

European Community continues its momentum towards union

By James Langley

European union has been a persistent theme of European history for more than 1,000 years and has, more or less imperfectly, been achieved from time to time under the aegis of a dominant personality or military power. This conception of union by domination was quite recently current, as evidenced by the mementoes of the Third Reich, and it is, indeed, only since the end of the Second World War that an alternative conception, a European union based on consent, has become a practical reality. Both the occasion and reasons for this dramatic and historic change are readily identifiable. The course that the movement towards European union has followed since then is more tortuous, and the task of forecasting the future is still more perilous.

It was in September 1946, a little over a year after the end of the Second World War, that Winston Churchill, speaking in Zurich, suggested the creation of a United States of Europe. The idea, coming in the aftermath of the greatest holocaust of all time, appeared visionary and impractical, if not actually distasteful to many of those who had been caught up, for the third time in less than a century, in fratricidal conflict. Yet Churchill's credentials were impressive, for he alone had carried the burden of the war in Europe's "darkest hour" and he had been a principal architect of the final victory. He was, moreover, an acknowledged humanist, a man of vision, a student of history, who lived by the maxim that those who do not learn from history are condemned to repeat it.

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His proposal commanded respect and immediate assent.

The lessons of European history are clear enough. This centre of civilization, technical innovation and economic progress had, in less than a century become the scene of the three greatest conflicts man had known. The results had been unprecedented slaughter, the overthrow of social order and empire, and the prospect of the extinction of a unique culture. The answer with Greece in the centuries preceding the era was undeniable: would the states of Europe, like the Greek city-states, destroy themselves by internecine feuds and fall prey to powers accumulating beyond their borders, or would they (to use Toynbee's terminology) respond to the challenge by new forms of political and economic organization? In Europe the rancours of the past were exacerbated by the economic devastation caused by war, and the challenge to which Churchill responded characteristically but astonishingly was nothing less than the material and spiritual survival.

European resilience

Fortunately, Europe was resilient in the world environment favoured by the of imagination and self-help for Churchill called. Its civilization implied basic unity of interest, achievement and philosophy that asserted itself in response to his wording of the challenge. Bank weakened and politically menaced, responded, through its political leadership, taking the first steps towards the creation of a new political and economic order would remove the danger of a repetition of the previous conflicts and would enable Europe to play a role commensurate with its past in the world economy and the rearrangement of international relations that was inevitable after the war.

The latter years of the war had been extraordinarily fertile in ideas for the organization of the postwar world. The United Nations and the multilateral institutions that were to shape the financial and

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