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## **THE AMERICAN PRESS DISCOURSE ON EUROPEAN UNION AT THE END OF WW II: A BIPOLARISATION IN EUROPE?**

### **ABSTRACT:**

In the immediate post-World War II period, Europe remained ravaged by war and thus susceptible to exploitation by an internal and external Communist threat. This fear for American Administration was already being considered in 'ppp European economies in the winter of 1946–1947, Congress passed the Economic Cooperation Act in March 1948 and approved funding that would eventually rise to over \$12 billion for the rebuilding of Western Europe, on the basis of a free market economy: The *Marshall Plan*.

It helped European industrialization, brought extensive investment into the region and also stimulated the U.S. economy by establishing markets for American goods. Even though the Plan was to be opened to the entire European continent, including Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, the Soviet concern over potential U.S. economic domination of its Eastern European satellites and Stalin's unwillingness to open up his secret society to westerners doomed the idea.

Therefore the Marshall Plan was applied solely to Western Europe with one strong and inevitable commitment: all Western European participant nations

ought to agree among them on the terms and quantities of the distribution of the American economic and financial aid. This pre-condition prepared the political and ideological scenario for the later European split into two opposite influential areas: Western and Eastern Europe; but also forced European nations to sit, talk and agree upon an issue of over-nation-state particular interest.

Thus, can the Marshall Plan be considered as the first step on the construction

of European Union?, has European Union prioritized economics thanks or because of the Marshall Plan?, Current political difficulties of the EU could be due to its mainly economic start?; and how did American press depict all this process?, which was the discourse of some of its most famous newspapers? This paper, as fulfillment of a broader research of the image of European Union through the American press, seeks to put forward not only that some of the problems of the EU today could be due to the first decisions taken, but also that the real and productive seeds of the union of Europe could be traced back to the consequences of the implementation of the Marshall Plan in Western Europe.

KEYWORDS: Marshall Plan, Western Europe, American newspapers, European Union

AUTHOR:

Professor Maria Obieta Vilallonga, PhD (maria.obieta@deusto.es)

Research group on “Communication: Discourses, Values and Social Justice”

Department of Communication

Faculty of Social and Human Sciences (www.socialesyhumanas.deusto.es)

University of Deusto, campus of San Sebastián (Spain) (www.deusto.es)

## FULL TEXT

If one looks closely to the way European Union has been built up, it can become clear that WW II was a cornerstone in that process, and that the implementation of the Marshall Plan, along with its additional projects such as the European Recovery Programme (ERP) and the Organization for European Economic Cooperation (OEEC) pushed some European nations to start working together in closer cooperation, at least on the economic level. But, on the other hand, it also could be considered as the cause of the division of Europe into two antagonistic areas: The Western side of Europe, Atlantic-Oriented and considered the defender of democracy and liberal market and trade economy; and the Eastern countries of Europe, growingly dominated by the USSR and its communist ideology and state construction.

This is the key point of this paper: how US decision to help Europe reconstruct after WW II influenced the way European unity was conformed; why at that particular moment? And why the construction of a united Europe was implemented that way and not otherwise?. This questions are seek to be discussed at the light of the information provided by some of the most important North American newspapers. Methodologically this means that: “While conducting qualitative media content analysis, it treats newspapers as platforms of discourses relevant to society. (.....) Europe and thus ‘European Integration’ do not exist per se, but only as discursive constructs. Quality papers provide an ideal source for examination, as the print media were both actors and instruments of the communication of ‘European Integration’. (.....) Moreover, newspapers play a particularly significant role with respect to the

historical shaping of ‘European’ modes of thought”. (GRENIER, Florian, 14). In this sight it is important to remember that communicative processes and structures play a decisive role in depicting the construction of social realities and its processes. And thus, media and newspapers as essential part of the social communication in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century have to be taken into account both as dissemination actors and as sources of information.

#### 1. Marshal speech (June 1947)

The Secretary of States of the Truman Administration, General George Marshall, gave at Harvard University in June 1947 a speech, in which he addressed some of the crucial issues of the external policy of the Truman administration, mainly towards Europe.

It is well know that in the II WW aftermath, European states remained ravaged and, thus, susceptible to exploitation by internal and external communist threat. The USA Truman Administration, thanks to the so called “Truman Doctrine” (March 1947) was ready to passed through Congress special budgets to help not only Greece and Turkey, but also the rest of European countries -much impoverished after the war- so as to prevent and stop the advance of the totalitarian ideology and politics of Russia and Stalin.

He started describing the situation of Europe as “very serious”, complex and as a moment of “breakdown of the business structure”, “of visible destruction” and of “dislocation of the entire fabric of European economy”. From this catastrophic description of Europe, he stressed the idea that the recovery of Europe should take longer and bigger efforts than foreseen. He also pointed out that if the US did not provide any aid, Europe would had to face “Economic, social and

political deterioration of a very big character”, and, thereof, could be an easy ground for communist ideas and politics to take root. This eventual collapse of Europe was of great concern to the US administration, since it was considered to give way –among other consequences- for Communism to expand<sup>1</sup>. So, the Truman administration had it very clear that it was a “must” to break the vicious circle of poverty, and social and political instability of European states, and to “restore the confidence of European people in the economic future of their own country and of Europe as a whole”.

Europe was one of the biggest markets for American industrial good and financial exchanges. This, it was a matter of American self-defence against its cultural and political enemy, the Stalin’s Soviet Union, as much as a question of American national development and growth. It is in this context in which these words of Marshall’s address have to be read: “our policy is directed not against any country or doctrine, but against hunger, poverty, desperation and chaos. Its purpose should be the revival of a working economy in the world so as to permit the emergence of political and social conditions in which free institutions can exist”. The statement could be louder but not clearer.

The conditions to provide and be eligible for the aid were:

1. America was ready to cooperate with whatever country willing to participate in the programme. On the contrary, “ {a}ny government which maneuvers to block the recovery of other countries cannot expect help from us. Furthermore, governments, political parties or groups which seek to perpetuate human misery in order to profit therefrom politically or otherwise will encounter the opposition of the

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<sup>1</sup> There had been a progress on the voters support to communist parties in Italy and France during the past local elections. It was also steadily clear that Moscow foreign policy was headed to increasing social instability.

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United States”. European stability and progress for the world’s peace, and consequently their own development and international leadership.

2. This was addressed to European nations in particular, and, from my point of view, was one of the determining factor in the real construction of the European Union. Marshall said: “There must be some agreement among the countries of Europe as to requirements of the situation and the part those countries themselves will take in order to give proper effect to whatever action might be undertaken by this Government”. He went further on when indicating that Europeans should take the initiative in the launching of the recovery programme, moreover because the programme ought to be “a joint one agreed to by a number if not all European nations”.

As stated, the Soviet Union, in theory, was not set apart of the recovery programme, although its ultimate aim was precisely to withdraw the advance of communism in Western Europe. In fact, Moscow sent a delegate, Mr. Molotov to the first meetings, but soon he refused to continue the works alleging that the already known as “The Marshall Plan” was another means of capitalism to widespread over Europe. According to Soviet doctrine, Americans were not seeking to improve living standarts among European working classes. They foresaw to worsen their daily conditions, and also to force Stalin to explain the Soviet official doctrine towards USA and capitalism.

The result of the talks was that only European Western countries agreed on an organization to distribute among them the American funds and economic and financial aid. Europe -Western Europe- found a way to cooperation and understanding on the economic and financial level, but nothing was said or

demanded on the political one, even though European politial unity was highly desirable according to some contents of American journalists in their rapports

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from Europe.

It was also true, on the other hand, that the image of the United States of America was very much present among European leaders, and that since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century there had been interesting projects looking forward attaining European unity, such as Coudehove-Kalergi, or Briand to say some. USA represented the ideal of a democratic political federation, and an economic developed and strong nation. So European countries were in real need of a way out of disputes, unrest, upheavals and antagonisms; Western political leaders were also fully aware of the necessity of their nations to agree on some sort on “unitarian project” which could institutionalized intra-Europe relationships, this time far away from extreme nationalism and exclusion, but rather based on cooperation, understanding, mutual respect, integration and commonalities. Evenmore, when the Eastern European countries were been organized according to the estrict and totalitariam communist rule.

Yes, two long term processes were given birth from 1947: the one leading to the European Union, and the other to the bipolarization of Europe in two different and always vigilant areas, the democratic, american-supported, and welfare state of the Western nations of Europe; and the communist, soviet-ruled and state-organized countries of Eastern Euope, according to the wall-border of Berlin.

To conclude this chapter: the requirements of the “American friend”, the consciousness of the weakness of European nations both internationally and nationally, the fear of another oubreak of war because of the Soviet expansion over Eastern Europe, and the common belief in the necessity of peace for economic and social growth were on the basis for the acceptance of the rules

posed by American officers, and which led to cooperation among European nations.

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The process started slow and less ambitiously, from the easiest -economic and financial agreements- to the toughest -political understanding among state nations-, but it has demonstrated to be steady and durable in the long run.

## 2. The image and discourses on Europe

“The 'golden age' of the press, which now dawned in the form of a veritable 'newspaper boom' (...) was of course also definitively linked to growing press freedom and increasing literacy rates in the respective societies. At the same time, the media revolution guaranteed and internationalization of coverage in the dailies, means of correspondent networks established by many newspapers, and the emergence of news agencies. As a consequence of their increasing cross-border activity, the print media in a sense became a transnational community of discourse in which processes of journalistic dialogue, mutual observations and citations -although not always by consensus- and finally a tendency for national media agendas and news contends to align were the dominant characteristics” (GREINER, p. 15). This means not only that papers became producers of discourses and knowledge on a particular issue, and in that sense they primarily conform people's ideas on that question, but also that those same newspapers could offer the interpretation and discourse their readers gave to the printed and edited news.

It is in this sense, that when working with newspapers it is really necessary to have it clear what, why, whom, who where and how the news is transcribed and, thus, transfers knowledge about both national or international issues.

Broadly speaking, it could be said that American press stressed the necessity of an economic and financial unification of, at least, Western Europe, because it could be of importance to international rapprochement, and of advantage for the United States in the long term, as well. In this sense, yet in the interwar period,

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American press projected several ideas of an on-going economic integration of Europe.

Complementarily, as Florian Greiner defends in his article<sup>2</sup>, the coordination of radio frequencies in Europe became a symbol for the necessity of Europe-wide cooperation, and this transnational cooperation, that seemed unavoidable, helped develop communication, media and journalism. “Journalists repeatedly stressed the presume successes of this kind of Europeanization” (GREINER, p. 24), consequently the integration of broadcasting is a success story and a demonstration that other types of integration could also be possible in Europe. For journalists recognised strong interconnections among European countries and cultures, and thereof they emphasized the 'de facto' existing European unity in terms of economy, culture and technological development. In fact, “{t}heir reporting and news coverage showed that the relationship between the 'nation' and 'Europe' was often not characterised by rigid antagonism; rather, the omnipresent national objectives were frequently interpreted and discussed within a European framework, which indicates an increasing awareness of the importance of transnational contacts and relations. It can therefore be said that newspapers projected and communicated broad notions of 'European integration' at a time when the terms 'Europe' and 'integration' were separated as widely as one can possibly imagine on an actual historical and political level”. Thus, newspapers and news broadcasting were key factors in creating a common ground for integrative thinking, and in doing so they could be

considered important actors in understanding the history of European integration in its short and long term perspectives, in so much as conforming people's thoughts, setting agendas and creating a basic and overall frame in

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2. Communicating European Integration in the Age of the World Wars: Print Media Discourses on the Unity of Europe, 1914-1945, *Journal Of Contemporary European Research*, vol. 10, issue 1 (2014), pp. 12-25

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pro of the European Union.

In general, the most important American newspapers (*The Chicago Tribune*, *The Christian Science Monitor*, *The Los Angeles Times*, *The Washington Post*, and *the New York Times*) were all very much in favour of a solution to European disunion, and therefore applauded the foreign policy sketched in Marshall's speech. Even more, some of them produced information on European events in a very pro-European-Unity pedagogical manner<sup>3</sup>, as the following quote: "One of the fundamental differences between the period following World War I and the present is that whereas formerly the slogan was 'self-determination of peoples', now it could be stated as 'Europe unite or be exterminated'. A quarter of a century of bitter experience, especially the thread of Soviet imperialism conquest, has convinced even the greatest doubters that his continent can only maintain its cultural, economic, and political freedom in some form of combination". This point seems to be the urgent issue which all newspapers, editorial, reports, and European chronicles agreed upon. Differences could be observed when referring to opinions on how Western representatives were playing their cards and defending their arguments. *The Christian Science Monitor* highlighted the ambiguity of British foreign officers regarding to the integration of Europe<sup>4</sup>.

One of the most and better known journalists of that time, Mr. Walter Lippman,

writing directly from Europe for *The Los Angeles Times* and *The Washington Post* pointed out that "American dollars and American guarantee of military support are essential to the security and revival of Europe. But unless Europe is united, little can be accomplished. Not even Western Europe can, or will, begin

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3. For example, *The Christian Science Monitor*, September 19th, 1950. The article was entitled "Almost everyone's for European unity. But how to get it?".

4. 25th July, 1949. The UK was not only a member of the Commonwealth, but its head; and was always reluctant to lose the national sovereignty

to unite unless Britain, the strongest of European nations, is affirmatively and actively the leader in the movement toward European unity<sup>5</sup>. It was of common understanding that Great Britain was central to the construction of European union, but it was also evident the reluctance of British governments to push forward and speed up the process, due to their unwillingness to discuss on the possibility of a different way of understanding national sovereignty.

Another common argument used by the press relied on the evidence of the expansion of communism across Europe. Hence, Europe needed to recover so as to stop Stalin's imperial foreign policy; vital both for European recovery, and for the protection of American interests in the world, and for the development of its industrial and agricultural sectors through exportations. As Lipperman stated “ (...). Yet, without European unity, neither the European recovery program, nor the Russian settlement can be achieved”<sup>6</sup>.

The interest on what was going on in Europe, without much discussion on the decisions taken by the Truman administration, although more critical to what European leaders were coming up with, became clear when considering the fact that some of the chosen newspapers entirely reproduced without additional comments, the address of President Truman to the Congress on the progress of the Marshall Plan. Or when the opening session of the new Council of Europe in Strasbourg, which was thoroughly commented and illustrated on the *Christian Science Monitor*<sup>7</sup>. Nevertheless, *The Chicago Tribune* (January 1953) did not seem to agree on the speed Western Europe was acting, mainly on the economic and military matters, and signalled out the differences between Europeans and Americans, in the sense that the formers were more devoted to economic reconstruction and unity, whereas the latter were worried about the defence of the Western world from the Soviet thread.

In October 1950, the Chairman of the board of *The Washington Post* travelled across Western Europe and, as a result of the journey, he wrote a long article entitled “European Union Broaden from goods to guns”, which made praiseworthy references to the Schuman Plan, “the most dramatic illustration of this new adventure into solidarity”, because “its initial stimulus was an altruistic will towards achieving a higher standard of living. To that has been added the most fundamental of all drives: the struggle to survive in freedom”.

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5. *The Los Angeles Times*, 4 June 1949

6. *The Los Angeles Times*, 29 January 1948

7. August 20, 1949

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This words are illustrative of the evolution of the image of post-war Europe in American newspapers, since they make clear to the readers that what started up as an economic recovery program for Europe, turned out to be a new settlement for the defence of democracies, although under a new European model for understanding, cooperatioon, economic integration and political organization, based on common and basic European cultural values: peace, democracy, solidarity, the rule of law, and the welfare state.

Maria Obieta Vilallonga, PhD.  
Department of Communication  
Univerisity of Deusto, San Sebastián

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