnstamm was the fact that, during the Eisenhower administration in America, secrecy in matters of atomic energy was replaced by openness. Eisenhower, in his famous 'Atoms for Peace' speech, delivered on 8 December 1953 to the UN General Assembly, had made it clear that his country was willing to promote and share atomic know-how for peaceful purposes.¹ 'My country,' Eisenhower stated in simple terms, 'wants agreements, not wars [...] my country's purpose is to help us to move out of the dark chamber of horrors into the light.' In his speech Eisenhower proposed an international atomic energy agency, the responsibility of which would be

to devise methods whereby this fissionable material would be allocated to serve the peaceful pursuits of mankind. Experts would be mobilized to apply atomic energy to the needs of agriculture, medicine and other peaceful activities. A special purpose would be to provide abundant electrical energy in the power-starved areas of the world. [...] The United States would be more than willing – it would be proud to take up with others 'principally involved' the development of plans whereby such peaceful use of atomic energy would be expedited. (Chernus 2002, xviii)

One such plan was the Monnet Plan for a European atomic community. France and Britain had great difficulties with Monnet's atomic community (they preferred bilateral cooperation), but American support took Kohnstamm once again to the United States. This time it was not as a mere student who just wanted to get to know more about American politics, but as the trusted colleague of Jean Monnet, charged with setting up, together with three European atomic specialists or 'wise men', a programme for the production of atomic energy in Europe, and with talking with prominent American leaders. Monnet sent several letters to his old friends in America (old ECSC connections) to prepare their visit. Among them were the bankers John McCloy and Donald Swatland, Gerard Smith (Special Assistant to the Secretary of State for Atomic Energy), Robert Bowie (Head of the Policy Planning Staff in the State Department) and John Foster Dulles. Pascaline Winand, in her monograph on *Eisenhower, Kennedy and the United States of Europe*, writes, 'Monnet took special care to introduce Kohnstamm [...] as "a very intimate friend of his".' Writing to Dulles's secretary, Monnet asked that

Kohnstamm's phone calls be treated as his own in the past, and that they should be directly connected through to Dulles. Monnet also wrote to Dulles himself that he could trust Kohnstamm fully (Winand 1993, 96). As a result of Monnet's letters, Kohnstamm and the 'wise men' were given direct access to the White House and to President Eisenhower.

So Kohnstamm, while working for the future of Europe, did very important business in America, a country indispensable, in his opinion, to Euratom's success (Segers 2008, 152). With the help of Monnet he succeeded in keeping alive a network of European friends – American 'Europeanists', as Winand calls them. Together with these 'friends' he prepared the hotly discussed report 'A Target for Euratom'. It sketched a doom scenario if Europe, subsequent to the nationalization of the Suez Canal by Nasser, failed to set up Euratom, which was to produce 15 kW installed nuclear capacity by 1967. It was no longer 'atoms for peace' but 'atoms for power'. In a way Suez worked as a catalyst on European thinking and politics (Segers 2008, 164). Kohnstamm, in a conference speech at Columbia University in 1957, cited from the report:

Thus without nuclear power, Europe's dependence on the Middle East is bound to increase. The Suez Crisis has given us a warning of what this could mean. As the quantity of oil imported from the Middle East increases, there will be a corresponding increase in the political temptation to interfere with the flow of oil from that region. A future stoppage could be an economic calamity for Europe. [...] The European economy must be protected against an interruption of oil supplies, by finding alternative sources of energy [...]. Only nuclear power, providing Europe with a new source of energy, can achieve this. (Kohnstamm 1957, 147)

However, most importantly, according to Kohnstamm, Euratom could give the people its confidence back. 'The rich past of our nations has kept us spellbound for many decades.' Europe is 'at last turning toward the future' (Kohnstamm 1957, 149).

Conclusion

In the end Euratom was not a great success, and for Europe the most important goal became a common market. But, rather than discussing European integration politics, the question posed in this chapter concerns the extent to which Kohnstamm's European vision in the 1950s

was coloured by American influences, as opposed to what might be called a specifically *European* Europe.

The conclusion must be that, from Kohnstamm's point of view, there was no exclusively *European* Europe. Behind the scenes of the ECSC and Euratom, and later on the EEC, there was a unique network of Americans and Europeans working closely together to promote the European integration project. Kohnstamm also participated in the Bilderberg conferences, which were secret meetings – the first one taking place in 1954 – to protect European–American relations against growing anti-Americanism.

We have seen that Kohnstamm had already 'discovered' America and the Americans in 1938, when he first visited the country. He was fascinated by Roosevelt's New Deal politics, which had much of what was lacking in European politics, such as enthusiasm, activism and dynamics. It was during the war, when Kohnstamm was held prisoner by the Nazis, that he became highly interested in international politics and the particular problems of Europe. One can even pose the question of what Kohnstamm's Europe would have looked like if there had been no Camp Amersfoort, no Sint-Michielsgestel and therefore no E.H. Carr, and no necessity to find a solution for post-war Germany. The European problems definitely had a deep impact on him; without them his post-war ideas and activities cannot be properly understood.

It was in the 'Hirschfeld nota' that Kohnstamm was one of the first to plead for the reconstruction of Germany. Thanks to the Cold War, many people came to support this idea, although they had to acquiesce in the loss of East Germany and the rest of Eastern Europe – a loss which Kohnstamm himself had to accept, and which transformed his European ideas into West European ideas and made him a supporter of West European plans. However, some plans were more promising, in his view, than others. One of the reasons why he so easily exchanged the OEEC for the ambitious project of Jean Monnet must have been his strong preference for functionalist politics, with the ultimate goal of founding a federal Europe. Only by that route could the old world become something like that beautiful country on the other side of the ocean: a unified continent, a dynamic society, a *New Europe*.

Note

1. See the chapter by Menno Spiering in this collection.

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