EDITED BY JAN HANSEN, JOCHEN HUNG, JAROSLAV IRA, JUDIT KLEMENT, SYLVAIN LESAGE, JUAN LUIS SIMAL, AND ANDREW TOMPKINS

THE EUROPEAN EXPERIENCE

A Multi-Perspective History of Modern Europe, 1500-2000

https://www.openbookpublishers.com

Cover image: Wilhelm Gunkel, *Fly Angel Fly* (2019). Cover design by Katy Saunders

1.1.2 Ideas of Europe in Modern History (ca. 1800–1900)

Nere Basabe, Károly Halmos, Jacco Pekelder,

Heike Wieters, and Tonio Schwertner

Introduction

The nineteenth century, when nationalist movements rose up all over Europe, is often considered the era of the nation-state. That said, the ideal of European unity remained influential and widespread, although it shifted from the Enlightenment idea of cosmopolitanism to a conception rooted in national diversity, and from the idea of a European empire to that of a European federation. Moreover, Europe during this time became far more than a geographical term or a byword for Christianity—it became a political project. This process began after 1789 with the French Revolution and particularly the French general and dictator Napoleon (1769–1821), who later established a French Empire encompassing most of Europe, based on military conquest and a (supposedly superior) system of rational governance and common civil law. Anti-revolutionaries countered with their idea of Europe as the spiritual 'Empire of Christ', reflected in works such as *Christendom or Europe* (1799) by the German writer Novalis (1772–1801), or *On the Pope* (1819) by the Savoyard writer and diplomat Joseph de Maistre (1753–1821). The Holy Alliance, a coalition linking Austria, Prussia, and Russia founded after Napoleon's demise in 1814–1815, can be seen as a political translation of this traditionalist view. In opposition to these reactionary 'Eastern Powers', the idea of Europe as a 'brotherhood of nations' emerged, and new political groupings and movements such as liberals and socialists gathered around it. Thus, the nineteenth century turned into a struggle of these different ideological groups over the exact nature of Europe as a political project.

Inspired by romantic and historicist ideas that contested French revolutionary universalism, public interest in general history became

widespread after 1815, specifically in the writing of European histories that placed Europe's origins in the medieval Christian Church, the Roman Empire, Greek democracy, or the ancient German assemblies. These narratives were, of course, serving very different political purposes: while traditionalists like Joseph de Maistre defended medieval unity under the Roman Catholic Church as the core of European history, liberals like the French politician François Guizot (1787–1874) saw a plurality of values, religions and political regimes as the common heritage that supposedly powered the progress of the continent. Some of them even travelled to Greece—which they saw as the cradle of Europe's principal political idea, democracy—in order to fight for its independence as a 'brother nation'. Many liberal authors, such as Guizot or the Swiss-French activist Benjamin Constant (1767–1830), opposed the standardised Napoleonian Europe, arguing that 'European civilisation' was characterised by cultural and political plurality and peaceful commerce. According to them, it was precisely this plurality that let Europe prosper and would lead to a future of peace and freedom.

Patterns of Power in Europe

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, for most rulers, soldiers, and diplomats, the idea of Europe was mainly concerned with external peace and security. To uphold these, they imagined two antithetical solutions: that of a hegemonic, pan-European 'universal monarchy' or European Empire, and that of a 'balance of power' between various great powers within a stable European system of states. Universal monarchy had its roots in the empires of Rome and Charlemagne, and for nearly a thousand years the Holy Roman Empire (962–1806), that loose, multi-layered political structure at Europe's centre, remained its most important embodiment. The balance of power was a more recent idea that emerged after the 1648 Treaty of Westphalia that ended the Thirty Years' War (1618–48). The treaty had formally introduced to the realm of European politics a vision of Europe as a patchwork of 'sovereign' states—political entities, in other words, ruled by princes (or, in exceptional cases, republican governments) with mutually exclusive claims to authority over clearly demarcated territories. Although references to a European whole, often framed as 'Christianity', were still quite common, the 'state' had now become the central reference point of international politics. Particularly in the eighteenth century, it was thought to be the primary task of princes and foreign policy experts to ably manage the balance of power and uphold a multipolar 'states system' in order to prevent a return to 'universal monarchy', i.e. hegemony by any single one of them.

When, in 1804, Napoleon established a new French Empire to replace the almost extinct Holy Roman Empire and win hegemony over Europe,

the other European powers coalesced to restore the balance. But when they finally succeeded in 1814–1815, the victorious powers, Russia, Britain, Austria, and Prussia, did not simply restore the state-centred system of the pre-Napoleonic period. Instead, the Treaty of Vienna that cemented the peace with a re-established Kingdom of France produced a new vision of Europe, in which the traditional ideal of a balance of power was combined with a shared, five-power hegemony over the minor powers. They would act 'in concert', on the basis of a novel security culture in which international peace was tied to legitimist, monarchical orders within individual states (in breach of the Westphalian state sovereignty that precluded this kind of meddling with a country's domestic affairs). On this basis, the five now took collective responsibility over European stability and prosperity.

With greater emphasis on European cooperation came the increased exclusion of non-European, non-Christian powers. The Ottoman Empire was neither invited to the Congress of Vienna, nor was its territorial integrity respected afterwards, for example when European powers forced it to accept Greek independence in the 1820s. The powers also stopped recognising the Barbary Pirates on Africa's West-Mediterranean shore as sovereign states. Instead, Europeans waged war on what they now saw as illegitimate, extra-legal entities and began to subject them to colonial submission and exploitation.

Europe as a Shared 'Civilisation'

During a business trip through Italy in 1859, the Swiss businessman Henry Dunant (1828–1910) became a witness to the horrors of the Battle of Solferino in the Second Italian War of Independence. Dunant's experiences inspired him to write the book *A Memory of Solferino* (1862). In his pamphlet, which was published and circulated throughout Europe, Dunant called for the creation of a transnational voluntary organisation to aid those affected by war and conflict, based on Christian and humanitarian values. His efforts ultimately led to the foundation of the International Committee for Relief for the Wounded, later renamed the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). Dunant, and subsequently the ICRC, envisioned Europe as the central stage for transnational cooperation, based on commonly shared values of humanity and civilisation. This vision was put to paper in 1864, when European states ratified the demands of the ICRC in the First Geneva Convention, which codified rules for the protection of the victims of armed conflicts.

However, many of the members of the ICRC were convinced of the superiority of European 'civilisation'. They used this narrative to excuse colonial violence as 'civilising' missions. Hence, the ICRC's vision of Europe in the nineteenth century was twofold: on the one hand, Europeans were believed to share the same values that made transnational cooperation possible

in the first place. On the other hand, the idea of alleged superiority was used to propagate these principles around the globe, including the justification of colonial force and even violence in those areas that did not yet adhere to perceived European standards.

This civilisational idea of Europe had a long tradition rooted in Christianity and was still very influential in the nineteenth century. In Hungary, for example, ideas of a Christian community or the 'Occident' were still the only ones that most people, beyond diplomats or intellectuals, had of Europe. There was, however, a new notion that arose during this time: the ideal of the West. To be sure, in Hungary at least, the West did not necessarily mean Europe. During the first half of the nineteenth century, it was fashionable among Hungarian elites to visit Britain or France, but by the turn of the twentieth century North America had already taken this place in the collective imagination.

Europe as a Community of Nation-States

Challenges to the Vienna Treaty came primarily from the related new ideologies of liberalism and nationalism, which produced alternative conceptions of European order based on nation-states. These ideas implied the destruction of the political solutions created by the Vienna Treaty, such as the introduction of Habsburg control to the Italian peninsula, the continued partition of Poland, or the German Confederation, a defensive alliance of thirty-nine princes and free cities meant to deter French revisionism and stabilise Central Europe.

In 1803, the Polish statesman Adam Czartoryski (1770–1861) formulated a memorandum for the young Tsar Alexander I (1777–1825) about a new direction for Russia's foreign policy, which included ideas for a new European order. Czartoryski's proposal was arguably the first plan for a rearrangement of Europe's political geography by creating states with more 'natural' borders and greater national homogeneity. This idea of a Europe of agglomerate nations was inspired by German Enlightenment thinkers such as Johann Gottfried Herder (1744–1803) and Immanuel Kant (1724–1804). Czartoryski, however, only published his treatise in 1830, shortly before fleeing Russian Poland.

Starting from the 1830s, revolutionaries from all around the continent gathered in various transnational political networks. The 'Young Europe' association was formed by the Italian nationalist thinker, writer and organiser Giuseppe Mazzini (1805–1872) in 1834, while the 'League of Friends of Freedom and Peace', led by the French writer Victor Hugo (1802–1885), promoted the movement for a 'United States of Europe'. In London, 1850, exiled revolutionaries founded the 'Central Democratic European Committee'. All of these groups called for a brotherhood of nations.

Consequently, up until the series of revolutions that struck across Europe in 1848—often referred to as the 'Springtime of Nations'—the

German, Italian and Polish movements that the historian John Breuilly calls "unification nationalists" did not regard one another as rivals. Instead, they tried to cooperate against their most formidable enemies, Russia, Austria, and Prussia, which in 1815 had formed the Holy Alliance and promoted the harsh repression of revolutionary actions and ideas. In fact, the nationalists sometimes claimed to represent a "Holy Alliance of the Peoples" in opposition to the three conservative powers.

For many revolutionaries in 1848, nationalist aims and a Europeanist movement were not mutually exclusive. But there were clashes between German, mostly liberal, nationalists and Poles, for instance, as well as between Germans and Danish national-liberals. The failure of the revolutions of 1848, however, strengthened the argument of those wanting to impose nationalist goals over the idea of freedom and European unity. Still, Mazzini continued to speak of "Europe […] marching by the common consent of her populations towards a new era of union" and announced the approach of "one vast market". In 1862, the French economist Pierre-Joseph Proudhon (1806–1865) attributed the failure of the revolutionary movements to the fact that they had combined the principles of democracy and nationality. Instead, Proudhon articulated a new idea of European federalism, defined as a "federation of federations" of independent communes totally detached from any national principle. At the same time, many of the former revolutionary Europeanist movements adopted more conservative doctrines that advanced ideas of supranational regions, such as the German idea of *Mitteleuropa* (Central Europe), or Pan-Slavism and Pan-Latinism. The idea of a Pan-Europe, however, did not enjoy much support, despite the foundation of the monthly journal *United States of Europe* in 1869 by the League of Friends of Freedom and Peace.

An illegal activist for Italian unity in his twenties and later a propagandist of transnational nationalism, Napoleon III, Emperor of the French (1808–1873), committed his reign to the replacement of the Vienna states system with one based on nationalities. To achieve this, he waged war in the 1850s against Russia and Austria, and in the following decade he was mostly supportive of the Prussian bid for mastery in Germany. In the end, however, he still appreciated the idea of the concert; once it was adapted to the new age of nationalities it should resurge, albeit, of course, with France as Europe's prime arbiter.

In the end, it was Prussian minister president Otto von Bismarck (1815–1898) who profited most from Napoleon's ploy. He displayed a similarly opportunist approach to the Concert of Europe, first outmanoeuvring the other great powers to the best of his abilities during the three wars of German unification, and then at times reviving the concert on his own terms to protect a status quo that, after the establishment of the new Prussian-led *Kaiserreich* in 1871, had become very favourable to Germany. Thus, nineteenth-century

efforts to merge the concert idea with nationality-based politics finally came to an end with the arrival of a new age of global competition between industrial nation-states. Only after the First World War (1914–1918) would U.S. President Woodrow Wilson (1856–1924) again try to wed these unwieldy partners. It was not without significance that this outsider, upon his arrival in Europe in January 1919, began his peace-broking mission by paying tribute at the statue of Mazzini in his birthplace, Genoa.

Pacifist, Liberal, and Socialist Ideas of Europe

Above all, nineteenth-century Europe was marked by accelerated industrialisation, technological innovation and new ways of consuming and circulating goods across regions and borders. The breakthrough of capitalist modes of production and the era of mass consumption led to the formation of new societal organisations and the forging of new networks for transnational cooperation. Though different in their core objectives, many of these actors and networks agreed on implicit or explicit visions of humanitarianism and strove for a united Europe as the basis for lasting peace on the continent.

Focusing on unity and cooperation, the main goal was to achieve a 'perpetual peace'. Perpetual peace projects were known since the Middle Ages and widely spread during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. While heterogeneous in their political and ideological outlook, many of these movements and groups shared the hope that a European federation would end military conflict and provide political stability for the continent. At the Congress of Vienna in 1815, the European powers tried to set up a new stable order in Europe. However, the congress brought neither lasting peace nor stable political regimes and, consequently, alternative ideas were discussed.

During the nineteenth century, this idea took the shape of a political union of European states. The first and perhaps best known of these projects was formulated in the manifesto *On the Reorganisation of European Society*, written in 1814 by the French philosopher Henri de Saint-Simon (1760–1825), who tried without success to present it at the Congress of Vienna. In his manifesto, Saint-Simon for the first time formulated the idea of a "great European parliament" and described the unification of Europe as an incremental process: first France and England would form a union, then Germany would join once it had achieved its own unification. The conditions for membership were to be decided under a constitutional, parliamentary and liberal system.

In 1849, representatives from peaceful societies all over the world met in Paris for the third International Peace Congress. That year, Victor Hugo acted as president of the congress and shared his vision of a brotherly, united European federation. Hugo's term of a "United States of Europe" was later used by the French philosopher Charles Lemonnier (1806–1891), who

convened the Congress of Peace in Geneva in 1867 to find a solution to rising tensions between the second French Empire and the Kingdom of Prussia over the territory of Luxembourg. Lemonnier underscored in his appeal to the delegates at the congress that a united Europe had to be a free and democratic continent; in short, a Europe fundamentally different from the dynastic realities of the time. The Congress of Peace in Geneva did not only call for the United States of Europe as an abstract utopia, but also outlined the conviction of many participants that individual freedom and democracy were necessary preconditions for a stable, peaceful, and united Europe.

Over the course of the nineteenth century, industrial workers and subsequently the labour movement emerged as new political subjects. The European labour movement was initially a very heterogeneous grouping of different ideological and political streams. In 1848, attempting to unify these diverging currents, the German philosophers Karl Marx (1818–1883) and Friedrich Engels (1820–1895) published *The Manifesto of the Communist Party*, which relied heavily on a negative vision of Europe. In its opening paragraph, the pamphlet depicted the "old" Europe as a religiously-based alliance sharing a common agenda to fight the imminent rise of communism. Conjuring up the existence of powerful anti-communist forces in Europe was an important strategy to lend credibility to their slogan: "working men of all countries, unite!" Individuals, unions, and political parties within the labour movement subsequently developed an array of positive visions for a united Europe. During the 1848 revolutions, Marx called for a democratic German federation as a necessary precondition for a federation of free European states. Just a few months later, Engels attacked liberal designs of European unity and eternal peace as mere dreams. He stressed that a real "European brotherhood" (*europäische Völkerverbrüderung*) must be rooted in "thorough revolutions and bloody fights". The International Workingmen's Association (also called First International), founded in London in 1864 with the aim of improving the international standing and networking of industrial workers, envisioned a united Europe too. At its 1867 Lausanne Congress, the First International underscored two connected core objectives: first, the transformation of the social and political bases of society and, second, the creation of a federation of free European states. These developments had further goals: first, the liberation of workers from having to sell their labour to those owning the means of production; second, an increased sense of solidarity and brotherhood among workers; and finally, the aim of augmenting peace and prosperity for workers and their families in Europe and around the world, by means of eradicating capitalist modes of production in favour of a socialist and eventually even communist society.

The disciples of Saint-Simon founded the utopian-socialist school of Saint-Simonianism and published many European union projects during the 1830s

based on the idea of 'universal association', the motto of their new religion that sought to attain solidarity far beyond European borders both in industrial, political and mystical terms. Examples are the journal *L'Européen* founded by the French politician Phillippe Buchez (1796–1865), in which he appealed for a "European federation" in 1831, or the idea of the "Mediterranean System", formulated by the French economist Michel Chevalier (1806–1879) in 1832, an economic and industrial project that would link West and East through the Mediterranean Sea. Other utopian socialists like the French writer Gustave d'Eichthal (1804–1886) and the French philosopher Victor Considerant (1808–1893) published their plans for a European federation in 1840. This coincided with the diplomatic Oriental Crisis, itself a consequence of the Egyptian-Ottoman war and the confrontational positions taken up by the powers in Europe, where once again France risked an armed conflict. All these authors claimed that after the Greek War of Independence of the 1820s had brought Greece back to the European community, a 'perpetual peace' could not be attained strictly within European borders. They broadened the mental map of Europe towards the East, even proposing Jerusalem, Istanbul, or Alexandria as capital cities for the future European federation, where the General Congress of Nations would sit. Meanwhile, the Spanish writer Juan Francisco Siñeriz (1778–1857) published the first European Constitution in Paris in 1839, an attempt to shape the juridical framework of a future European union. Despite their differences, which encompassed disagreements about European institutions and different ideas about the membership of Britain or Russia, all these projects shared the idea of a unity based on the independence of nations and the principles of democracy and representation, social cohesion and economic development.

Conclusion

In the aftermath of the French Revolution, different and often opposing ideas of Europe thrived on the continent. Older notions of European civilisation survived or were adapted to the new times. Meanwhile, contemporary developments such as industrialisation and the rise of nationalist movements, as well as political revolutions, had produced new ideas like a 'United States of Europe'. The development of the modern political spectrum of conservatism, liberalism and socialism over the course of the nineteenth century was closely related to these new notions of 'Europe', with each camp articulating their own vision. In the context of the rise of modern nationalist movements, pacifist ideas of 'perpetual peace' gained importance as a solution to the conflicts that the nationalist struggles generated.

Discussion questions

1. This chapter introduces many different ideas of Europe that developed during the nineteenth century. Can you point to any similarities they all share?

2. Describe the relationship between rising nationalism in Europe and the changing ideas of 'Europe' in the nineteenth century.

3. What role did religion play in modern ideas of 'Europe'?

Suggested reading

Barnett, Michael N., *Empire of Humanity: A History of Humanitarianism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011).

Berend, Iván T., *History Derailed. Central and Eastern Europe in the Long Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), https://doi.org/10.1525/9780520932098.

Breuilly, John, 'Nationalism and national unification in nineteenth-century Europe', in *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Nationalism*, ed. by John Breuilly (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 149–174.

Evans, Richard J., *The Pursuit of Power: Europe 1815–1914* (London: Penguin, 2016).

Gruner, Wolf D., *Die deutsche Frage in Europa, 1800–1990* (Munich and Zurich: Piper, 1993).

Mack Smith, Denis, *Mazzini* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1994).

Vick, Brian E., *The Congress of Vienna: Power and Politics after Napoleon* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2014).

Zawadzki, W.H., *A Man of Honour: Adam Czartoryski as a Statesman of Russia and Poland 1795–1831* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).