

THE EUROPEAN BUREAU OF ADULT EDUCATION: A MIRROR OF INCIPIENT AND CONTINUING EUROPEAN UNIFICATION

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In studying past events, historians have been unable to agree on whether to focus on large macro-level events and the influence of important political figures of each time period, or rather to concentrate on the micro-level, the grassroots-level coincidences less significant from the point of view of the society, and the "little" people toiling away in political obscurity. Yet, one hopes that this disagreement among historians will continue, since conflicting opinions are fruitful from both a scientific and a practical standpoint. It is often the case that a picture of history created through research calls for taking into account both the macro- and the micro-level phenomena. In this article, I attempt to focus especially on the macro-level, which until now has received less attention than details clarifying the micro-level. This article concentrates on connections between the founding of the European Bureau of Adult Education and its activities in the 1950s and in the 1960s, and the great historical changes that took place in Europe at the time.

Disgrace and the golden handshake of the United States

A realistic assessment of our condition following the Second World War can only lead us Europeans to one conclusion: the western part of the continent was in a pitiful state of disgrace. It did not seem able to manage on its own. It was facing both internal and external problems. Among the former, the worst were the destruction caused by the war and the ensuing economic decline. The latter manifested itself as the threat of communism. Although the human and material losses suffered by the Soviet Union in the war were immense, its totalitarian system made it possible for it to continue its aggressive foreign policy, and to create a buffer zone of vassal states between itself and western Europe.

At a conference of foreign ministers held in Moscow in the spring of 1947, George C. Marshall, the Secretary of State of the United States, heard the foreign policy demands of the Stalinist Soviet Union. When Marshall returned from Moscow to the United States through the war-ravaged countries of western Europe, there was only one conclusion he could reach: unless the United States would take radical action, the combination of Soviet political goals and western European weakness could only lead to the spread of communism into western Europe.

Already a few months earlier--after a well-known speech given at Fulton, USA by Britain's former Prime Minister, Sir Winston Churchill--the United States' new

policy towards Europe had begun to take form. It was named the Truman doctrine, after the President in office. Its central tenet was that the United States would help all free nations fighting for their existence against external as well as internal enemies. In a sense, the plan for helping Europe presented by Secretary of State Marshall provided the Truman doctrine with a concrete approach, without which it might have remained a mere empty declaration.

The plan accepted by the United States for helping the western European States was called the Marshall Plan, and the accompanying economic aid the Marshall Aid. It is necessary to remember here that Marshall Aid was not given unconditionally. Among the conditions set by the United States was that the recipients had to join in commercial and economic cooperation, for instance by gradually lowering and removing trade barriers. In fact, these conditions marked a starting point in the development of common markets, known today in the form of the free movement of people, capital, services and merchandise.

What was the United States trying to accomplish with these conditions it attached to its aid, conditions which were to be so significant from the viewpoint of European integration? We might have various opinions about the USA's kindheartedness as such, but we could hardly be so naive as to overlook its primary motive--American interests in Europe. When the Marshall plan was implemented the Cold War era was already underway, and the USA's European policy must be understood against this background.

Thus, Marshall Aid and the conditions attached to it were primarily meant to serve the United States' interests, not European integration. If we have any doubts about the validity of this starting point, we can take another approach, and ask whether the United States would have been willing to help create a significant trade rival to itself--such as what Western Europe gradually became through the EU, once it became capable of choosing its own course. We cannot believe this to have been the American goal. If, however, we are happy with the European Union we have today, we can thank the United States for setting substantial integration processes in motion in the late 1940s and early 1950s. This was a time when the open wounds of the recent war would have effectively stopped the Europeans themselves from embarking upon such a course.

Two Roads Cross

In terms of the founding of the EBAE, we saw above the highway along which American interests in Europe

were marching deliberately. The history of the founding of the EBAE is, however, rather the crossing of two different roads than one road alone. The other road was traveled by Europeans themselves, as they were forced to look for some new directions for the western parts of the continent to take. During a quarter of a century, that area had given birth to two World Wars, and it was not possible to confront the future without looking for new foundations to build it upon.

One such 'new' foundation was the attempt to find a partial solution in federalism. Within the European federalist movement, which emerged after the War, it was assumed that regulating conflicts in western Europe might succeed better within a federal state or a similar federation of countries than between nation-states fueled and held together by the forces of nationalism.

The ideas of the European federalists appealed both to Oscar Guermontprez, who became the first President of the EBAE, and Bob Schouten, who was the Director of the EBAE for nearly all of its first two decades. Since the federalists themselves had limited power, they actively sought support from institutions they saw as sharing the same greater ideological and political goals. This approach led to cooperation with, among others, the European Cultural Center (ECC) which had started working in Geneva, and with the European Youth Campaign, which had founded its headquarters in Paris and which chiefly relied on American funding.

Great Plans

The director of the ECC, Denis de Rougemont, had a plan to begin promoting the establishment of Cultural Centers in western European countries. These were modeled chiefly after the French Foyers de Culture (Community Centers) and the German Volkshochschulen, which were beginning to be rebuilt with the support of the Allied interim government. One manifestation of these support activities was that an esteemed adult education specialist from Manchester, Ronald Wilson, was assigned to the British Embassy in Germany in 1947-58, with the task of helping the Germans launch activities in the Volkshochschulen which had operated already before the war, as well as of founding new schools.

Both the Foyers de Culture and the Volkshochschulen represented the non-residential form of adult education. Oscar Guermontprez and Bob Schouten, however, were more interested in developing cooperation between the European institutions of residential adult education. For this task the

Foundation for the European Work of the Dutch Folk High Schools was founded in 1953.

Denis de Rougemont was a man of initiative. He offered the support of his Center for a new secretariat to be created to coordinate the activities of the Foyers de Culture to be founded in different countries. This idea did not catch on, however, and by the time of a meeting held near Geneva in May 1953, it had to be abandoned. The fundamental weakness of the idea was that in order for it to succeed, the basic units, meaning the community centers, would have to be founded first before western European cooperation between them could be established. It is quite understandable that an idea chiefly based on already existing adult education institutions turned out to be more viable.

Unrequested Help

The cause which de Rougemont wanted to advance was western European unification. It was such a lofty goal that a person inspired by it could not give up after one unsuccessful attempt. On the contrary, de Rougemont presented as a new idea that a forum for cooperation for European adult educators would be founded under the auspices of the ECC. Since we know that European adult educators had begun having ad hoc contacts across national boundaries in the 19th century, the idea of organized cooperation in the form of an international organization was most interesting. When we consider the ECC's own objective of promoting Europeanism, we must ask whether the motive for its activity was primarily the advancement of adult education or of European unification.

We saw above the role of the Americans in setting the European unification process in motion through the conditions attached to Marshall Aid. The American thread in the origins of the EBAE, in turn, comes from the ECC having used the European Youth Campaign (EYC) as a sponsor for a series of meetings which eventually led to the founding of the EBAE. The EYC, as was mentioned above, got most of its funding from the United States.

Today, we can be grateful for having the EBAE. Given that the purpose of the EBAE is to represent the non-governmental sector of adult education, however, the history of its origins is rather interesting. To begin, we must consider that the EBAE was founded by the ECC, rather than by adult educators themselves or their own organizations. And, above all, the ECC represented the incipient European unification aspirations, and thus the efforts of the governmental sector. As it happens, European integration has never

been a unanimously pursued goal for large popular movements; rather, the unification process has been driven by politicians and business interests.

The ECC's eagerness to establish a European adult education organization went so far that de Rougemont presented a fully worked-out plan of action for founding it. In fact, his plan led, albeit not quite in its original form, to the founding of the EBAE. I am not going to discuss the complex founding process in more detail here; let it suffice to say that it went through various stages over a span of more than ten years, and that is if we consider the process as having ended with the registration of the European Bureau of Adult Education in 1964 as an organization in accordance with Dutch law and with its headquarters situated in Holland.

In the EBAE, the adult educators of western Europe had been offered help they had not been asking for. The way it was born and its possible political ties were not apt to encourage all of the potential members to apply for membership. It is interesting here to look more closely at the guarded stance some of the member countries assumed towards the EBAE. This guardedness parallels the political reactions these same countries later displayed towards the EEC when it was founded by the Rome treaty in March 25, 1957.

The prominent EBAE enthusiasm displayed by the Benelux countries as well as by France and Germany was counterbalanced by a relatively marked British reticence. This difference escalated into an open disagreement when the Franco-Netherlandic contingent attempted to emphasize the EBAE's connection with the ECC, and the English felt this emphasis to be too political. Denmark was the bridge between the Nordic countries and the rest of western Europe at the time, since it was the only Nordic founding member of the EBAE, and for a long time its only Nordic member in general. Since Denmark wanted to be sensitive to the foreign policy orientations of its Nordic neighbors, it attempted to make the EBAE politically neutral in a way that would make it possible for the adult education organizations from the other Nordic countries to join. Among these other Nordic countries, Finland was more interested in the EBAE than was Sweden (compare with results in Finland and Sweden to their referendums on joining the European Union in 1994). Slowest to warm up to this 'organized' European orientation was Norway, where the majority still has not seen the EU as the framework to best serve the interests of Europe and the rest of the world.

Being Courted by the European Economic Community

The second UNESCO World Conference of Adult Education held in Montreal in 1960 had recommended, among other things, the promotion of adult education by increasing regional cooperation. For this purpose the EBAE, in cooperation with the European Economic Community (EEC), organized a one-week educational event in Brussels in December of 1961. The first part of the event was hosted (and sponsored) by the EEC. Participants came from the six countries that formed the EEC at that time (the Benelux-countries, France, the Federal Republic of Germany, and Italy), and from Great Britain, Austria and the Nordic countries.

The overall theme for the event was the training of adult educators, and at least one interesting report about the proceedings remains. From Finland, two people participated: Paavo Kuosmanen, a high-ranking official from the National Board of General Education, who represented the Society of Culture and Education; and Aune Tuomikoski, an English teacher and noted author of textbooks. The latter wrote a review of the event. Its testimonial value is increased by the fact that it was written from the standpoint of an "outside" observer: in her own country, she had hardly anything to do with adult education, aside from the fact that her textbooks might have been used by adult educators. From the viewpoint of European unification, on the other hand, any Finn might well have been considered an "outsider" in the early 1960s. At that time, managing foreign relations with the Soviet Union was such a central issue of national survival that, despite centuries of Western European cultural ties, there was little attention left for any orientation towards western Europe.

The Finnish observer noted that the Brussels discussions revealed that the EEC had maintained contact with the EBAE for some time. The purpose of the event in question was the EEC's wish to inform representatives from adult education circles about its achievements, its present situation, and its future outlook. Special emphasis was placed on charting the potential adult education had in advancing European integration. One presentation was precisely about the possible forms of cooperation between the EEC and organizations of liberal adult education. According to the Finnish observer, this "courting" by the EEC contained the following elements:

The EEC wished that adult educators would make it a part of their work to present accurate and up-to-date

information about the goals and activities of large international organizations such as the U.N., EEC, and EFTA. For example, the process of adopting common agricultural and labor policies would offer adult educators of the EEC countries important work in spreading information and preparing people for change. Adult educators could engage in important preventive work in combatting the dangers brought about by rapidly emerging nationalist zeal which could be the result of sudden political instability preceding integration.

Adult educators were not asked to become active supporters of integration without a reward, however. According to Aune Tuomikoski, there was a carrot: "The possibility was raised that the European University being planned by the European Atomic Energy Community EURATOM would include adult education in its curriculum." In her summary of the Brussels event, hosted by the EEC, our reporter noted that many of the participants had expressed a wish that "the EEC would continue to address information to adult educators." However, the summary continued: "There were others who felt that the tasks suggested by the EEC were not in concordance with the nature and purpose of adult education.

The EBAE leadership highly appreciated the study visit to the European Communities and the ensuing seminar. It published a detailed 99-page report on the visit and seminar as a special issue of *Notes & Studies*. However, not a word was reported of those opinions that questioned the ethical basis of mixing adult education and politics and the proposals suggesting the use of adult education to promote the unification process of Europe. Probably, the desirable end justified the means in the minds of the Bureau's leadership.

Although it would be interesting, it is not possible here to discuss the various traditions of liberal adult education of countries represented in the seminar in Brussels. From the standpoint of liberal adult education traditions in Finland, however, the hesitation felt towards the EEC's "engagement proposal of December, 1961," was understandable. According to those traditions, liberal adult education cannot be used as a vehicle for spreading political, religious, or other doctrines. These traditions do not, of course, prevent political, religious, or other organizations from offering education adhering to their values and goals to those who have already chosen their ideology, since those people would not be "converted" under the cover of education anymore. It is possible that those

who felt reluctance about the proposal by the EEC thought likewise.

The Rendsburg Conference Produces a Far-Reaching Idea

Article 2. of the constitution of the EBAE reads as follows:

"The Bureau, an independent body established on the initiative of the European Centre of Culture, proposes to pursue its own work in the general spirit of the aims defined in article 3 of the Constitution of the E.C.C. Its registered office is at the E.C.C. but its executive office may eventually be elsewhere."

This article raises a question of the organization's independence if its aims were tied to the constitution of another. This strong link is understandable because it was impossible to break all contacts with the E.C.C. Disappointed that the Bureau remained uncommitted, as early as 1953 a representative of the European Youth Campaign had noted that the Campaign had a hard time supporting an organization "whose European intentions were so weakly formulated." The concession in Article 2 must have been necessary to avoid having the E.C.C. turn its back on the Bureau as well.

Later, in the early 1960s, the "European intentions" of the EBAE became more focused, however. The joint meeting with the representatives of the EEC described above, for instance, already reflects a certain kind of more active approach. It might also no longer be paradoxical but rather a given that we would find ourselves unable to ignore a certain American influence when we study how the EBAE began to promote European ideals and European unification.

Starting in 1951, representatives of European Folk High Schools and other Residential Adult Colleges had met in annual conferences to develop their work. For the 1957 conference, it was decided to invite Americans as well. This conference, which was held in Bergen, the Netherlands, was sponsored by the EBAE and the Adult Education Association of the United States. Five years later, the European-American conference held in Rendsburg Folk High School in the Federal Republic of Germany produced a far-reaching idea. According to sources: "Some Americans and Canadians asked, if it would not be possible to make the advantages of Residential Adult Education directly subservient to international cooperation."

Those who made the initiative backed it by referring to the fact that every year thousands of Americans and Canadians visited Europe. In an educational sense, their situation was no better than that of a regular tourist; there was no way to get in touch with the Europeans in a genuine and meaningful way. Neither was it possible to get to know European culture and world view from a deeper perspective. The question raised by these American and Canadian participants was whether "Folk High Schools and other educational centres could lend a helping hand to this experiment" of establishing more intense European-American contacts.

According to available sources, the guests from North America approached their idea pragmatically. They willingly admitted that it would take money to realize it, and promised on their part to explore potential funding sources in their own countries. The Europeans, in turn, noted that they themselves did not have educational institutions of the kind that would facilitate the sort of cultural exchange and educational activity their North American colleagues were proposing. The Europeans also acknowledged that realizing the idea would require some form of financial support. From the beginning, their highest hopes were attached to the European Cultural Foundation.

In November, 1962, a few months after the Rensburg Conference, the General Assembly of the EBAE was held in Haus Buchenried, West Germany. The fact that the meeting itself is never the main event of the General Assembly gatherings does not lessen its value and importance. Indeed, compared to the educational event arranged in conjunction with it, the General Assembly has always lasted a relatively short time. In Buchenried as well, it was the accompanying seminar that offered one working group an excellent opportunity to critically review the idea that with much enthusiasm and perhaps less realism had been proposed in Rensburg. In its report, the working group, led by Harald Eng-berg Pedersen, Vice President of the EBAE and a Danish FHS professional, announced that the European Cultural Foundation had tentatively agreed to provide financial support to the Meeting Europe venture. The working group gave its unqualified support to the basic idea of arranging a series of courses and suggested that the EBAE's secretariat should, without delay, begin to search for suitable Folk High Schools to arrange the courses and to print brochures about them. The working group also recommended a more conservative start to the project than the 10-12 annual courses originally suggested by the Rensburg initiative. It was planned that the project should materialize as a pilot program

in 1963, and it was deemed more practical to plan a fuller program for the following year (1964).

After the Rensburg Conference and the EBAE General Assembly, there were two ideas to be considered. One was the American idea aimed at establishing more intense European-American educational contacts in the residential settings offered by the folk high schools and other equivalent centres. The second idea was still in the planning stages and unclear. Although the EBAE leadership had already decided to launch a pilot program, it was still unable to clarify educational goals for the courses. The first concrete version of the basic course idea appeared in a brochure advertising the 1963 pilot courses.

An Early Program for Promoting European Citizenship

Among the projects intended to support unification, the "Meeting Europe" course series which was carried out in 1963-1970 was the largest. It consisted of 44 international summer courses, each 7-10 days long, with topics advancing European awareness and unification. A total of 9 countries (Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, the Federal Republic of Germany, England, the Netherlands, and Sweden) joined the Meeting Europe program. These 44 courses were held at residential folk high schools and other residential centres and were attended by a total of some 1,200 adult participants.

Keeping in mind that through all of these years the Bureau was suffering from insufficient financial resources, it is interesting to note that it nevertheless managed to carry out the organization of these courses. In addition to the usual expenses, the Bureau was even able to sponsor travel expenses for the course participants to a notable extent. From various sources, the Bureau managed to gather over 132,000 Dutch guilders to sponsor the courses. When we note that this sum is equal to the Bureau's three yearly budgets for the same period of 1963-1970, we realize that the course series was in a class of its own as a special project given the highest priority.

Who, then, was interested in sponsoring the "Meeting Europe" courses? Two sponsors were significant. First was the European Cultural Foundation, whose work would be forwarded by sponsoring these courses; over the years it contributed a total of 81,000 Dutch guilders, amounting to approximately 62% of the total sponsored funds. The Prince Bernhard Foundation, which was founded during the war in 1940 and operated under the auspices of the Dutch Royal

Family, in turn gave approximately 47,000 Dutch guilders, or just under 36% of the total outside financial support. This foundation primarily sponsored Dutch undertakings, but especially when it came to international activities, it did not draw the line too carefully. The fact that the EBAE organized the courses made them sufficiently Dutch. To some extent, this situation strengthened the image of the EBAE as a "Dutch institution." The fact that the EBAE based its existence largely on the gracious support of the Dutch government contributed to this image even more. Pleas to the effect that member organizations would assume more responsibility for supporting the Bureau were received with deaf ears. Several appeals to this effect were made, the most authoritative probably being the one forwarded by Mr. L.B. van Ommen, Director of Youth Welfare, Adult Education and Sport in the [Dutch] Ministry of Cultural Affairs, at the 20th Anniversary Meeting of the EBAE.

The "Meeting Europe" courses were an early--perhaps even the earliest--multinational program designed to promote European Citizenship. Their historical pioneering value can only now be fully appreciated, when the European Union holds European Citizenship as one of the central priorities of the educational and cultural programs it funds.

Why, then, were the courses not continued? First of all we must note that the sponsorship for the courses dried out. Perhaps it was assessed that the courses, nevertheless, were not an effective enough means for promoting international understanding and European ideals among the "common" people, since the leaders of the nations still had a long way to go until Europe could experience real detente. On the other hand, we must realize that the "Meeting Europe" courses were a demanding task for the small secretariat of the Bureau, even if funding could have been found to continue with them. As a positive consequence of the courses, however, the Bureau staff grew. That staff we are vividly reminded of by Willem Bax, who entered the Bureau's service during the final stages of the course series. For many of us, he is one of the positive manifestations of the kind of Europeanism adult education should try to foster.