

EUROPEAN LEAGUE FOR ECONOMIC CO-OPERATION

50th ANNIVERSARY OF ELEC
1946 - 1996

In remembrance of

JOSEPH RETINGER

Initiator of the
European League for Economic Co-operation

~~E.L.E.C.~~

50th ANNIVERSARY OF ELEC

In remembrance of

JOSEPH RETINGER

1888 - 1960

Initiator of the

European League for Economic Co-operation

« Poland was his motherland. He was passionately attached to her ... But he cherished within him another great love : a United Europe »

*H.R.H. Prince Bernhard
of The Netherlands*

June 1996

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Retinger at the Congress of Europe at The Hague, in May 1948,
drawn by Feliks Topolski.

FOREWORD

The European League for Economic Co-operation (LEEC) is celebrating its 50th anniversary and is remembering its initiator Joseph Retinger who founded it with Paul van Zeeland and Pieter Kerstens joined by a great number of eminent personalities amongst whom Major General Sir Colin Gubbins, Sir Edward Beddington-Behrens and Sir Harold Butler (United Kingdom), Guillaume Konstruck (Luxembourg), Daniel Serruys, Edmond Giscard d'Estaing and Lucien de Sainte Lorette (France), Hermann J. Abs (Germany), Enrico Falck (Italy), Baron Victor von der Lippe (Austria), and many others.

On this occasion LEEC decided to hold an enlarged Central Council meeting in Cracow, where Joseph Retinger was born, at the invitation of its Polish Committee and its President Mr. Andrzej Olechowski.

The programme culminated in a colloquium organized at the Collegium Maius of the Jagiellonian University, the unveiling of a plaque in memory of Joseph Retinger on the house at 2 Wislna Street, at the corner of the main city square of Cracow, and an official dinner at the City Hall.

The aim of this brochure, also published in Polish, is to recall Joseph Retinger the man and to give a sample of his ideas and the many initiatives he launched in favour of European co-operation and the unity of Europe.

The European Movement and the Bilderberg Meetings, two associations in the creation of which Joseph Retinger played an important role, are also participating in this celebration.

This brochure is based mainly on "Joseph Retinger, Memoirs of an Eminence Grise", a book written and edited by John Pomian who served as Retinger's secretary from 1948 to 1960. We are greatly indebted to John Pomian for the permission to use extracts from his book and for his help in the preparation of this brochure. We would also like to express our thanks to Drs M. van der Velden for his research on the origins of the League and the biography at the end of this brochure.

Daniel Cardon de Lichbuer
International President of LEEC
Brussels-Cracow, June 1996.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As already mentioned in the Foreword, this brochure is almost entirely based on John Pomian's book on « Joseph Retinger, Memoirs of an Eminence Grise », Sussex University Press, 1972.

The texts signed by H.R.H. Prince Bernhard of The Netherlands are from his Foreword to John Pomian's book.

The numbers between brackets - () - refer to the pages in John Pomian's book. The texts between inverted commas - ' ' ' - are from Retinger's papers as they were reprinted in Pomian's book.

The choice of texts is necessarily incomplete and to a certain extent arbitrary. Other texts could have been selected (while certain others could have been omitted). Our primary aim will be attained, however, if this brochure succeeds in arousing the curiosity of the reader and to refer him directly to the book itself.

JOSEPH RETINGER AS A MAN : A PERSONAL REMINISCENCE

THE CHAMPION OF A UNITED EUROPE

by
H.R.H. Prince Bernhard of The Netherlands

Throughout history there have been many outstanding figures who, during their lifetime, were at the focus of public attention. Some had admiration and honours lavished upon them ; others were despised and rejected. Their names were familiar to all ; and they left their stamp on the trends and events of their day.

But there have always been others - men whose influence was no less great, whose personalities left as deep a mark on their times, but who for all that were known only to restricted circles, often just to a 'happy few'. To the world at large, their names ring no bells. Such a man was Joseph Retinger.

Behind the frail and ailing constitution of this little man, who suffered from an affliction of the eyes for many years, was a will of steel, a remarkable mind, and inexhaustible energy.

Poland was his motherland. He was passionately attached to her ; and during the Second World War, though no longer in the first flush of youth, he risked his life by parachuting into occupied territory to contact the Polish Resistance.

But he cherished within him another great love : a United Europe.
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THE INITIATOR AND MOVING SPIRIT

by
John Pomian

... I joined Retinger shortly after the Congress of The Hague (in 1948). He asked me to stay with him and so for the next twelve years I shared his daily life, with one interruption when for over two years I moved to Paris, though even then I continued working with him.

He was the easiest companion to live with. Within a matter of days my friends became his friends, while my parents accepted him as one of the family. All this happened imperceptibly, as a matter of course. All the barriers which differences of age, position or the formalities of the language might make, dissolved because his manner was so exceptionally direct and sincere. At the same time proprieties were always preserved and in Polish, which we of course all spoke, the customary formal form of address was always kept, although softened and familiarized by the great variety of phrasing which the language permits ...

... At the same time he opened to me his circle of friends and as years went by also his political friends and acquaintances, introducing me invariably as a junior colleague who, although he had, of course, a lot to learn, at least was already enrolled.

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He dressed very modestly and did not pay much attention to his looks - claiming that old and infirm as he was it did not matter very much how well his suits were tailored or even pressed. He never had more than three suits and for years only two, though these I remember came from famous tailors, which showed that things had once been different. Even his inseparable walking stick was of the roughest kind and at home he simply wore a sleeveless sheepskin which added to the oddity of his silhouette.

He lived very simply in a succession of furnished flats and never seemed to be very much concerned with his surroundings, which often were very plain indeed. A hard chair by a table, underneath a harsh ceiling light were quite sufficient and he could sit there for hours, reading, talking and entertaining whomever came to see him.

In the half a dozen or so different apartments we moved into over the years, he never bothered to change or decorate anything; yet he had a keen appreciation of beauty, knew a lot about art and had a well formed and discerning taste. Only music was completely beyond him and he would often jokingly complain that he could hardly distinguish one anthem from another. But then it might be that this lack of concern for his surroundings was, like the lack of concern for his looks, a sign of creeping old age. This certainly must have conditioned many of the aspects of his character during the period I worked with him, and I often regretted that I never knew him in his prime.

He travelled through life unburdened by possessions. At the time I joined him his total possessions were a sizeable library, some papers which he kept to serve for his memoirs but which he could never be bothered to sort out, a handful of photographs and a few drawings by his artist friends which he gladly gave away for the asking. This did not strike me at first as particularly unusual, accustomed as I was to fellow exiles, most of whom emerged from the War with only the minimum of personal effects. He was in the same position as everybody else and it seemed quite normal. I was surprised, however, to discover after a few weeks that he did not even have a bank account ...

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Lone bachelor that he was, inventing far-reaching projects, playing an unusual and delicate game on the political chessboard, he naturally needed someone to confide in, to speak to of his hopes and plans, to tell the odd or amusing incidents he came across and sometimes also - why not - to boast a little. It was great fun and often quite exciting. Coming back from a trip or a meeting, he would immediately recount, *al fresco*, details from his conversation and every important move, noting every psychological nuance, which greatly added to the interest and piquancy of the story.

Many things delighted him and nothing more than a mischievous repartee, an irreverent pun, or a jab at somebody's secret soft spot. You are no Treasurer! You're just a book-keeper! he once threw with great glee at a multi-millionaire, who never contributed a penny to the organization of which he was Treasurer and kept complaining that others didn't do so either. Or once to Churchill, who was being

heaped with praise at a dinner in Strasbourg, following a Council of Europe meeting - 'Ah, but you are not human - you are just a phenomenon of nature !' And as the great man's smile vanished, as he turned round to thunder back, Retinger interjected 'like the Niagara Falls' which, taken as a compliment, restored Churchill's contented grin.

The oddity of his situation was a constant source of amusement. A penniless exile, hobnobbing with the great of this world, and getting them to follow his advice, adopt his suggestions and join with him in all sorts of ventures, the limits of which they sometimes only dimly perceived. Usually this happened in the most natural way ; after all he had a good title and a good reason to act as he did ...

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Seeing Retinger, his baggy suit, his unassuming looks and knowing his bohemian habits and the circumstances of his life, it was difficult to imagine the importance of his connections and his work. He neither looked nor behaved the part. And yet he not only knew everybody in high places but appeared to be in constant touch. It created a little aura of mystery, which he rather enjoyed, never denying anything either good or bad which people had to say about him ...

... He liked good food, but what he loved above all else was to entertain. He liked both to take people out to places they would enjoy and to receive at home. There of course it was much more modest, but he was very generous, particularly with drinks. He liked young company and was delighted whenever any of my friends came round. As my predecessors used to tell me this was always so, and particularly during the War when he kept practically an open house for his secretaries, his friends and friends of friends. The entertaining at home was necessarily restricted to a few people at a time, but once in a while he liked to give a little party for his Polish friends who would not mind the homely arrangements ...

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Such occasions, however, were few. Most of the entertaining was done outside ... in his student days in Paris (Retinger) used to spend his nights moving from café to café, and this zest for restaurants, bars and lively places remained with him all his life.

He was at his best in a small convivial company, propped at a table with a drink in front of him, puffing endless cigarettes which he held in a peculiar way between the thumb and the index finger. That's what he liked best. There was something immensely captivating about his somewhat monkeyish face with its broad, friendly grin and his alert big brown eyes popping out from behind the old-fashioned pince-nez. He could listen as well as talk and always had some ready barb or witicism with which to prod his companions. Whether one liked him or not, he was stimulating company ; he could irritate, amuse or please, but never bore.

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Frail as he appeared to be, shuffling unsteadily, leaning heavily on his stick, he was nevertheless extremely resilient and could call on unsuspected reserves of energy. He never seemed tired if the occasion called for alertness on his part. Nor did he ever seem the least affected by drink. Indeed although he could keep in step with the hardest drinkers and never refused a glass, drinking was in his case a purely social affair and he never touched anything when he was alone.

The reader might sometimes wonder what satisfaction Retinger derived from all he did? What was it that he found most rewarding? In fact, what drove him on?

The story of his life provides most of the answers. But there was also the overwhelming, exhilarating sense of creation. Every new idea, every new scheme which he conceived, launched and nursed to maturity and fulfilment was an experience worth any amount of privation. Every new venture called forth all of Retinger's great capacity for enthusiasm and passionate involvement.

Naturally he also appreciated it in others ; sought it and stimulated it whenever he found it. He was superb at inspiring people. This tremendous capacity for enthusiasm kept his spirit young. Throughout the years I was with him I watched him grow physically

old, weighed down by gradually increasing infirmities. What he depicted most in old age was that the driving passion and excitement of creation was gradually losing its edge.

That is why he was so good with younger people and liked their company so much. To them - and I was one - he was great fun and a wonderful companion, with a gift for infinite understanding and immediate communication. He could talk, encourage and advise as an equal. Like many people he also liked to pass on certain precepts, teach certain ways of approaching people and affairs, and many younger men like myself learned from him a great deal.

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Retinger was not a good public speaker, had no liking for it and only spoke at committees but seldom to larger audiences. At the Brussels Conference, when the officers of the (European) Movement were formally elected, each one of them made a speech. When Retinger's turn came, an assistant rushed the microphone to the end of the podium where he was sitting but arrived too late. Retinger stood up, said 'Thank you' and sat down. The Eastern European Conference was the only other occasion in the whole history of the (European) Movement when he actually made a formal speech and, even so, it lasted less than four minutes. In it he stressed that the purpose of all our work was neither aggressive nor negative but peaceful and constructive. He called upon the exiles to work together and support the idea of European Unity.

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... (Retinger) never was much interested in internal matters, concentrating his attention on foreign affairs which he held to be in the long run of far greater import in this interdependent world. Maybe the reason was also his cursory knowledge and understanding of economics and of law. He never felt very much at ease when any such subject was discussed, while his heart went out to humanities - particularly where psychology, art and history converged.

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THE RETINGER METHOD

Somewhat or other most of the talks that led somewhere took place during a meal or over a drink. This is, of course, not unusual but it was particularly in keeping with his taste and suited best his ways and his style. Denis de Rougemont recalled: 'During a meeting of the Bilderberg Group, at cocktail time, I remarked to Bob Boothby,¹ referring to Retinger who was wandering from one group to the next: "I think I've found the key to his method; he sits alone at a small table, orders a brandy and soda and the idea occurs to him to gather together a certain number of people. He explains to each that his idea is so important that it had better be kept dark. Then he assembles everybody in a nice room, goes back to his little table, orders a brandy and soda, and awaits further developments." Boothby immediately repeated the story to Retinger, who was delighted with it.' To many of the people who knew him, the picture of Retinger, which the mind recalls most readily and vividly, the one that seems most typical of his silhouette, is of Retinger propped at a table with a drink before him, exactly as Feliks Topolski's pen caught him one day during the Congress of The Hague (see p. 6).

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... The way he managed to influence proceedings was sometimes quite uncanny. I saw him at work in countless meetings. Now and again, having adjusted his pince-nez and sorted out his walking stick and his cigarette, he eased himself from the end of the podium where he usually sat and shuffled to some participant to pass on his message. Something was whispered and a nod or two showed that the point was taken. At some meetings his forays were extremely frequent and I watched amazed at how roundly such debates developed. I could see how some arguments were either dropped or stated just at the right time, how people were encouraged to speak or to keep silent. Sometimes they even changed their minds and expressed opposite views.

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¹ Lord Boothby

... Retinger's particular combination of talents, and weaknesses, was such that he could hardly occupy the centre of the stage. Like an impresario he needed others to be the stars of the show. He himself was cast for the role of the *éminence grise*, the man behind the scene, a role in which he was extremely effective.

He stimulated other people, guided them and helped them to achieve what he himself wanted. I was always fascinated by his technique. He was at his best in a *tête-à-tête* over a meal or a drink. Retinger's ideas often seemed hazy and patchy, many things were hinted at, there were gaps, and the formulas he used were seldom quite right. However, it was all stimulating and intriguing. It left room for the other person to invent his own definitions, to complete with his own suggestions, to add and to discard, and finally to espouse the end product of it all as his own idea.

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He liked people ; nothing interested him more. He involved himself in their personal problems, in their feelings and their hopes. He had that extremely rare gift, which women sometimes possess, of unerring intuition. He understood people in an uncanny way and seldom made a mistake. That was, in fact, the secret of his success. It explains the deftness with which he chose men. In the European Movement and its numerous offshoots and later in the Bilderberg Group it was of great importance to find the right sort of people, and Retinger had the immense gift of spotting talent. He created the teams on which, in turn, the strength of the organization depended.

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Retinger always believed that public opinion follows the lead of influential individuals. He much preferred working through a few carefully selected people to publicity on a massive scale ...

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A FREE AGENT

... all his life he wanted to be, and indeed was, a completely free agent - a man apart. He could become the most devoted friend and the most loyal collaborator of men he chose for their intrinsic qualities, independently of their political attachments and beliefs. He could be a most passionate advocate of good causes - never of ideologies - ready to sacrifice everything for their success. But to be tied up in any way with an organisation, to accept the discipline of a corporate and hence de-personalised body as distinct from a direct human relationship was, to him, perfectly abhorrent. So much so that never in his life did he join any club, however innocuous it might have been, unless it was in a temporary and honorary capacity.

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The fact that he was a stateless exile without a country or a party to give him at least nominal support was a mixed blessing. In international organizations, on committees, where people are deemed to represent some country or some organization, he could not claim any backing. As long as he was the indispensable promoter, the initiator and organizer his place was assured. But whenever there was need to array a representative group of people, his position was immediately weakened.

Even the Polish community was not very helpful. He had been accused of being somebody or other's 'agent' so many times that few dared to praise him without adding that he was also regarded as 'controversial'. The communists certainly opposed him and sometimes some Americans as well. On the Continent, and particularly in France, where he used to go more frequently than elsewhere, now and again it was rumoured that he was - 'l'homme des Anglais', while his English friends who knew it couldn't be so, nevertheless sometimes wondered what the real truth was. But fortunately among people who really mattered he had enough staunch and devoted friends.

At the same time the fact that he represented no party and no great country made him even more of a free agent and strengthened his claim to being impartial. It was one of the reasons why he never took a British passport, firmly sticking to his stateless travel document, however inconvenient this was for his travels.

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1940 - RELATIONS WITH GENERAL SIKORSKI

However good Rétinger's relations with Sikorski were before the War, after the rescue episode (in June 1940) they became closer still. From that moment he became his closest confidant and adviser and a constant companion.

Sikorski had many of the qualities needed for his difficult job. Thoroughly Polish in outlook and character, he also bore the hallmark of the soldier-statesman - a compound of chivalry, style and a deep sense of duty, which helped establish his reputation and won him the friendship and respect of many of the Allied leaders, and, in particular, of Churchill. He was also a firm leader, an essential quality for a Prime Minister in exile. The Poles were facing agonizing dilemmas and their nerves were strained. A firm hand was badly needed. Sikorski, as his correspondence shows, also knew how to reprove. Clad in his Roman-like gravity, he cast his thunders from Olympian heights. At the same time, since he was quick to forgive and forget, in the end everything was well.

Rétinger's relationship with him was based above all on a mutual respect and a warm friendship. But it took a gayer and more familiar form. Within Sikorski's immediate circle, Rétinger was the joker in the pack. They spoke of him with affection and with a smile. He was the Fra Diavolo, the familiar, the 'grey eminence'. He was stimulating and witty, sparkling with unconventional opinions and original remarks. He was always alert and good company. He satled among the countless petty intrigues concocted daily around the summit of power, keeping a level keel, pouring oil on troubled waters and appeasing ruffled feelings. And these were many. Like many Poles, Sikorski was quick-tempered and so too was Rétinger, although if my experience of him in later years is any guide, he would never lose his temper unless he was very sure of his ground. The two men had many rows and many times sparks flew between them. Knowing how safe their friendship was, they could well afford to differ. Perhaps it was the only way of keeping up the balance between two strong characters, when only one was in a position of power.

The rescue of Sikorski was a daring act on the part of Rétinger. It was also an event of great importance to the Polish cause. Rétinger snatched Sikorski, his Government and a good part of the army out of a situation of great embarrassment if not catastrophe.

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1941 - 1944 - MEETINGS OF CONTINENTAL PRIME MINISTERS IN LONDON AND THE BIRTH OF BENELUX

Rétinger was instrumental in the launching of regular meetings between the Prime Ministers and Foreign Ministers of Continental countries in exile in London during the War. According to his account :

'In order to achieve greater cohesion during the War, and after discussing the matter with Pipinelis, Spaak, van Zeeland and Kerstens, and with the full support of General Sikorski, I suggested regular meetings of the Foreign Ministers of the Continental countries in London, and until the death of General Sikorski we held about a score of such meetings, at which the underlying idea was to prepare for the unity of Europe. The meetings took place in the Polish Prime Minister's office, and were usually attended by two representatives of each Government ...

'The first of these meetings was held in October 1942, and they continued until 1944. The Polish Government provided the Secretariat and their agenda included matters such as the preparation of the conditions of armistice, punishment of war crimes, reparations, the disarmament of Germany and the reconstruction of Europe. Apart from this highly necessary work, they were also meant to develop the habit among European Governments of working together.

'These meetings of the Continental Foreign Ministers ended a few months after General Sikorski's crash in Gibraltar (in July 1943) ...'

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To supplement the meetings of the Foreign Ministers we also arranged periodical luncheons of the Prime Ministers of the Continental countries, presided over by each Prime Minister in rotation. To these luncheons we also invited distinguished statesmen of other countries, such as Anthony Eden and Anthony Drexel Biddle, Jr, who started by being Ambassador to Poland and who eventually became Ambassador to practically every Central and Eastern European country. On one occasion we invited Mr. Maisky, the Russian Ambassador, but he very politely declined our invitation.'

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'... our missionary efforts triggered off conversations between the Belgians and the Dutch which led to the creation of Benelux. As a matter of fact, it was round our council table late in 1941, with General Sikorski and myself participating, that the first talks on co-operation between Holland and Belgium took place between Mr. Spaak and Mr. van Kleffens ...

'The fact ... that we held those meetings helped me personally after the War to start again on a new footing the idea of the unity of Europe, which finally took the form of the European movement.'

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1944 - RETINGER'S FAREWELL LETTER TO PRIME MINISTER MIKOLAJCZYK ON THE EVE OF BEING PARACHUTED INTO OCCUPIED POLAND

'Bari, 1 February 1944

'To Premier Mikołajczyk.

'It seems I shall be leaving soon. I therefore write to take leave and I hope that God will bless you in your difficult task and in the tribulations that await you. It might be that all our hopes will be betrayed in this war and that the peace negotiations will go against us. That is why, as your predecessor General Sikorski did in 1940, so must we now gather all our strength in order to set an example which future generations can imitate and learn from.

'First of all, therefore, we must be united and our national unity and discipline must be our principal aim and weapon. So far we have stood out very well to the outside world and have not let ourselves be drawn too far in our internal squabbles and intrigues. We should keep up this attitude.

'And our second commandment must be complete patriotic and political honesty. We should not seek to defend ourselves by « tricks », providing only short-term relief, but which can turn against us and which, moreover, will set a bad example for future generations. Only a big power, solidly based, can afford « tricks » - in which case it could well dispense with them - while we must earn our future only by honesty, self-sacrifice and let us say it, virtue.

'Our surest weapon must be a steadfast patriotism, which appreciates the importance and the worth of an honest compromise. We lost to Russia but Russia is winning the War for the Allies. History might change this pattern but we have not the power to do anything about it. Therefore only an honest compromise can help us along the hard road of history. But it must take patriotism into account and cannot go too far. We must not forget that this compromise must be an honest one. It must be acceptable to the majority of Poles; it must be a lasting one and it must lead to some kind of co-operation - only a voluntarily accepted one - with Russia, whether it is communist or not. The megalomania of « national honour » did us much harm and we cannot sacrifice to it any more.

'I shall be trying to promote in Poland all the ideas which I discussed with you and I trust that I may have some measure of success. In case, however, something were to happen to me, I wish to remind you again that you should consider me expendable. You should not attempt to rescue me ; only exploit me for the good of the Polish cause. I should add that you might have complete confidence in me and my activities. I have no personal ambitions and I am too old to be drawn back from my mission by personal considerations. I only desire good for my country and peace in that part of Europe where Poland is.

'As you know, I have not taken part in any personal intrigues and during the War have kept far away from any internal political manoeuvres. I have therefore no reason to depart from my path, nor shall I.

'Should anything happen to me, please remember my daughters who remain in England. I enclose a letter to the President. Please hand it over to him whenever you think appropriate.

'May God keep you in his care.'

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1946 - INITIATOR OF ELEC

Amongst Retinger's notes there is the following record of the creation of the European League for Economic Co-operation :

'In 1946 I felt the time had again come to make a new effort in the direction of the unity of Europe. I made a start by giving a lecture at the Royal Institute of International Affairs at Chatham House on 7 May under the title *European Continent?* (see excerpts from this lecture on pp. 28-29). A few weeks later I went to Brussels, where I had a long talk with Paul van Zeeland, who agreed with me that we should try to revive the concept of the unity of Europe by applying it first to the economic field. Thus we started the Independent League for Economic Co-operation - a clumsy title, but the word « independent » was intended to convey that we were in no way associated with any government ; while « economic co-operation » spoke for itself. We omitted the word « European » because we wanted to have the help of extra-European countries ; first of all the United States and Canada, and also Russia, which we saw as a continent in itself. While in Belgium I also talked with Paul-Henri Spaak and Roger Motz, who both concurred in the idea, and that is how the League was started in Brussels in June 1946. Mr. van Zeeland, who was not yet in the Government, had a good deal of time to devote to the League and until he later became Foreign Minister was extremely active, travelling round, contacting people and promoting our ideas.

'Neither van Zeeland nor I had to alter any of our views on Europe, but in those days of feverish political activity, both in the domestic and international fields, we thought it better to limit ourselves to practical suggestions on economic matters. In fact at that time, not only were conditions chaotic, but there was a complete dearth of ideas as to how to overcome economic difficulties. There was as yet no Marshall Plan and Europe was critically short of raw materials and food and could not afford to buy them from overseas. But we never considered the unity of Europe, especially in the economic field, as being limited to the Western part of Europe. We believed, and I think rightly, that the solution to aim at should be such that both Western and Eastern Europe could co-operate for the economic welfare of the Continent. We tried to establish sections of the League in every European country we could reach. From Brussels I went to The Hague, and here again, my Dutch friends, and especially Senator Pieter Kerstens, gave us their full support and at once started to organize the Dutch Section of the League.

'Coming back to London I consulted my old friend, Major General Sir Colin Gubbins, who by that time had left the Army and joined industry. He too proved enthusiastic and helped me to start the League in Britain ... He suggested, for instance, that I approach Sir Harold Butler, former Director of the International Labour Office and later Minister in Washington, who had just retired and had a good deal of spare time. Sir Colin also put me in touch with Edward Beddington Behrens. He had been a brilliant young officer in the First World War and, after a spell at the International Labour Office, became a well-known industrialist and financier. Among others who joined the League in London were Leslie Hore-Belisha, Harry Price, Harold Macmillan, Peter Thorneycroft, Henry Hopkinson (later Lord Colyton) and Roy Harrod.

'As for France, we thought the best man to approach would be Daniel Serruys. As a young man he had worked with Clemenceau and had been Secretary of the French Delegation at the Congress of Versailles. Later he negotiated many important international economic and financial agreements ... He too joined us without hesitation.

'At that time Serruys was already quite an old man, with a distinguished appearance, an amazing memory, and an extraordinary facility of speech. He knew everybody in the Western economic world and, notwithstanding his dictatorial manner, he managed to interest many important people in our ideas, and brought into the French Section of the League François Ponce, Michel Debré, Fould, Lacour Gayet, Edmond Giscard d'Estaing, Christian Monnier, André Voisin and André Noël.

'Mr van Zeeland arranged for the setting up of the Luxembourg Section, under the chairmanship of Mr Guili Königsbruck. He also took in hand Italy, and obtained the support of Ugo La Malfa ... the late Senator Enrico Falck took an active interest and formed the Italian Section of the League.

'We also tried, but without success, to organize a Section in Portugal. Our efforts in Switzerland also failed. In Austria, however, and later in Sweden, Sections were organized. For obvious political reasons we did not think it wise at that stage to try to organize a German Section. It was not until the Congress of Europe at The Hague in May 1948 that we began seriously to think about it. Later, under the leadership of Herr Hermann Abs, the German Section greatly contributed to the work of the League.'

(209-212)

1948 - THE CONGRESS OF EUROPE AT THE HAGUE

Reisinger tells of the preparations of the Congress of Europe and of the efforts to bring together the various international movements for European Unity in a European Movement :

'Then in December 1947 our Committee assumed the title of the International Committee of the Movements for European Unity, while Duncan Sandys and myself were elected respectively Executive Chairman and Honorary Secretary. We then decided to organize the big Congress we had in mind and shortly afterwards we finally agreed that the best place to hold it would be at The Hague.

'The preparation of the Congress of Europe was very difficult. We wanted to have a monster international gathering independent of any government and of any political party, and to get the most European minded, the most famous and the most representative participants. But rivalries were hard to avoid and, moreover, it was naturally difficult to gather seven hundred and fifty people - the number we had in mind - willing to spend a week of their time on work which, although we thought it most important, did not in some cases seem so to them. Our Movement had few national branches at that time who could give us any help. We were therefore largely obliged to rely on the personal contacts of Duncan Sandys and myself, while the advice we received, although proffered with the best of intentions, was not always very sound. Here I must say that so far as France, Belgium and Holland were concerned, our friends in those countries were of the greatest help, but when it came to other countries we generally had to use our own judgement and make arrangements ourselves. All this entailed not only an extremely extensive correspondence with persons who, in many cases, were unknown to us, but also personal visits by Duncan Sandys and myself to several hundred people ...'

(215-216)



Congress of The Hague, May 1948.
Applauding Churchill's speech are, from left to right, Pieter Kerstens, Paul Ramadier, Joseph Retinger,
Denis de Rougemont, Raoul Dautry, Duncan Sandys, Salvador de Madariaga.

1952 - THE CREATION OF THE BILDERBERG GROUP

by
H.R.H. Prince Bernhard of The Netherlands

... (Shortly after the Second World War, Joseph Retinger) was deeply concerned about the divergencies, already visible or impending, between the United States and Europe on certain important issues. He considered it of vital interest for the free world to smooth over these differences and reconcile all those who belong naturally to one and the same community.

This marked the beginning of those meetings between eminent American and European personalities that were later to be known as the 'Bilderberg Conferences'. With his typical modesty, Dr. Retinger always contrived to remain in the background ; but he was, in point of fact, the prime mover. Thanks to his vast understanding of men and problems, this simple, retiring man never failed to bring his clearheaded and stimulating influence to bear ; nor did the well-spring of his inspiring activity ever run dry.

Many misunderstandings between America and Europe were dispelled by these conferences and by the personal bonds that grew out of them.

The Bilderberg Group hopes to continue its work for as long as is necessary, guided by Dr. Retinger's example and by the spirit that characterized this good comrade of ours who, though small of build, was, we may confidently assert, a truly great man ; one to whom the free world owes a considerable debt.

(X)

THE EUROPEAN CONTINENT ?

by
Joseph Retinger

It was General Sikorski, the late Prime Minister of Poland, who with the help of a handful of his friends and colleagues succeeded in elaborating ... a new framework for the political and economic system of the Continent and in taking the first steps towards putting it into effect ...

... Ways and means must be found of making agreements, whether signed or not, lasting and reliable. In other words, nations and their governments must be linked with ties that cannot be broken. It was out of the necessity for this that emerged the idea of blocks of nations federated in such a way as to ensure their cohesion and the maximum amount of willing co-operation among them ...

... We spent 1939 and 1940 maturing our ideas. The first public indication of them was given as early as November, 1939, in a speech General Sikorski made before the Foreign Press Association in London. He said then, that he could not envisage any hopeful outcome of the war, unless it produced some system of democratic co-operation among the nations of the Continent, which would allow of the problems of economic reconstruction being peacefully settled and produce a true balance of power. It was not enough for the peoples to be democratic, but their Governments must be so too and also the method of their co-operation.

Sikorski was also the first active European statesman to indicate publicly and officially, that the European states ought to relinquish part of their sovereignty for the common interest.

This Polish proposal for the co-operation of the Continental States was arrived at after many consultations with the foremost statesmen and politicians of the various countries, whom General Sikorski or I were able to reach during those turbulent days ...

... Briefly our idea was to establish in Europe some five or six regional, federal blocks more or less equal in economic and military potentialities which, though strong enough to defend themselves against attack, would be economic organizations whose foremost need would be Peace ...

... In all that we did, however, we were most careful not to be carried away by unrealistic Utopianism. Conscious of the impossibility of attaining perfection and realizing that we should have to approach our goal with the utmost circumspection, especially as we, after all, represented but a small section of the Continent, we refrained from embarking on schemes or dreaming dreams beyond our strength to carry out. Anxious as we were to have our ideas adopted by the smaller Western countries and the Scandinavian ones, we confined our proposals to regional blocks within our own sphere of natural influence, namely the Central-Eastern and Balkan blocks. A world federation was not for us to suggest ...

... Remembering all this, I cannot but be afraid that this division of the Continent into two zones of interest may transfer the scene of the conflict to Europe itself. Unintentionally and almost without seeming to pay attention to it, we are sliding into a renewal of the conflict between the East and the West, in which Russia will be the champion of the East and the Anglo-Saxons the protagonists of the West ...

... Suspicion can be removed and geo-politics can give way to economic co-operation, providing there is a free area of neutral ground between the contending parties, a free strip of insulating material between the two points of view ... the European Continent an entity again ...

... At present the Continental states have their eyes glued each on its own patch of ground, which they are busily trying to weed. If this weeding is to serve any purpose, they must raise their eyes and look both back and forward : back to the old unity of the Continent and forward to its renewed unification ...

(Excerpts from an address given by Joseph Retinger on 7th May, 1946, with a postscript dated 30th August, 1946, see above p. 23).

BIOGRAPHY

*Joseph Retinger
A Great European*

Cracow 1888 - London 1960

1888 Joseph Hieronim Retinger (JHR) was born on 17 April 1888 in Cracow, the youngest of five children. His father Joseph was a lawyer and legal adviser to Count Wladyslaw Zamoycki. The Retingers had many connections with the Jagiellon University in Cracow and his mother, from landed gentry, inherited a small estate nearby.

JHR married in 1912 Otalia Zubrzycka with whom he had one daughter, Malina.

In 1926 he married again, Stella Morel, and had two daughters, Marya and Stasia.

1906 After the death of his father, as protégé of Count Zamoycki, he came to Paris.

1908 JHR became Docteur es Lettres at the Sorbonne and continued studies in Munich, London and Italy.

1910 He founded and edited a literary monthly in Cracow.

1911 Came to London to set up the Polish Bureau representing a group of Polish political parties, active in the Austro-Hungarian part of Poland.

1914 - 1918 JHR lived in London and Paris and also visited the United States working for the cause of Polish independence. In 1916, with covert backing, he made an attempt at a separate peace with Austria.

1918 In early spring he was declared persona non grata in France and England and left hurriedly for Spain and later came to Mexico.

1919 - 1925 Worked in Mexico in close association with trade union and government leaders, assisting with their foreign relations and in their struggle against the dominance of American oil interests. In 1924 and 1926 he organized visits to Mexico of leaders of the International Federation of Trade Unions and

also promoted the formation in Great Britain of a Labour Party Parliamentary Committee for Mexico in 1926.

1927 Pursuing his war-time interest in European Unity he tried to persuade Labour leaders to sponsor a pro-European encyclopedia but the plan was turned down by Ernest Bevin.

1924 - 1939 JHR worked in close association with leaders of the Polish Socialist Party and represented them in London. He mobilised support when after the Pilsudski coup d'état many of them were arrested.

1939 JHR became adviser to General Sikorski, Prime Minister of the Polish Government in exile, in Paris and later in London. They first met in 1916 in Switzerland and again in 1926 when Retinger came to Poland with Edo Fimmen (from The Netherlands), Secretary General of the International Federation of Free Trade Unions. From about 1936, Retinger who lived in London frequently visiting Poland, worked closely with Sikorski trying to build up a democratic opposition.

1940 After the fall of Paris, on the 17 June, JHR obtained a R.A.F. plane, located Sikorski near Bordeaux and flew him to London to meet Churchill. They agreed the evacuation of Polish troops from France and some 30,000 men reached England.

1941 Retinger assisted Sikorski in the treaty negotiations with the Soviets and was sent by him to Moscow to start the liberation of hundreds of thousands of deported and imprisoned Poles, from among whom the Anders army was later formed. Sikorski, who influenced by Retinger became a convinced federalist, initiated talks on a federal union between Polish and Czechoslovak leaders. JHR contacted Belgian Ministers : Jaspars, van Zeeland, Spaak and Motz and the first talks on the future unity of Europe took place on 7 February 1941 with the participation of Sikorski and Pierlot, the Belgian Prime Minister. A few months later talks started with the Dutch Prime Minister Gerbrandy, Foreign Minister van Kleeffens and Economic Minister Kerstens. In the presence of Sikorski and Retinger the first talks on co-operation between Belgium and Holland took place between Spaak and van Kleeffens.

1942 - 1944 Under Sikorski's aegis JHR initiated regular meetings of the Foreign Ministers of the exiled governments in the Polish Prime Ministers' office to discuss the unity of Europe. Retinger got the support of British Ministers Sir Stafford Cripps and Ernest Bevin for these ideas. Everybody agreed on the need for supra-national links and institutions.

After the death of Sikorski in July 1943 Retinger arranged to be parachuted to Poland to brief resistance leaders and find out their views. He finally jumped on 3 April 1944 at the age of 56 and six months later, paralysed with polynouritis from which he never completely recovered, was evacuated by plane.

1945 JHR obtained from the British Government surplus military equipment such as bridges, field kitchens, clothing, etc. which was sent to Poland and visited the country on two occasions.

1946 To launch his European campaign, Retinger gave at the Royal Institute of Foreign Affairs in London a lecture on the 7 May under the title « The European Continent? ». He mentioned war time talks on Europe, efforts to promote regional groupings, the great danger of a vacuum arising in the centre of Europe and discussing existing possibilities he said : « It would be possible for the smaller of the Western Continental powers to initiate consultations and upon this framework a unified Continent might well be built ».

At the same time Paul van Zeeland - who in London in 1942 wrote « Preliminary notes on the reconstruction of Europe after the war » - published an article entitled « Belgium and Western Europe » suggesting France, Great Britain, the Netherlands and Belgium forming the nucleus of European co-operation.

On the 17 October 1946 Retinger, Paul van Zeeland and Pieter Kerstens, who knew each other from the London war-days, together with Canadian Ambassador Dupuy, as an observer, met informally for the first time in Maison Flamande in Brussels - residence of Paul van Zeeland - and decided to form an independent association to restore Europe. In 1949 it became known as the European League for Economic Co-operation (ELEC). Paul van Zeeland became President and Retinger Secretary General.

1947 - 1951 Retinger, van Zeeland and Kerstens developed the structures of ELEC.

An American Committee (disbanded after the launching of the Marshall Plan) and British, French, Belgian, Luxembourg and Dutch Committees were formed in the years 1946-1949 followed by Italian, German and Austrian Committees during 1950-1951. Prominent Europeans such as Sir Harold Butler, Harold Macmillan, Edmond Giscard d'Estaing, Daniel Serruys, René Mayer, Count Boël, Louis Camu, Bentz van den Berg, Guill Konsbruck, Hermann J. Abs, etc. met regularly at ELEC meetings.

In 1947 Retinger was elected Honorary Secretary of the International Committee of the Movements for European Unity (later renamed the European Movement) with Duncan Sandys as Chairman. This Committee initiated and prepared the Congress of The Hague in May 1948 opened by Winston Churchill and Princess Juliana, which led to the creation of the Council of Europe.

In 1949 Retinger became the first Secretary General of the International European Movement and with Duncan Sandys was the driving force behind the first session of the Assembly of the Council of Europe opened in Strasbourg on the 8 August 1949.

In 1951 Paul-Henri Spaak took over the chairmanship of the Movement and Retinger with the secretariat moved to Brussels.

1952 - 1959 In 1952 Retinger discussed with Paul van Zeeland and Paul Rijkens, Chairman of Unilever, the setting up of a forum for improving the then deteriorating relations between Europe and the United States. Retinger suggested Prince Bernhard of The Netherlands as Chairman and together they organised the Bilderberg Meetings to be concerned with the Atlantic Alliance.
As before Retinger remained primarily devoted to European Unity.
He died on the 12 June 1960 and was buried in a very modest grave at the North Sheen cemetery in London.

CHOICE OF PUBLICATIONS

- | | |
|-------|---|
| 1949. | Plan for intra-European convertibility ^(*) |
| 1950. | The Schuman plan ^(*) |
| 1950. | The free international transfer of currencies ^(*) |
| 1950. | The rearmament of Western Europe and its economic unification ^(*) |
| 1951. | The intra-European demobilisation of tariffs ^(*) |
| 1951. | Europe-Commonwealth Conference ^(*) |
| 1951. | The movement of workers in Western Europe ^(*) |
| 1951. | The organisation of transport in Western Europe |
| 1952. | A European Institute for Advanced Business Management ^(*) |
| 1953. | La portée économique d'une communauté politique européenne ^(*) |
| 1954. | A European solidarity plan to aid the depressed areas of Southern Europe |
| 1954. | Declaration of ELEC on the creation of a common market |
| 1956. | The common market to promote social prosperity |
| 1957. | European integration and social prosperity |
| 1958. | Common protection for private international investments |
| 1958. | Au-delà de la Communauté Economique Européenne |
| 1960. | La fiscalité indirecte dans le Marché Commun |
| 1960. | European Investment Bank problems |
| 1960. | The coming tasks of Europe |
| 1961. | The entry of Great Britain into the E.E.C. |
| 1962. | La politique agricole dans la C.E.E. |
| 1962. | The E.E.C. and the three neutrals |
| 1963. | Latin America and the European experience |
| 1965. | East-West commercial relations |
| 1967. | Economic, industrial, scientific and technical co-operation between the countries of Eastern and Western Europe |
| 1969. | The common policy for transport in Europe |
| 1969. | East-West Round Table |
| 1972. | L'élargissement des Communautés Européennes et la position des pays non candidats à l'adhésion |
| 1973. | Regional policy in the economic and monetary union |
| 1974. | For a reform of the functioning of the European Community institutions |
| 1977. | Towards a united Europe |
| 1978. | A new economic impetus for Europe |
| 1981. | Europe in the eighties - ELEC in action |

- 1982. Coexistence in the European economy of public and private enterprises
- 1984. Reorganizing work
- 1986. The reform of the Common Agricultural Policy
- 1986. Financial market for Europe
- 1987. The European dimension in environmental protection
- 1988. Europe and the case of Austria
- 1989. Taxation in Europe ¹⁹.
- 1990. What future for European agriculture?
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- 1993. Environment (Cahier Comte BOËL n° 1).
- 1993. Transition Strategies toward Economic and Monetary Union (Cahier Comte BOËL n° 2).
- 1994. Institutional Convergence: a Prerequisite for Monetary Union (Cahier Comte BOËL n° 3).
- 1994. The Future of Central Europe (Cahier Comte BOËL n° 4).
- 1995. The origins of the European League for Economic Co-operation (ELEC) by Drs M. van der Velden.
- 1996. In remembrance of Joseph Retinger, Initiator of the European League for Economic Co-operation (50th Anniversary of ELEC 1946-1996)

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¹⁹ Out of print.