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A Realistic Scepticism:

Raymond Aron's Perspective on the European Construction

Abstract

Since the very beginning of the experiment of European integration, Raymond Aron developed an interest for the idea of a united Europe, which led him to write extensively and continuously on the issue, especially for the wider public. The chapter investigates Aron's attitude towards European integration, through a critical analysis of primary sources, in order to problematise the interpretations recently offered by scholars working on Europeanism. The evidence offered supports the argument that, compared to Jean Monnet's federalism and to Charles de Gaulle's nationalism, Aron's perspective presents original traits. Notwithstanding his belief in the need that European states ought to create a framework for enhancing cooperation in crucial sectors (trade, security) which could lead to a certain degree of political integration, Aron was not convinced that this process would eventually produce a federation. Furthermore, he thought that further integration ought to be pursued with the active involvement of European peoples, together with the reconciliation with Germany and its inclusion within an anti-Soviet Atlantic alliance. The conclusion is that, as far as Europe is concerned, his position cannot be simplistically labelled as Europeanist or anti-Europeanist. Rather, it might be described as a realistic scepticism.

Introduction

«I would have hoped that a united Europe, as Monnet conceived it, might be possible. But I didn't believe very strongly in the possibility. I've always preserved a strain of Lorraine patriotism. So, I leaned towards one side or the other, according to circumstances – but always remaining favorable to a kind of unification of Europe, for which I worked hard, both before and after the RPF. However, I was skeptical about the possibility of effacing a thousand years of national history. France had been to such a degree the European nation *par excellence* (...). But I passionately hoped for a reconciliation with Germany and close cooperation with it. And, basically, we have probably obtained what was possible and what is, today, a reality for the young people of France and Germany: they belong to the same civilization. Frontiers started to lose their meaning. It's absolutely not what Monnet dreamed of. It's probably closer to what General de Gaulle had in mind. It was the historic probability».¹

With these words, Raymond Aron explained his attitude towards the experiment of European integration, to which he looked at as a “committed observer”, from two different perspectives – as a

¹ Raymond Aron, *Thinking politically. A liberal in the age of ideology* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 1997, or. ed. 1983), p. 140.

scholar based at Sorbonne University and at the Collège de France and as a commentator for the daily newspapers *Combat* and *Le Figaro* and for the weekly magazine *L'Express*. After the end of World War II, Aron carefully monitored the great cultural, political and institutional transformations which were taking place in different regions of the world.² His attitude regarding European affairs deserves special attention: a staunch supporter of a united Europe, but in the deepest part of his soul he considered himself a Frenchman, with strong Lorraine roots. At first glance, Aron's words seem to suggest a pessimistic vision of the project of European integration, resembling Charles de Gaulle's anti-Europeanism and very far away from Jean Monnet's enthusiastic Europeanism. However, as we will argue throughout the article, Aron's view on Europe is much more nuanced and organic: his original vision, skeptical and pragmatic at the same time, might be summarised with the formula "neither with Monnet, nor with de Gaulle". Our argument, in brief, is that, though Aron did not share the federalist ideal of a supranational European entity advanced by Monnet, his position was incompatible with the Gaullist vision of a Europe "from the Atlantic to the Urals", which he deemed unattainable at a time when the European continent was divided in half by the Iron Curtain. The critical analysis of Aron's main writings on Europe that we are presenting in the following pages – conducted from a historical-political perspective – will show that he was critical towards both visions and it will help to sketch the contours of his own original vision on Europe. Aron thought that both Monnet's federalism and de Gaulle's nationalism produced misleading myths; moreover, both perspectives hampered the development of a clear understanding of the role that Western Europe could and ought to play in post-1945 world politics. On the one hand, Monnet's vision did not assign any significant political function to national states, which Aron considered as the main actors of politics³ and the main *loci* for citizenship⁴; on the other hand, de Gaulle's perspective tended to

² For an overview on Aron's reflection on international affairs, see Thomas Meszaros, Antony Dabila, 'Raymond Aron's heritage for the International Relations discipline: the French school of sociological liberalism', in Olivier Schmitt (ed.), (Abingdon – New York: Routledge, 2018), pp. 142-162; Francesco Raschi, 'Raymond Aron: Peace and War. A Sociological Account of International Relations', in Filippo Andreatta (ed.), *Classic Works in International Relations* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2017), pp. 105-125. For a concise and influential discussion on Aron's perspective on international politics see Stanley Hoffman, 'Raymond Aron and the Theory of International Relations', *International Studies Quarterly*, 29 (1), March 1985: 13-27. For an interpretation of Aron's heritage for contemporary liberal political thought, see Iain Stewart, *Raymond Aron and liberal thought in the twentieth century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020). See also Jean-Fabien Spitz, 'Raymond Aron and the tradition of political moderation in France', in Raf Geenens, Helena Rosenblatt (eds), *French liberalism from Montesquieu to the present day* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 271-290.

³ Raymond Aron, *France Steadfast and Changing. The Fourth to the Fifth Republic* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1960, or. ed. 1959). See also G. de Ligio (dir), *Raymond Aron, penseur de l'Europe et de la Nation*, Petre Lang, Bern-Bruxelles-Frankfurt am Main-New York-Oxford, 2012. See also Id., 'Sulla Nazione. Fine o inizio dell'era delle nazioni' (1979), in Id., *Il destino delle nazioni. L'avvenire dell'Europa*, edited by Giulio De Ligio and Alessandro Campi (Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino, 2013), 179-216. The essay has only been published in its Italian translation; the original typewritten document can be found at CESPRA (Centre d'études sociologiques et politiques Raymond Aron), Archives Raymond Aron, Paris.

⁴ Raymond Aron, 'Is multinational citizenship possible?', *Social Research*, 41 (4), Winter 1974: 638-656.

transcend – simplistically and mistakenly – the basic schemes of the Cold War, which Aron saw as unavoidable historical constraints.

Raymond Aron was – and considered himself as – a truly European scholar and intellectual. Since the 1930s, when he conducted his studies in Germany, up until the post-1945 period, one of his main objectives as a public figure has been to promote the reconciliation between France and Germany.⁵ In performing his role of commentator of contemporary international politics, he wrote extensively – in newspapers, magazines and essays – on Europe in general and especially on the issue of European integration. Joël Mouric noticed that Aron's interest on Europe was significant and persistent: Aron wrote on the cultural and political aspects of Europe continuously, from the very start of his academic career to the last interventions as a public intellectual⁶. The number of pages where Aron faces European issues is outstanding. Though collecting Aron's thoughts on Europe is not a difficult task, contextualising and understanding them within a clear and coherent theoretical framework – which is the ultimate objective of this article – is challenging.

Before proceeding with the analysis, a *caveat* is in order: in Aron's work there is no clear-cut stance pro or contra Europe. This is not surprising, since Aron's preference for sober and disenchanted analysis resurfaces in all his writings. Aron's favoured analytical strategy is grounded on systematic doubt, which allows him to critically question well-established theoretical positions and to resist any ideological attempt at trivializing arguments, in political as well as in intellectual debates. So, the same effort for achieving 'intellectual hygiene' which characterises Aron's positions on politics in general can be found in his speculation on European issues.⁷ This explains why in his writings one cannot find any enthusiastic statement in favour or against the European experiment; his contribution to the debate consists of prudent, realistic and often sceptical analyses.⁸ Of course, Aron's

⁵ For instance, see Raymond Aron, "Discours à des étudiants allemands sur l'avenir de l'Europe", *La Table ronde*, no. 1, January 1948, pp. 63–86, republished in Id., *Politique française Articles 1944-1977* (Paris: Éditions de Fallois, 2016, Kindle edition). The article is based on Aron's intervention to a conference held in Munich in 1947. On Aron's intellectual biography, see Nicolas Baverez, *Raymond Aron: un moraliste au temps des ideologies* (Paris: Flammarion, 1993). On his political thought, see Brian C. Anderson, *Raymond Aron. The Recovery of the Political* (Lanham - Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 1997); see also Daniel J. Mahoney, *The Liberal Political Science of Raymond Aron*, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Lanham (Maryland), 1992.

⁶ Joël Mouric, 'Raymond Aron and the Idea of Europe', in *Raymond Aron and International Relations*, pp. 111-125. See also Id., *Raymond Aron et l'Europe* (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2013), p. 15. The first article mentioned here is Raymond Aron, Daniel Lagache, 'Ce que pense la jeunesse universitaire d'Europe', *Bibliothèque universelle et Revue de Genève*, décembre 1926: 789-804, while the last article is an opinion piece on the Euromissile crisis, published on the weekly magazine *L'Express*: Raymond Aron, 'Pershing, le test du courage européen', *L'Express*, 7-13 October 1983.

⁷ Claude Lévi-Strauss, 'Aron était un esprit droit', *Commentaire*, n. 28-29, Hiver 1985: 121-213.

⁸ On Aron's attitude towards realistic analyses as the main ingredient of any theory of international relations, see Raymond Aron, 'What is a Theory of International Relations?', *Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 21 (2), 1967, pp. 185-206. About the relationship between Aron's realistic theorising and (classical as well as neo-versions of) realism, see Pierre

disenchanted objectivity is a trait that has attracted many critiques: since in his works he highlighted the pros and cons of any alternative path for restoring a European equilibrium, he displeased the advocates of all clear-cut solutions (such as Monnet's federalism and de Gaulle's nationalism). In his memoirs, Aron smugly looks back on the reproaches of some Europeanist friends who accused him of 'coldness' towards the progressive steps of European integration.⁹ On the other hand, Gaullist enemies of projects of European unification repeatedly blamed him for his Europeanism, one of the reasons which led to his estrangement from the RPF.

Considering Aron's disenchanted and pragmatic perspective on politics in general, it is not surprising that his analyses on Europe led to different and sometimes clashing interpretations. Among his readers, some consider him a passionate supporter of European integration, while others find in his writings evidence of a clear and deep Euroscepticism. For instance, Georges-Henri Soutou argues that Aron has been an advocate of European integration from the very start of the process, pace to the misleading image of an 'Atlanticist' champion that has been ascribed to him by several of his commentators.¹⁰ According to Soutou, Aron was Europeanist, rather than Atlanticist; the same opinion is shared by Robert Frank, who affirms that Aron was a committed Europeanist since the early 1930s, his primary motivation being the necessity of reconciling France and Germany, not an Atlanticist anti-communist stance.¹¹ On the contrary, Pierre Kende finds Aron's perspective clearly Eurosceptic.¹² In his study on Aron's political thought, Stephen Launay advances an interpretation similar to Kende's, claiming that Aron's Europeanism was never in line with federalist positions, since it assumed a primary role for nation-states within the international context. Some authors propose more nuanced interpretations of the development of Aron's Europeanism. For instance, Olivier de Lapparent considers Aron the European pedagogue par excellence, an intellectual who struggles for European civilization, transcending partisan (ideological) positions.¹³ Like Lapparent, Joël Mouric investigates Aron's Europeanism, shedding light on the ambivalence of his thought,¹⁴ oscillating between a vague and unspecified commitment to the European project and a realist

Hassner, 'Raymond Aron: Too Realistic to Be a Realist?', *Constellations*, 14 (4), 2007, pp. 498-505, especially his discussion at pp. 500-501.

⁹ Aron recalls several examples of the reproaches that he got from his Europeanist colleagues and friends. See Raymond Aron, *Memoirs. Fifty Years of Political Reflection* (New York – London: Holmes & Meier, 1990).

¹⁰ See Georges-Henri Soutou, 'Introduction', in Raymond Aron, *Les articles du Figaro. Tome I. La Guerre froide, 1947-1955* (Paris: Éditions de Fallois, 1990), pp. 11-27, p. 26.

¹¹ See Robert Frank, *Les contretemps de l'aventure européenne*, «Vingtième Siècle. Revue d'Histoire», n. 60, octobre-décembre 1998: 96-97.

¹² Pierre Kende, *L'euroscepticisme de Raymond Aron*, in AA.VV., *Raymond Aron et la liberté politique* (Paris: Éditions de Fallois, 2002) pp. 213-219.

¹³ Stephen Launay, *La pensée politique de Raymond Aron*, Paris, PUF, 1995, pp. 224-230.

¹⁴ Mouric, *Raymond Aron et l'Europe*.

scepticism towards supranational and federalist solutions.¹⁵ As the following sections will illustrate, interpreting Aron's position on European integration through the support/opposition dyad might be misleading: though he showed his support for the idea of European unity, all the while he exposed the illusions and weaknesses undermining the European supranational experiment.¹⁶

Aron's commitment to European unity

Since the aftermath of WWII, Aron favoured the idea of a united Europe, considering it as the commitment to a form of civilisation.¹⁷ Rather than as a 'tangible political reality', Aron envisioned Europe as an 'abstract notion': although throughout the centuries European nations had retained the desire for a superior and unitary entity, this had never been realised. The principle of European communion, according to Aron, had never been pursued through conscious and coherent actions. Nonetheless, Europe existed as a civilisation, with several distinctive characteristics: science, (a common) history, freedom.¹⁸ The European civilisation, after a devastating war, was at a crossroads. European peoples might head towards Sovietisation, Americanisation or neutrality. However, Aron disliked both the first and the second solution – on the one hand, he considered communism 'not a dream, but a nightmare'; on the other hand, he was not convinced, especially in the first post-war years, that the American model was a fitting solution for European nations. Therefore, he preferred the third solution, though he was aware of the shortcomings of a policy of neutrality. Aron believed that creating a 'European Europe' was an unattainable endeavour, since any form of 'European patriotism' was lacking; however, even if it was doomed to remain a multinational entity, Europe ought to choose the path of neutrality, to become "a land of peace, thanks to its political semi-impotence", a land of prosperity and a bridge between the two superpowers. In Aron's opinion, the main mission was for Europe to build a people-oriented, human society – a viable alternative to the Soviet and American models of mass society –, capable of retaining a sparkle of the 'eternal liberalism' which had enlightened European history. Aron explained his idea that Europe is a liberal civilisation in a conference held in 1947: "Today intellectuals, citizens, politicians as well as the

¹⁵ Olivier de Lapparent, *Raymond Aron et l'Europe: itinéraire d'un Européen dans le siècle* (Bern – New York: Lang, 2010), p. 167.

¹⁶ See Giulio De Ligio, 'Nature et destin des nations: Aron et la forme politique de l'Europe', in G. de Ligio (ed.), *Raymond Aron, penseur de l'Europe et de la Nation*, Petre Lang, Bern-Bruxelles-Frankfurt am Main-New York-Oxford, 2012, pp. 17.33.

¹⁷ See Raymond Aron, *The Century of Total War* (London: Derek Verschayle, 1954, or. ed. 1951), pp. 312-313. Here Aron defines Europe as a "historical community", having in common only a vague sentiment of belonging to a common civilization.

¹⁸ Raymond Aron, *Perspective sur l'avenir de l'Europe*, 26/27 novembre 1946, unpublished, NAF 28060 (Boîtes 1-238), Bibliothèque nationale de France - Département des manuscrits.

popular masses can vaguely feel that a new era of European history is about to start, or rather that it ought to start. Everybody feels that European unity, whose form is still to be envisaged, is a necessity of the present time”.¹⁹ So, European unity was a compelled way to go after the catastrophe of WWII, ‘the only chance of recovery’ for the old continent.²⁰ Two systemic factors – the (alleged) collapse of the nation-state as well as the military and diplomatic-strategic dominance of the two superpowers, inspired not by nationalist, but rather by universalist and imperialist political principles²¹ – made the European unification an urgent necessity, although its institutional shape was at the time yet to determine. Besides, Aron’s account of Europeanism was formulated as an intellectual stance or as a political ideal, not as a political project ready to be implemented.

After the launch of the Marshall Plan during the Spring of 1947, Aron’s reflection on Europeanism shifted towards a firm Atlanticist position.²² As he wrote in an essay published in 1957, Europe’s main spiritual contribution to human history was to carry on liberal civilisation, the common heritage of the European continent and its utmost cultural expression: “anyone who embraces the values of the liberal civilisation cannot be doubtful about the necessity of a close cooperation among the European countries lying to the West of the Iron Curtain”.²³ Aron argued that, in order to defend the liberal civilisation, Europe had to realise an Atlantic alliance. This is not surprising, since in the aftermath of WWII any neutralist temptation was seen with discomfort and suspicion by European intellectuals: in times of civil war, like in times of religious wars, no neutrality is allowed.²⁴ Aron was convinced that the USSR and the US were not two sides of the same coin: their political regimes and their effects could not be considered on the same level. Therefore, Europeanism could not take an equidistant stance, but it needed to be firmly Atlanticist: “When we face a military and religious sect, which rigidly applies the principle ‘whoever is not with me is against me’, there are only two honourable attitudes: total acceptance or absolute rejection. There are no half measures”.²⁵ Since 1948 Europeanism and Atlanticism, although never completely confused, are strictly interconnected in Aron’s reflection on international relations. Therefore, Aron considered the acceptance of the Marshall Plan as the only viable path for Europe – and for France – towards economic recovery; at

¹⁹ Raymond Aron, ‘Y-a-t-il une civilisation européenne?’, *Semaines étudiante internationales*, Savennières, 5 août 1947, unpublished, NAF 28060 (Boîtes 1-238), Bibliothèque nationale de France - Département des manuscrits.

²⁰ *Ibidem*.

²¹ Raymond Aron, *L’Âge des empires et l’avenir de la France* (Paris: Défense de la France, 1945), in Id., *Chronique de guerre. La France Libre, 1940-1945* (Paris, Gallimard, 1990), pp. 975-985.

²² See Raymond Aron, ‘La fin des illusions’, *Le Figaro*, 5 juillet 1947, in Id., *Les articles du Figaro. Tome I*, pp. 33-36.

²³ Raymond Aron, *A proposito dell’unità dell’Europa: la dialettica del politico e dell’economico* (1957), in Id., *Il destino delle nazioni*, p. 93. The text, unpublished in French, was pronounced by Aron during a conference on the problems of European integration that took place in Basel on the 22nd of November of 1956.

²⁴ Raymond Aron, ‘The Great Schism, 1947-1956’, in Id., *Thinking politically*, pp. 117-153, p. 9. About Aron’s defense of Atlanticism vis-à-vis neutralist stances, see Baverez, *Raymond Aron*, pp. 250-255.

²⁵ Aron, ‘The Great Schism’, p. 305.

the same time, the Marshall Plan was the most effective instrument available for speeding up the European common action, since it compelled European governments to find an agreement on the allocation of the capital lent by the US.²⁶ The common effort needed for the recovery had an explicit anti-totalitarian charge. Notwithstanding its humanistic inspiration – vis-à-vis the anti-humanistic vision of Nazism –, The Marxist spirit of Soviet communism could not be compatible with the European mission: “Max Weber said: without a minimum of human rights we are no longer able to live our lives. I think that totalitarianism deprives people of this minimum”.²⁷ This minimum of human rights consists of a basic conception of liberalism, which needs to be safeguarded as the highest result of European civilisation: “On the other hand, I believe that a simple, deep idea of liberalism which manifests itself through the desire for personal security and the respect for the fundamental rights of individuals, has taken roots in Western Europe”.²⁸

Aron and Monnet’s Europeanism

As we showed in the preceding section, Aron argued that European liberalism was only compatible with a project of European unity to be realised within the framework of the Atlantic alliance. For the sake of the present discussion, it is necessary to investigate the relationship between Aron’s and Monnet’s formulations of Europeanism.

First of all, one clarification is in order: as Aron notices in his *Memoirs*, the Schuman Declaration – an upgrade of the Monnet Plan, that had driven the French economic reconstruction policy from 1946 to 1950, for the six countries of the European Coal and Steel Community – was not intended for the defence of Western Europe vis-à-vis the Soviet threat. As a matter of fact, the Schuman-Monnet vision was publicly announced on the 9th of May of 1950, before the outburst of the Korean war. Somehow, according to Aron’s interpretation, Monnet had in mind to create a European interposition entity between the US and the USSR: “building Europe should be a way to contain the two great powers, rather than a way to strengthen one or the other”.²⁹ Furthermore, Aron was convinced that, at first, Monnet did not have in mind to link European unity and German rearmament; the combination of the two processes resulted from contingent circumstances rather than from a strategic vision.³⁰ In general, however, Aron’s objections to Monnet’s ideas about European unity came from two main

²⁶ Aron, *Memoirs*, p. 168.

²⁷ Aron, “Discours à des étudiants allemands sur l’avenir de l’Europe”, Kindle position 77145-77146.

²⁸ *Ibidem*, Kindle position 77174-77176.

²⁹ Aron, *Memoirs*, pp. 281-282.

³⁰ *Ibidem*.

concerns: on the one hand, the method proposed for achieving unity; on the other hand, the ultimate goal of the unification process, namely a European federation (the United States of Europe).

The Schuman-Monnet project envisaged the creation of a common authority in charge of controlling the production of coal and steel in the French and German border regions, within the framework of an international organisation open to other countries – after the declaration of 1950, four States were involved, in addition to France and West Germany: Belgium, Italy, Luxemburg and the Netherlands. The creation of this framework for cooperation was the first step towards a broader integration process, with a supranational character. Since its very beginning, Aron understood the European Coal and Steel Community as an experiment of supranational integration, rather than as a scheme of intergovernmental cooperation.

One of the reasons which explain Aron's favour towards the Schuman Declaration is that he saw in it a genuine intention to overcome the French-German antagonism. Instead of continuing to take precautions against the danger of a revived, aggressive German nationalism, Monnet proposed a new, forward-looking approach: France – and Western Europe – should pursue a real reconciliation with Germany.³¹ What Aron found less convincing in the Schuman Declaration, as Mouric points out, is the 'neutralist' stance, very influential among French intellectuals, which advocated the European community as a chance to get rid of US tutelage.³² On the contrary, Aron was convinced that the issue of European integration could not be detached from the alliance with the US.³³ While Monnet and Schuman emphasised the economic benefits of the cooperative management of coal and steel resources, Aron believed that the crucial aspect of the ECSC project was its political dimension, especially the proposed dialogue with the Federal Republic of Germany.³⁴ Moreover, the construction of an area of economic prosperity in Western Europe – made possible by the synergic processes set in motion by the Marshall Plan, the Schuman Declaration and the North Atlantic Treaty – could be a powerful deterrent to any soviet temptation of military attacking the Old continent. Aron's insistence on the priority of the political (and geopolitical) dimension of European integration over its economical dimension reveals the main reason behind his long-lasting disagreement with the advocates of European federalism. In 1950, it was clear that Western Europe's need for US economic assistance and cooperation was doomed to be an enduring feature of the new international system;³⁵ however, Aron claimed that, especially after the Korean war, it was evident that the crucial problem

³¹ Raymond Aron, 'L'initiative française', *Le Figaro*, 11 mai 1950, in Id., *Les Articles du Figaro. Tome I*, pp. 398-401.

³² Mouric, *Raymond Aron et l'Europe*, pp. 179 ff.

³³ Raymond Aron, 'Europe et États-Unis', *Le Figaro*, 3 juin 1950, in Id., *Les Articles du Figaro. Tome I*, pp. 408-411.

³⁴ Raymond Aron, 'Le pool industriel franco-allemand. II. L'autorité internationale', *Le Figaro*, 7 juin 1950, in Id., *Les Articles du Figaro. Tome I*, pp. 412-421.

³⁵ Aron, *The Century of Total War*, p. 232.

for Europe was the common defence from the soviet threat, which could not be realised without the contribution of West Germany: “Western Europe needs a military force and the reconciliation between France and Germany is necessary in order to create it (...); the European idea is useless, pointless, if it does not support this dialogue”.³⁶ So, the sector where Europe could achieve a significant progress was that of military affairs: this idea was at the core of the Pleven Plan – a proposal for a Western European defence architecture presented in 1950 by the French Prime Minister, where the debt towards Monnet’s receipt for European integration was evident. Aron believed that European political institutions could only arise after the creation of a common defence system: “the High Command will come before the Ministry of Defence”.³⁷ Nevertheless, Aron was sceptic about the practicability of these desirable developments, since the idea of a European military union seemed yet “dangerously revolutionary”. Although European nation states were unable to effectively guarantee their defence by working autonomously, their peoples’ feelings did not change “at the pace of industrial progress”. Nationalist passions persisted, and to replace them people would choose ideological passions, rather than Europeanist patriotism. Therefore, Aron thought that the European idea risked to remain an empty shell, since it lacked both the charm of messianic creeds and the concreteness of long-established citizenship bonds. “It was the invention of some intellectuals” – an invention that reason might find desirable, even if it could not awaken popular passions, which are crucial for the realisation of far-reaching political projects.³⁸ Aron was not indifferent towards the idea of building “an improved, cohesive Europe, aware of its unitary mission”³⁹; however, he believed that realising a common European army was like “building a new world”, since asking Belgian, Dutch, German and Italian to overcome centuries of history was a tremendous enterprise. Making real the abstract notion of Europe was a very complex task, that required to refute ideological schemes and to rely on the force of law: “the ideologue pulls back and here comes the jurist – the most formidable among jurists, that is, the expert of constitutional law”.⁴⁰

While participating to the debate about the ECD, Aron tried to soften up the discussion’s ideological character, which was especially striking in France. He was convinced of the opportunity to reconcile with the Germans as well as of the need to rearm the German Federal Republic, but he thought that these goals should not necessarily lead to the construction of a federation of the six members of the ECSC. It was necessary and urgent to jointly manage military affairs; also, it was inevitable and

³⁶ Ivi, p. 257.

³⁷ Ivi, p. 258.

³⁸ Ivi, p. 259.

³⁹ Raymond Aron, ‘L’armée européenne : un pari sur l’avenir qu’on peut refuser’, *Le Figaro*, 17 septembre 1951, in Id., *Les Articles du Figaro. Tome I*, pp. 729-732.

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*.

beneficial to tear down anachronistic economic barriers; nonetheless, Aron did not think that this required any sovereignty transfers and new constitutional designs. Those processes would have demanded a higher legitimacy than that possessed by an agreement realised by governmental officers, a strong popular consensus which could only emerge from a transnational, European public debate.⁴¹ Like de Gaulle, Aron believed that the cooperation among the six ECSC members could only be intergovernmental; while he considered Monnet's proposal of a closer military and economic collaboration a deceiving idea.⁴² Regarding the European army, Aron blamed federalists because of their imprudence and he argued that, while aiming at the federation as the ultimate goal of the process, they ought to envisage gradual mechanisms for achieving military integration in order to avoid that national public opinions strongly attached to the political categories of the nation states opposed the unprecedented endeavour of a common army.⁴³

In general, Aron did not favour the functionalist method proposed by Monnet – that he named “deceitful federalism” or “clandestine federalism”⁴⁴ – and he deemed nonsensical to create a European army without an explicit agreement on the institutional model that could have supported it. Federalists had a deceitful intent: they aimed at artificially building a federation, while history shows that federal states usually have emerged through force, because of the decision of a defeater, or through popular consensus. Thus, before undertaking the path of integration, Europe needed to develop such a popular consensus and to put it to the test, forging a constitutional order and growing a new patriotic sentiment able to sustain it.⁴⁵ Claiming that the common market would give rise to a European federation, according to Aron, revealed the mistaken assumption at the basis of the federalists' reasoning on European integration, that is, that economy drives and embeds politics, and therefore that the fall of economic barriers entails the fall of political barriers. Clandestine federalism relied on a misleading hypothesis. Its advocates maintained that the system of obligations arising from the European institutions could soak in the existing nation states and their sovereignty, supplanting them once and for all. Aron thought instead that states were the main actors of world politics; he refuted the assumption that politics was subordinate to economics and criticised: “the illusion that economic and technological interdependence among the various factions of humanity

⁴¹ Raymond Aron, ‘Fédération européenne: Objectif ou mirage?’, *Le Figaro*, 24 septembre 1952, in Id., *Les Articles du Figaro. Tome I*, pp.899-901.

⁴² Raymond Aron, ‘Ce que peut être la fédération des Six’, *Le Figaro*, 4 décembre 1952, in Id., *Les Articles du Figaro. Tome I*, pp. 930-933.

⁴³ Raymond Aron, ‘De la sécurité à l’audace’, *Le Figaro*, 22-23 septembre 1951, in Id., *Les Articles du Figaro. Tome I*, pp. 733-735.

⁴⁴ Raymond Aron, *Peace and War* (Malabar, Fla: R.E. Krieger Pub. Co, 1981, or. ed. 1962), p. 747. Here Aron calls Monnet's vision “federalism without tears”. See also Raymond Aron, ‘The Crisis of the European Idea’, *Government and Opposition*, 17 (1), 1976, pp. 3-21, especially pp. 13-15.

⁴⁵ Aron, ‘Ce que peut être la fédération des Six’, p. 933.

has definitely devalued the fact of ‘political sovereignties’, the existence of distinct states which wish to be autonomous”. A superior European sovereignty might emerge, but only “on condition that peoples desire it and that the leaders act in accord with this desire, or again on condition that the leaders act with a view to federation and that the peoples consent to it”.⁴⁶

The worst mistake in Monnet’s federalist vision – Aron maintained – was its inability to clearly explain the political nature of Europe to the public opinions of the states involved in the process of integration: “My only guess is that people has been talking so much about Europe that eventually it has become unclear what Europe really is (...). I will start (...) with a political definition and I will argue that nobody wants the unity of Europe for essentially economic reasons. The European unity is first and foremost a matter of political will”.⁴⁷ Therefore, functionalists *à la* Monnet overestimated the role of economic interests and economic cooperation within a domain which was primarily political; moreover, they avoided to put their political vision to the test of public opinion’s approval.⁴⁸ Aron was convinced that mobilising European public opinion was a necessary step towards the realisation of European integration. Furthermore, he was never persuaded that the federation was the only institutional option for integrating Western European countries, notwithstanding the necessity of organising a common defence from the Soviet threat and the opportunity of realising a common market. So, we will show in the next section how Aron’s position drew near the confederal perspective *à la* de Gaulle, which stressed the importance of relying on intergovernmental cooperation for undertaking post-WWII reconstruction: “the cooperation among the Six could only be based on intergovernmental agreements”.⁴⁹

Aron and de Gaulle’s Euroscepticism

As is generally known, de Gaulle did not oppose the process of European integration as such; rather, he was against the idea of a European federation, i.e. the creation of supranational institutions that could progressively erode national sovereignty. He firmly believed that European integration could only progress as a project led by nation states, the main political actors on the world scene. It is worth pointing out that de Gaulle’s position towards European integration evolved during his long political

⁴⁶ Aron, *Peace and War*, p. 748.

⁴⁷ Raymond Aron, ‘L’Union Française et l’Europe’, in AA.VV., *L’unification économique de l’Europe* (Neuchâtel: Éditions de la Baconnière, 1957), pp. 9-33, quotation: pp. 9-10.

⁴⁸ Aron, ‘Ce que peut être la fédération des Six’, p. 933.

⁴⁹ *Ivi*, p. 932.

career.⁵⁰ Though we cannot retrace its development at length in this article, we will highlight the main differences between Aron's and de Gaulle's understandings of European integration, as they emerged during the critical junctures of the process which was theorised throughout the 1940s and launched with the Schuman Declaration.

In the first phase of European integration, from 1947 to 1951, Aron's and de Gaulle's positions could appear generally convergent, at a first glance. As a matter of fact, at the time Aron took an active part in the political life of the Gaullist party RPF (*Rassemblement du Peuple Français*). The main point of disagreement was the issue of the reconciliation with the Germans: while both de Gaulle and Aron recognised the necessity of restoring friendly relations between France and its "eternal enemies", the latter was much more inclined to consider the option of the reunification of the German people – though he was aware that this could only happen in the long term – and, since the beginning of the discussions about the future of the occupied German territories, he favoured the creation of the German Federal Republic. Since the end of the 1940s, Aron keenly approved Konrad Adenauer's pro-Western policies; on the contrary, de Gaulle was sceptical about the good will of the German leadership, because – as Aron put it – he used to read the Franco-German relation with his eyes turned to the past. The French President insisted on the need to pursue the dissolution of the Reich, and he maintained that an economically, politically and militarily powerful Germany would always be dangerous for Europe and especially for France. Unlike Aron, de Gaulle harshly criticised the agreement reached among the allied countries on February 1948, the very first step towards the establishment of the German Federal Republic. However, over the years the distance between Aron's and de Gaulle's positions on the German issue was progressively reduced: they both argued that the Korean war proved the urgent need of a German rearmament.⁵¹ Also, they advocated the economic and political reorganisation of Western Europe within the framework of an anti-Soviet alliance with the United States – this is not surprising, since Aron shared de Gaulle's worry that the Soviet troops were too close to the French border, deployed "at a distance of less than two stages of the Tour de France".

The main disagreements between Aron and de Gaulle arose at the beginning of the 1950s, with respect to the interpretation of the Europeanist projects. If we consider their philosophical understandings of history, Aron's was more compatible with de Gaulle's rather than with Monnet's. Both Aron and de Gaulle understood politics as an autonomous domain of human activity, which preceded economics,

⁵⁰ See Lucia Bonfreschi, *Raymond Aron e il gollismo, 1940-1969* (Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino, 2014). See also A. Moravcsik, 'Charles de Gaulle and Europe: The News Revisionism', *Journal of Cold War Studies* (2012), 14#1, pp. 53-77.

⁵¹ For instance, see Charles de Gaulle, *Discours et messages. Dans l'attente: février 1946- avril 1958* (Paris: Plon, 1970), pp. 305 ff.

and they thought that the state – even within the international context characterised by the “bellicose peace” – was not destined to sink into oblivion. Although contemporary history was a “universal history”,⁵² military affairs were characterised by two hegemonic powers, the US and the Soviet Union; the importance of the military dynamics during the Cold War showed that, in Europe as elsewhere, the state was the undisputed protagonist of world politics.⁵³ Even decades later, in 1974, Aron was inclined to rule out the possibility of having a multinational or supranational citizenship: since in order to define citizenship a certain form of patriotism – which allowed the overlapping of the roles played by the citizen and the soldier – was needed and nothing similar to patriotism had emerged from the European experiments of integration. In Aron’s opinion, citizens demand that the state respect human rights and they are justified to do so insofar as they fulfil specific obligations, primarily the homeland’s defence: “the citizen has the vocation to be a soldier”.⁵⁴

As we said before, the main controversy between Aron and de Gaulle concerned the European Community of Steel and Coal (ECSC) and the European Community of Defence (ECD). Aron appreciated the ECSC project – though he criticised some of its practical details – as he saw a great opportunity for realising the reconciliation between the French and German peoples, the first step to build a European system based on the equality of its members.⁵⁵ On the contrary, de Gaulle and the Gaullists worried that the ECSC and its High Authority might threaten French sovereignty to the advantage of “a technocratic, stateless and irresponsible Areopagus”.⁵⁶ The Gaullist scepticism emerged much more strongly about the ECD. As we showed in the preceding section, Aron was persuaded of the need to include West Germany in the efforts for the defence of Europe against the Soviets and he believed that in general the ECD might be a viable solution, although not a perfect one.⁵⁷ De Gaulle instead could not find any positive elements in the Pleven Plan;⁵⁸ he considered the foreign policy course of the French Fourth Republic and its support to the ECD outrageous, a threat to the defence as well as to the independence of France, or a dangerous attempt at separating the destiny of the French armed forces from the destiny of the nation state. Dispersing the French army in a multinational community of defence was a risky choice, because it could lead to the collapse of

⁵² Raymond Aron, *The Dawn of Universal History* (New York: Basic Books, 2002, or. ed. 1996).

⁵³ Aron, *Peace and War*, pp. 363-403.

⁵⁴ Aron, ‘Is Multinational Citizenship Possible?’.

⁵⁵ Raymond Aron, ‘Le pool industriel Franco-Allemand. I. Incertitudes techniques’ (Le Figaro, 6 juin 1950), ‘Le pool industriel Franco-Allemand. II. L’Autorité internationale’ (Le Figaro, 7 juin 1950), in Id., *Les Articles du Figaro. Tome I*, pp. 412-421.

⁵⁶ See Bonfreschi, *Raymond Aron e il gollismo*, p. 218.

⁵⁷ Raymond Aron, ‘À propos de la Communauté Européenne de Défense’, *Le Figaro*, 26-27 avril 1952, in Id., *Les Articles du Figaro. Tome I*, pp. 825-828.

⁵⁸ On Aron’s role during the debates on the ECD, see Bonfreschi, *Raymond Aron e il gollismo*, pp. 263-274.

the *Union Française*.⁵⁹ The worst possible outcome of this process, according to de Gaulle, was for France the loss of the status of great power.⁶⁰ Aron, like de Gaulle, thought that accepting German troops in a European army was a bet; however, he believed that it was worthwhile bet.⁶¹ For this reason, in his articles published on the *Figaro* Aron criticised the anti-ECD campaign launched by the Gaullists.⁶² He disapproved the almost explicit alliance established between communists and Gaullists against the European army: he believed that some actions undertaken by the leading figures of the RPF – such as Jacques Soustelle’s visit to Poland and the anti-ECD articles published by Michel Debré on the communist newspaper *L’Humanité* – might be counterproductive, since they risked to legitimise the French Communist Party as a defender of the French homeland and to provide (French and Soviet) communists with arguments to fuel their anti-Western and anti-American propaganda. Moreover, Aron maintained that the advocates of a rearmed Germany within the framework of a European confederation, a solution favoured by many Gaullists in the aftermath of the Second World War, were more in line with the promoters of the ECD than with the communists: “I think it is worthwhile to remember [to the Gaullists] that Western solidarity, today as in the past, offers the best chance to safeguard peace and national independence”.⁶³

During the debate about the ECD, Aron repeatedly expressed his doubts on the project and on its possible implications for the institutional development of the European process, but he always insisted on the necessity of a stable Western alliance with an anti-Soviet function, extended to the domain of military affairs. He deemed the Gaullist perspective especially unbearable because of its acceptance of an implicit agreement with the communist enemies for the sake of protecting an obsolete idea of sovereignty, which was no longer apt to secure French independence and security. From a strategic point of view, Aron claimed that the Gaullist policy of seeking a dialogue with the Soviet Union risked to undermine the security policy jointly undertaken by Western countries. After the rejection of the ECD by the French Parliament, the disagreement between Aron and de Gaulle resurfaced with respect to the decision to integrate the West German army within the NATO scheme of military cooperation, which was formalised with the London agreements signed on the 3rd of October of 1954. De Gaulle opposed this decision and he proposed that France could play the role of mediator between the two blocs, within a Europe extended from the Atlantic Ocean to the Urals

⁵⁹ Moreover, General de Gaulle criticised the idea of achieving European unity through the ECD and considered the latter a parody of the first. See Charles de Gaulle, *Lettres, notes et carnets - juin 1951-mai 1958* (Paris: Plon, 1985), p. 188.

⁶⁰ Ivi, pp. 527-576.

⁶¹ Raymond Aron, ‘L’armée européenne: un pari sur l’avenir qu’on ne peut refuser’, *Le Figaro*, 17 septembre 1951, in Id., *Les Articles du Figaro. Tome I*, pp. 729-732.

⁶² As Bonfreschi points out, Aron’s criticisms were addressed specifically to the other anti-ECD Gaullist party’s leaders, rather than to the General. See Bonfreschi, *Raymond Aron e il gollismo*, pp. 263 ff.

⁶³ See Raymond Aron, ‘Machiavel et Talleyrand’, *Le Figaro*, 4 février 1954; Id., ‘De l’indépendance française’, *Le Figaro*, 8 février 1954, in Id., *Les Articles du Figaro. Tome I*, pp. 1170-1176, quote p. 1170.

thanks to the *détente* in the relations with the Soviet Union realised through the French effort. While he avoided any reference to the General's words, Aron openly condemned this narrative, a misleading "myth" which mistook patriotism for "national vanity".⁶⁴

Aron kept a critical attitude towards the Gaullist *grand dessin* regarding European and international politics. Notwithstanding his perplexities on Monnet's functionalist path towards European integration, he was always rather supportive of the integration projects; on the contrary, de Gaulle was among its starker critics. By the early 1960s, the Gaullists fully developed their idea of a radically different Europe from that imagined by the advocates of European integration – a confederal entity led by France in cooperation with West Germany where the states were the only political bodies retaining legitimate authority as well as agency. The main goal of this proposal was to emancipate Europe from the US control;⁶⁵ however, Aron argued that de Gaulle's was unrealistic, since it was an indisputable fact that Europe needed the US to guarantee its own security.⁶⁶ In general, within the Gaullist vision laid a tension between two contradictory ideas, namely that of a Europe made by sovereign nations and that of a Europe willing to create a supranational union. This could be explained, according to Aron, with de Gaulle's double political personality: on the one hand, the General considered himself at the same time as the representative of "imperial France" and as the protector of "national France"; therefore, he attempted to combine two tasks into a challenging endeavour: to make Europe without "dissolving the nation states" and to do so he appealed to a myth with shaky foundations on the ground of political reality.⁶⁷ Aron worried that the Gaullist grand strategy for foreign policy, as far as Europe and the future of the Atlantic Alliance were concerned, might hamper the flourishing of the communitarian mood that Europe was forced to pursue.⁶⁸ De Gaulle refused to understand⁶⁹ the fact that "the military unity of the Atlantic Alliance is not less needed than the European construction".⁷⁰ To sum up, Aron's critique to de Gaulle's strategy focused

⁶⁴ Raymond Aron, 'Le prix de la solidarité contre une légende', *Le Figaro*, 6 janvier 1955, in Id., *Les Articles du Figaro. Tome I*, pp. 1344-1347.

⁶⁵ See Georges-Henri Soutou, *L'Alliance incertaine. Les rapports politico-stratégiques franco-allemands 1954-1996* (Paris: Fayard, 1996), especially pp. 190 e ss.

⁶⁶ Raymond Aron, 'L'alliance atlantique est conforme à la nature des choses', *Le Figaro*, 12 mars 1963, in Id., *Les Articles du Figaro. Tome II. La Coexistence, 1955-1965* (Paris: Éditions de Fallois, 1994), pp. 1160-1163.

⁶⁷ Raymond Aron, 'De Charles-Quint à Clémenceau', *Le Figaro*, 14-15 juillet 1962, in Id., *Les Articles du Figaro. Tome II*, pp. 1053-1055.

⁶⁸ Raymond Aron, 'Suite du dialogue avec Michel Debré. Diplomatie traditionnelle ou dépassement du nationalisme', *Le Figaro*, 14 novembre 1963, in Id., *Les Articles du Figaro. Tome II*, pp. 1277-1282.

⁶⁹ Raymond Aron, 'Le secret du Général', *Le Figaro*, 25 janvier 1963, in Id., *Les Articles du Figaro. Tome II*, pp. 1134-1138. Here Aron maintains that the General often expressed his harsh criticisms towards international institutions not (only) because of his beliefs, but mainly for the sake of engaging his counterparts in endless *querelles*.

⁷⁰ Aron, 'Suite du dialogue avec Michel Debré', p. 1280.

on its unrealistic character: the attempt to avoid the logic of the juxtaposition between the blocs was doomed to fail and “contrary to reality”.⁷¹

Although Aron opposed de Gaulle’s grand strategy, he always admired the General and his contribution to French politics. This explains why his criticisms very often addressed the style of Gaullist political proposal, rather than its content:⁷² for instance, when de Gaulle vetoed the inclusion of the United Kingdom within the European common market, Aron reproached him for the attitude that he had showed during the press conference and for not having consulted the other EEC members before it. Ultimately, Aron agreed with the veto: nobody could have opposed the UK if it gave assurances regarding its commitment to the project of European integration, but the British government was not able to persuade its partners. Therefore, de Gaulle had a point in blaming the Brits, since their public opinion was at best ambiguous on the issue of European integration: “[t]he British candidacy did not express the common feeling of the political class, a clear and solid wish of the nation”; “[t]he British were not enthusiastic about participating in the European Community, but they hated the idea of being excluded”.⁷³ Moreover, moving from an objective analysis of the complex international environment, Aron was aware that de Gaulle was not the only one to blame for the problems of the Western bloc and he frankly pointed out the mistakes made by the General’s opponents during the main crises of the European integration process.⁷⁴

Aron’s main criticism concerned the Gaullist idea of Europe as a continent stretching from the Atlantic to the Urals: though this expression – a quote from the General’s speech delivered at the University of Strasbourg on the 22nd of November of 1959 – had mainly a symbolic value, Aron thought that it reflected de Gaulle’s lack of understanding of the dynamics of international politics. As a matter of fact, when de Gaulle preferred to speak of “Eternal Russia” rather than the Soviet Union he revealed a glimpse of his own conception of history: he maintained that communism was only a superstructure destined to fade away, while the Russian people was the unchanging base. Aron was against this perspective, since it overlooked the main characteristic of contemporary international politics, namely that ideology was a constitutive element of international relations and therefore it required special attention from scholars as well as from policy makers.⁷⁵ So, Aron was convinced that

⁷¹ Aron, *Memoirs*, p. 298. See also Aron, *The Century of Total War*, p. 115.

⁷² Aron, *Memoirs*, p. 300: “What led me to these perhaps excessive criticisms was the General’s very style; and it is style that assured his success. Positive results could have been achieved without scandal, without exasperating our partners and allies”.

⁷³ Ivi, p. 289. See also Raymond Aron, ‘Les Grands dessins n’étaient pas compatibles’, *Le Figaro*, 2-3 février 1963, in Id., *Les Articles du Figaro. Tome II*, pp. 1141-1144.

⁷⁴ Raymond Aron, ‘Les relations franco-américaines. 1. Le centre du débat’, *Le Figaro*, 12-13 mai 1962, in Id., *Les Articles du Figaro. Tome II*, pp. 1030-1033.

⁷⁵ Aron, *Memoirs*, pp. 210 ff.

de Gaulle's idea of building a Europe from the Atlantic to the Urals was unobtainable insofar as the Soviet Union continued to be the leading actor within the Communist bloc.

Moreover, Aron claimed that de Gaulle's foreign policy as it had been unfolding during the 1960s – pace to the General's alleged realist perspective on politics – misled French public opinion, projecting a distorted image of the world and, consequently, discrediting Atlanticism as well as fomenting anti-American sentiments within the French society.⁷⁶ Aron deemed de Gaulle's vision of a pacified Europe from the Atlantic to the Urals problematic insofar as it suggested the idea, dangerous and "contrary to reality", that there was a radical opposition between 'Europeans' and 'Americans'. Aron was firmly convinced that it was wrong to consider the two superpowers as equally evil forces threatening French independence, since de Gaulle's claim of autonomy made sense only insofar as the American protection was effective. American liberalism and Soviet totalitarianism could not be compared as if they were equivalent ideologies; furthermore, the US and the USSR played different roles within the international arena. Not recognising this fundamental difference, de Gaulle showed ingratitude and lack of respect towards the US: on the one hand, he aimed at presenting himself as the leader of a great nation capable of conducting an autonomous foreign policy; on the other hand, his nation benefited from the security framework created by the North Atlantic Treaty and could count on the stabilising effect of the US troops' presence in Germany. De Gaulle's wish that France could act as a sort of (nuclear power) pivot between the superpowers was doomed to failure, as the events triggered by the Prague Spring in 1968 would have dramatically showed.⁷⁷

Conclusion

To sum up the discussion developed throughout this article, we would like to emphasise two main points. First, the main disagreement between Aron and de Gaulle concerned the question of the opportunity for European powers and for the United States to loosen their ties: while the General was in favour of such a solution, Aron insisted that the US support was crucial for effectively contrasting the Soviet threat. He maintained that, if European nations had to choose between European unity and Atlantic community, they ought to choose the latter option, since even a united Europe could not risk that the United States resorted to an isolationist foreign policy and since the Atlantic alliance, although far from perfection, was the best chance for guaranteeing the survival of European liberal societies.⁷⁸ Second, Aron was very sceptical of Monnet's federalist proposal, because he saw Western

⁷⁶ Ivi, pp. 146 ff.

⁷⁷ See Quagliariello, *De Gaulle e il gollismo*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2003, p. 664.

⁷⁸ Aron, *The Century of the Total War*, p. 312.

Europe as a common anti-totalitarian civilisation, whose great economic performance had a powerful Atlantic and anti-Soviet drive. Once the trade and economic goals set at the beginning of the European experiment had been met, political integration seemed destined to remain a chimera. After all, the myth of Europe had been reversed, while an unimaginative economic community had been set in motion. As Aron pointed out in an article published in 1975, the support for Europe was not comparable for the patriotic love and sense of sacrifice that European citizens felt for their own nations.⁷⁹ Thus, history showed that General de Gaulle was right at least on a fundamental fact: citizens were not (yet) ready to cherish any European community as much as they cherished their own nations.

In one of his articles, Aron bitterly looked back at the first decades of European integration, restating his nuanced assessment of the alternative visions of European unity which had animated it.⁸⁰ He distinguished between a *reasonable* project (i.e., the creation of a single market) and a *paradoxical* one (i.e., the political unification). While the first was successful, the second has shown a disappointing record, despite the “permanence of the idea”.⁸¹

The reasonable project - the labour in common of all the Europeans who are on one side of the barricades - has been achieved as fully as any project can be realized. The paradoxical project - to make use of the end of European greatness, in order to create a political unity which the nations always rejected during the time of their glory - has not been fulfilled. The period of crisis, at once moral, economic, and political, into which the whole West has entered, is not favourable towards ambitious thinking and long-term projects. History does not move in a straight line. Europeans dreamt of the United States of Europe twenty-five years ago, but without altogether believing in them - at least the majority of them.⁸²

In order to explain the failure of the paradoxical project, Aron pointed his finger to the lack of political will not only of European elites, but also of European citizens, who are benignly aloof towards the European project,⁸³ incapable of urging their rulers to actively engage in the construction of a united Europe.

To conclude, as far as his attitude towards the idea of European unity is concerned, we would place Raymond Aron's reflection between the two extremes of Monnet's committed federalism and de

⁷⁹ Raymond Aron, 'L'Europa, avvenire di un mito' (1975), in Id., *Il destino delle nazioni*, pp. 135-155.

⁸⁰ Raymond Aron, 'The crisis of the European Idea'.

⁸¹ Ibidem, p. 13.

⁸² Ibidem, p. 19.

⁸³ Ibidem, p. 14: "Public opinion remains available with regard to European unity precisely because of its detachment - even its indifference. This public opinion will not give birth to the initiatives of the Princes who govern us. Nor will it oppose them".

Gaulle's nationalism. On the one hand, Aron agreed with Monnet that European states needed to pursue a fair reconciliation with the Germans and to accept the possibility of transferring sovereignty to supranational institutions in exchange for enhanced security and prosperity. On the other hand, like de Gaulle Aron firmly believed that, even after WWII, states were the protagonists of international politics and the creators of history. In his writings, Aron distanced himself from the fragile federalism which neglected to build his own foundation and did not involve European peoples in an open and honest discussion on the future of the Continent. At the same time, he rejected the anachronistic nationalism which hampered a fruitful debate on international politics and risked stoking dangerous sentiments of anti-Americanism.

As Aron often put it, between the united and federal Europe *à la* Monnet and the confederal Europe *à la* de Gaulle, there might be a third way. Aron's preferred solution was a cooperation framework embracing independent Western European states united within the Atlantic community, a necessary condition for European security. Our analysis showed that in Aron's reflection the European and the Atlanticist perspectives grew closely intertwined. Therefore, turning Aron in a champion of Europeanism or of anti-Europeanist nationalism – an effort that has been undertaken by a number of scholars – is a meaningless endeavour. Like in post-WWII international dynamics, in Aron's worldview the two poles coexisted and only from their balance could emerge a disenchanted yet committed intellectual contribution to the future of Europe.