

**Peter Catterall**

Queen Mary, University of London

## MACMILLAN AND EUROPE, 1950-1956

### The Cold War, the American Context and the British Approach to European Integration<sup>1</sup>

Much of the work which has so far appeared on Harold Macmillan's attitude towards European integration has focused, understandably, on the period 1957-1963.<sup>2</sup> This, after all, was the period during which Macmillan, as Prime Minister, moved from the expedient alternative of the Free Trade Area to the failed entry negotiations of 1961-1963. Work on the period up to 1957, in contrast, has tended to be more sketchy and superficial. Its basic tone is summed up in Richard Lamb's comment that Macmillan was "not consistent."<sup>3</sup> Hugo Young, more acerbically, refers to "a mixture of contradictions."<sup>4</sup>

Nevertheless, this view would certainly seem to be supported by a cursory glance at the Macmillan record in these years. On the one hand Macmillan was an enthusiastic participant in the Council of Europe from its creation in 1949 until his entry to government in 1951 made further involvement impossible, leading the Conservative delegation to Strasbourg in 1950 and 1951. After his appointment as Foreign Secretary in 1955 he complained in his diary: "The F.O. (so strong is tradition) is—from the time of Ernest Bevin and Eden—hostile to the European movement—as a Churchill stunt! I keep trying to persuade them that I favour it—as one of its founders!"<sup>5</sup> Yet, on the other hand, many historians seem to have taken the view that this self-identification was more apparent than real. Macmillan has been universally condemned as having spent the rest of 1955 trying to sabotage the Messina negotiations and the Spaak committee that paved the way for the Treaty of Rome. Some have even portrayed him as consistently hostile to the European Defence Community.<sup>6</sup>

1. I would like to thank British Academy award OCG-32748 for helping to make the research on which this article is based possible.

2. See particularly Jacqueline Tratt, *The Macmillan Government and Europe* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996).

3. Richard Lamb "Macmillan and Europe," in *Harold Macmillan: Aspects of a Political Life*, edited by Richard Aldous and Sabine Lee (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999), 75.

4. Hugo Young, *This Blessed Plot: Britain and Europe from Churchill to Blair* (London: Macmillan, 1998), 113; see also Richard Davenport-Hines, *The Macmillans* (London: Mandarin, 1993), 281.

5. Department of Western Manuscripts, Bodleian Library, Oxford: *Harold Macmillan Diaries* [henceforward *HMD*]: 29 June 1955.

Even those who have appreciated his early advocacy of a European Army have tended to imply that such enthusiasm was buried under growing Germanophobia as the 1950s wore on [Young 113-114]. Macmillan's Cabinet memoranda can prove a fertile source for such interpretations, not least the anxieties he expressed in March 1953: "Are we really sure that we want to see a Six Power Federal Europe, with a common army, a common iron and steel industry (Schuman Plan) ending with a common currency and monetary policy?"<sup>7</sup> All of this, he feared, threatened to hand to Germany "on a plate what we have fought two world wars to prevent."<sup>8</sup>

The resulting historiographical tone is neatly summarised in the title of Martin Schaad's recent book, *Bullying Bonn*.<sup>9</sup> To be fair to Schaad, he does not, however, emphasise British anxieties about Germany and geopolitics. His focus instead is on the extent to which Germany was seen, particularly after the normalisation of relations with the Federal Republic by 1955, as a means of leveraging British ends in Europe. In Macmillan's papers in 1960-1961 that paved the way for the entry negotiations, for instance, a divergence between de Gaulle and Adenauer was seen as offering an opportunity for Britain.<sup>10</sup> Whilst historians have disagreed, however, about the degree of cordiality in Macmillan's relationship with Adenauer,<sup>11</sup> all have tended to portray it as instrumental and ineffective.

In Macmillan's account, Adenauer's approach to European integration was, however, no less instrumental. During Macmillan's 1957 visit to Germany the Chancellor apparently told him "I don't want us to get strong again too quickly [...] I see great dangers ahead. That is why I yearn so for European unity and (in view of France's weakness) for British participation." [HMD: 12 May 1957]

At the same time, as Young acknowledges [Young 114], the European idea in the 1950s was in any case far from crystallised. What form Europe should take, and to what purpose, remained a matter of debate. Even those

6. See Spencer Mawby, *Containing Germany: Britain and the Arming of the Federal Republic* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999), 7, 102.

7. Public Record Office, London [henceforward PRO]: CAB129/60, C(53)108 (&9 March 1953).

8. PRO: T234/100, Macmillan to Bridges (1 February 1956), quoted in James Ellison, *Threatening Europe: Britain and the Creation of the European Community 1955-58* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000), 41. See also HMD: 16 November 1950, 14 March 1953.

9. Martin P.C. Schaad, *Bullying Bonn: Anglo-German Diplomacy on European Integration 1955-61* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000).

10. See Oliver Bange, *The EEC Crisis of 1963: Kennedy, Macmillan, de Gaulle and Adenauer in Conflict* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000), 18.

11. Sabine Lee ["Macmillan and Germany," in Aldous and Lee, 117] acknowledges Macmillan's attempts to foster friendly relations, in contrast to Wolfram Kaiser, *Using Europe, Abusing the Europeans: Britain and European Integration 1945-63* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996).

who agreed upon objectives did not necessarily agree upon the means. Furthermore, as Alan Milward has demonstrated,<sup>12</sup> there was a clear instrumentality to the approach taken to European integration by all players. In an arena of competitive negotiation, this was, of course, always likely. Macmillan, Monnet, Spaak and others all had to articulate their positions against each other, react to different initiatives and cope with countervailing domestic pressures. After all, European ideas had to be explained and promoted to national audiences who, as Spaak admitted, frequently had little grasp of the issues so avidly discussed by what was in many ways “an intellectual movement of the few.” [HMD: 26 October 1952] This was not the least reason why schemes such as the Schuman Plan or the European Army went through various iterations. Accordingly, even if Macmillan did shift his ground on these issues, which is a matter of debate, it does not prove that he was as inconsistent in his approach to European integration as has been claimed.

This paper seeks to test this prevailing orthodoxy by looking in particular at Macmillan’s involvement in the Council of Europe 1949-1951, and his reactions to the successive challenges of the European Army idea, the Schuman Plan and the Common Market proposals. In the process it is hoped that it will provide a fuller analysis than any hitherto of how Macmillan’s thinking on European integration developed in the period up to his entry to 10 Downing Street.

### ***The Council of Europe***

In many ways Macmillan was an ideal delegate to the Council of Europe Assembly. He spoke French fluently, and enjoyed friendships with many continental politicians, particularly French and Italian, dating back to his time as Minister Resident in North West Africa in 1942-1945. As he acknowledged,

I like foreigners; I like listening to their speeches; and I am beginning to understand, after a good many years of experience, their way of thinking. I find their speeches much more interesting and witty than those I have to listen to in the House of Commons. Their method of thought is at least logical. They try to argue a case, where we are content with mere assertions. Apart from these personal predilections, I must also admit that I like the life at Strasbourg. [HMD: 15 May 1951]

From his diaries it is clear that he relished the polyglot manoeuvrings for political advantage in an assembly which had yet to acquire the rigid political divisions of the British Parliament. Not that he in any way wished the Assembly to be a mere talking shop, noting that,

12. Alan S. Milward *The European Rescue of the Nation State* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).

My object all along has been to distract the delegates from their eternal (but barren) exercise of constitution making to practical and urgent affairs. In 1949, we made the inclusion of Germany the central theme. In August 1950 we launched the European army. In November 1950, I want to keep the European [army] as the central subject. [HMD: 18 November 1950]

This passage points to three components of Macmillan's thinking on Europe. Firstly, Macmillan did have clear and practical objectives. To achieve these the Council of Europe did not necessarily prove a perfect vehicle. But that some of Macmillan's ambitions were frustrated, requiring adjustment, does not demonstrate inconsistency. As he noted when returning to the Council as Foreign Secretary,

It's fun to be back in Strasbourg, where I spent so many weeks 6 years ago, with Churchill, Sandys, Maxwell-Fyfe, and all the rest; in the early formation years of the European movement. Altho' it hasn't all worked out quite as we had hoped, yet in one way or another, tremendous steps have been taken towards practical co-operation in European affairs. The instruments have varied; NATO, WEU, OEEC and so on. But the work has been done. [HMD: 4 July 1955]

Secondly, Macmillan was less concerned than some of his European counterparts about the precise institutions utilised. His interest was more in practical co-operation to tackle immediate economic and security issues. Some may see in this the failure of imagination Young accuses him of [Young 114]. And he was certainly impatient with what he saw as "facile but unreal constitution making." [HMD: 6 March 1951] But this was not least because he felt that the result was often to lose sight of the primary purpose. When the French Foreign Minister, Robert Schuman, addressed the Assembly late in 1950, for instance, Macmillan recorded,

This strange, melancholy, quixotic figure, half politician, half priest, gave a characteristic address, well phrased, philosophic, and rather impractical. The European army is clearly not so much to fight the Russians as (like the steel and coal pact) to unite Germans and Frenchmen. It is to be accompanied by all the paraphernalia of the Coal and Steel plan; committees of ministers, parliamentary bodies and all the other 'organs' which the French love so much. [HMD: 22-24 November 1950]

In contrast, Macmillan emphasised, "The purpose (which is to make German rearmament safe for the world) must be kept in mind. So long as this is done, detail is unimportant." [HMD: 27 September 1951] The problem with the Young view of this attitude is that it mistakes why Macmillan did not favour precision and detail. It is not that Macmillan lacked a vision, but that he had a different and larger one than many contemporaries. Unlike Schuman, his prime concern was not to unite French and German, but to promote common cause across the divided continent on which they, and many others,

resided. Detail reduced the ambit of consent. Macmillan's thoughts, for instance, on the future of the Council of Europe in 1955, are accordingly both broader and more imprecise:

I think it has two main functions (a) to keep under review and discuss the political aspect of these technical European organs (b) to debate, in the only Parliamentary European forum that exists, the great questions of the day. In addition, it represents the concept of Europe as a whole; even tho' now divided ideologically, Europe is a historical and cultural whole. [HMD: 4 July 1955]

An unsympathetic reading might claim that this represents a failure of imagination, but only because, as he and many of his Strasbourg colleagues were aware, with the cold war at its height, there were limits on what could be done for the foreseeable future to treat Europe as a political whole. For instance, on meeting the former Prime Minister of Estonia he sadly reflected, "I am bound to admit that I find it difficult to imagine conditions in which Russia will evacuate these territories." [HMD: 6 March 1951] He was, however, reluctant therefore simply to reduce his vision of Europe to a western rump. A key example is the Central and Eastern European group he founded with Edward Beddington-Behrens in 1948. It might be easy to dismiss this body, of which he was President, as simply an artifice of the cold war,<sup>13</sup> intended merely to remind "ourselves (and the public) that (including the 3 Baltic States) there are still 9 countries in Central and Eastern Europe under Totalitarian rule." [HMD: 21 August 1950] However, as was clear from the group's conference in October 1950, the objectives were rather broader. As well as keeping lines of communication open they included,

- (a) Unity of Eastern Europe (i) between themselves (ii) with Western Europe
- (b) Democratic Reconstruction, when liberation comes
- (c) [resolving the problem of] Refugees. [HMD: 16 October 1950]

The cold war context was nevertheless clearly the third component of his thinking about Europe in these years. After luncheon at the Italian embassy early in 1951 Macmillan commented,

It is a strange world—or rather dual world in which we live. With one half of our minds we do our daily business; make plans for next year and so forth. With the other we discuss (privately and unreported) the approaching end of the civilised world. [HMD: 31 January 1951]

Such anxieties were to diminish after Stalin's death in March 1953, but not to disappear.

13. It did, after all, receive some support from MI6, though the Foreign Office, under both Bevin and Eden, was generally indifferent at best; see HMD: 7 December 1951.

Defence issues by no means completely dominated Macmillan's view of the purpose of European integration. He was, after all, an early and active adherent of Lady Rhys Williams' European League for Economic Co-operation founded in 1948. Defence, nevertheless, was clearly central to his thinking on the subject. The problems of European defence took centre stage, for instance, during the trip Macmillan took to Sweden on behalf of the European Movement in March 1951, or in Macmillan's sense of the frustration his old friend Eisenhower felt in his position as SACEUR [HMD: 3 July 1951]. This, rather than the fostering of Franco-German unity, is the context within which Macmillan's attitude to the European Army issue has to be viewed.

### ***From European Army to EDC***

Macmillan was an enthusiastic onlooker when Churchill launched the concept of a European Army at Strasbourg in August 1950. The idea of some sort of force which would both help to contain the Russian threat and provide a safe context for German rearmament had already been gestating for some time, but the outbreak of the Korean War two months earlier certainly helped to ensure the receptivity of Churchill's audience. Macmillan, like Churchill, has however been accused of having subsequently cooled to this proposal. This is less than fair.

Churchill's speech had moved a special emergency resolution calling for national contingents from all member states of the Council of Europe—a neat way of allowing the Germans, who had recently joined, to rearm. In August Churchill seems to have envisaged the creation of ten German divisions. [Mawby 2] In October, when the Americans offered this to the Germans, the French however took fright. The Pleven plan they now put forward, demanding instead “a European army under a European minister of defence, fully integrated, with battalions or perhaps ‘regiments’ as the largest national units” [HMD: 23-30 October 1950], reflected their fears of Germany, rather than the anxiety to improve European defence which had motivated Churchill.

The Germans were not necessarily wholly sold on the idea either. As Macmillan later put it, “The French are frightened of the Germans; the Germans are frightened of themselves.” [HMD: 18 February 1952] In particular, the SPD opposition, suspicious of German rearmament and neutralist, had recently been making electoral headway, to the alarm of Adenauer's CDU. In November 1950 Macmillan therefore used a speech in Strasbourg as an emotional plea to the Germans to support the concept of the European Army.

In contrast to the French, he was more concerned about the risk of American isolationism—another reason why he regarded the European Army

as an imperative—than renewed German aggression. He did, however, appreciate, that the French

are haunted by it. It would certainly help the French very much if the 'European army' conception was maintained; still more, if some British contingent were joined to it. But I can see the technical and 'logistical' difficulties, which will be urged by the French. At the same time, there are such immense difficulties in any scheme which involves re-building the power of Germany, that bold and imaginative decisions are necessary. My feeling is that these will not be forthcoming. [HMD: 20 December 1950]

Detail, designed to tie the Germans down, did not seem to him imaginative. Indeed, as he and Eisenhower observed, integration could be more effectively achieved through amalgamation of arms production and logistics [HMD: 27 September 1951]. But that would have been to prioritise military efficiency, rather than the narrow political objectives which came to dominate what became known as the European Defence Community scheme. These, to Macmillan, vitiated the goals of the idea as originally conceived. He lamented

[Paul] Reynaud says that no French assembly will vote for a European army in which Britain is not represented. But how can Britain be represented in the devitalised and denationalised army which Pleven and Monnet plan to make—no national uniform but a common uniform; no national tunes; only an American jazz. Such an army will never be formed and if formed will not fight. [HMD: 29 November 1951]

As he told his close friend, the French ambassador René Massigli, earlier in 1951, "The British wd never accept a Parliamentary control by a sort of sub-committee of the European Assembly." However, he did go on to argue,

What was important was that a British contingent shd be included in the European Army, even if the greater part of the British contribution was made direct to the Atlantic force. If we were to persuade our people to accept this, the system must be simple and elastic. [HMD: 29 January 1951].

Macmillan only seems to have accepted that British involvement was not feasible when, after the Conservatives returned to power in the 1951 election, he heard as a member of the Cabinet the new Foreign Secretary, Anthony Eden, explain that Eisenhower was pleading for the British not to attempt to join at this late stage as it would only further delay progress [HMD: 4 December 1951]. Not that this satisfied him for long, not least because of a concern at the sense of betrayal amongst his friends in the European movement at the failure of the new Conservative government to take a markedly more positive line towards Europe than their Labour predecessors. His memorandum protesting against a Foreign Office paper on European integration in January 1952 is well-known. However, as Minister of Housing and Local Government,

and an object of Eden's suspicions, he was not well placed to take this matter forward. After careful consideration he concluded, "Resignation is no good and wd delight those who are against us—at least, so I feel.... [therefore] I leave world politics and return to my 'rabbit hutches.'"<sup>14</sup>

He still felt the French needed a gesture of British support if the National Assembly was to ratify the EDC Treaty, a view confirmed by the Paris embassy in April 1952. The Cabinet's reaction was to offer France a guarantee. Macmillan complained in his diary:

How odd it is that we undertake these obligations in this rather haphazard way! Of course, it is right and really commits us to no new position. But I still feel we should have taken the lead ourselves in Europe, instead of adopting this method, wh does not save us from the risks but deprives us of the control. [HMD: 5 March 1952]

By April 1953 Massigli was reporting that because "France is terrified of a German-French merger, without Britain, which leaves them at the mercy of Germany" [HMD: 27 April 1953], the French President was now suggesting a return to the Churchill confederal concept, as opposed to the EDC scheme to merge various units.

Achieving some kind of improvement in European defence still seemed imperative to Macmillan, despite the thaw in the cold war following Stalin's death. Siren voices in response to the Russian peace initiatives alarmed him greatly. Later, when Foreign Secretary in 1955, he was to advocate and participate in a limited revival of Four Power talks aimed not so much at achieving concrete ends but at continuous dialogue. An avid reader of nineteenth century history, this no doubt reflected in part his view of the Concert of Europe following the Napoleonic wars. Churchill's more opened-ended call for international summitry in his speech in the Commons on 11 May 1953, however, seemed much more risky to Macmillan. He mused,

Does Churchill know what he wants as a settlement with Russia? Will Central and Eastern Europe be 'sold out' in a super-Munich? All these things are very worrying. At present I can do nothing in the Cabinet. But I shall not stay if we are now to seek 'appeasement' and call it Peace. [HMD: 12 May 1953]

Macmillan felt that the Russian overtures were largely designed to divide the West and prevent the outcome they most feared, the rearmament of Germany. [HMD: 1 August 1954] He saw Churchill's response as playing their game and, in the process, making French ratification of the EDC even less likely. For, as Massigli later emphasised, "there could be no question of any French Govt

14. HMD: 15 and 17 March 1952. It might be noted that Macmillan was quite prepared to threaten resignation when he felt it would help him get his way, for instance, over bread and milk subsidies when at the Treasury.



being able to persuade the French Assembly to ratify E.D.C. so long as there was any chance of talks with Russia.” [HMD: 24 July 1953] Churchill’s speech did have major consequences for Macmillan’s career. If its effect on the cold war was limited, it certainly brought to an end the cold relationship that had long characterised Macmillan’s dealing with Eden—the two men being brought together by their markedly similar reactions to Churchill’s demarche.<sup>15</sup> Neither the Soviet thaw of spring 1953 nor Churchill’s speech, however, seem to have changed Macmillan’s attitude to the EDC. It was by no means what he had advocated in 1950, and he did, as Mawby says, fear that it would become dominated by the Germans [Mawby 103], but as long as it was the only option on the table he wished to see it ratified.

However, advised by Massigli, he long saw this as unlikely as long as Britain was not involved. When the French Assembly finally rejected the EDC on 30 August 1954 he

looked up again my Cabinet paper on the subject in Feb 1952, when I foretold that it would not pass. I still think that it’s a good result for us. “Federation” of Europe means “Germanisation” of Europe. “Confederation” (if we play our cards properly), should be British leadership of Europe. [HMD: 3 September 1954]

His reaction was a Cabinet memorandum suggesting “a European box inside an Atlantic box,” through using the 1948 Brussels Pact as the basis for a European entity within NATO [HMD: 4 September 1954]. Macmillan seems to have feared that this might antagonise the Foreign Office, which suggests that he was unaware of the active discussion of this option that had been pursued within Eden’s bailiwick over the previous few months [Mawby 146f]. When it was subsequently capped with success by the creation of Western European Union he triumphantly recorded in his diary

So the great plan is launched for which we have worked at Strasbourg and elsewhere for more than 5 years. The federal system of EDC is dead; the confederal system of Western European Union is very much alive. Britain (and Churchill) is justified of her children. It is really a great triumph for us. The British F.O. has been hopelessly wrong all through—like the State Dept. It has been a real pleasure to see England leading Europe. [HMD: 24 October 1954]

15. Reinforced by their shared criticism of Churchill’s clinging to the premiership.

### **The Schuman Plan**

Macmillan's attitude towards the Schuman Plan was consonant with that he consistently demonstrated towards the EDC, though the outcome was less to his satisfaction. There is, for instance, the same distaste for constitution-building, and the same preference for a confederal approach. The issue concerned, however, a matter much less central to Macmillan's European priorities. Accordingly, whereas he could plausibly claim some paternity rights as far as the European Army idea was concerned, in the case of the proposals for what eventually became the European Coal and Steel Community in 1952, he was much more reacting to the initiatives of others.

He would, however, have claimed that at least his reaction was not, like that of the Labour government, one of almost unalloyed negativity. As is well-known, in August 1950 at Strasbourg, he and David Eccles instead put forward their alternative proposals. The main difference was the absence of the supranational elements of the Schuman Plan [*HMD*, III, 201-204]. Less concerned than the French to tie-in the Germans, their focus instead, in the tight parliamentary situation of that time, was upon the domestic political advantage that might be gained. As Macmillan noted, "I am convinced that the Macmillan-Eccles plan can do nothing but good on the home front. For it will show that Conservatives are as determined as anyone else to protect British interests, while willing to cooperate with Europe on a reasonable basis."<sup>16</sup> European matters less central to British priorities, then as now, are always susceptible to being viewed largely through a domestic prism. Not that Macmillan did treat the Schuman Plan purely as a domestic political football.

For him the Plan also involved rigidities that were unattractive for other European nations, notably the Dutch and Belgians [*HMD*: 19 August 1950], as well as the British. On 24 August 1950 he therefore put forward a compromise resolution:

That a renewed effort should be made forthwith by all the Governments concerned to find a basis for an agreement which will enable all the principal coal and steel producing countries of Europe to participate fully in the scheme.

Two days later, after some behind the scenes manoeuvres, the Council of Europe Assembly carried this motion by 66-19.

He felt that this reflected, in part, French concern at the weakness of their steel industry as opposed to that of Germany. The concurrent discus-

16. [*HMD*: 6 August 1950] And when the French subsequently used the injudicious absence of Eccles from the Economic Committee of the Council to claim that he and Macmillan had retreated from their proposals, the latter was mortified at the bad press it generated at home [*HMD*: 22 August 1950].

sions on German rearmament, however, diminished any prospects of French compromise during the autumn. Nevertheless, Macmillan did not seem put out. When he returned to Strasbourg in November he cheerfully noted, "The Schuman plan will go on; the British will probably end up by joining, if not as full members, at least as associates. All this is very encouraging...." [HMD: 21 November 1950]. By May 1951 he was teasing the only two groups in Strasbourg who failed to vote for the Plan, the British and German socialists, for their betrayal of the supposed internationalism of their creed. As with the EDC, however, the uncertainties of political life in Fourth Republic France continued to suggest that the ultimate success of the Plan was by no means certain. Indeed, that November he told the newly formed Conservative Cabinet that he thought it would collapse [HMD: 25 November 1951]. What he seems to have envisaged was a revival of the Macmillan-Eccles contre-projet, as an alternative that would work. Failing that, he would have preferred British involvement, as the best way to ensure that the Germans did not come to dominate the resulting organisations. As he told the Cabinet on 4 December 1951, after Eden had advised that the attitude of the previous Labour government meant that it was now too late to participate:

I thought the present position tragic, but that, in view of what Eden had said, we must accept it. But I thought that both the Schuman plan and the European army (on the Pleven-Monnet model) might break down. But was there not a danger that if it went through, the position in ten years would be still worse. There would be a European Community which would dominate Europe and would be roughly equal to Hitler's Europe of 1940. If we stay out, we risk that German domination of Europe which we have fought two wars to prevent.

Macmillan was able to do little about this at that instance, and the European Coal and Steel Community was formed of Belgium, France, (West) Germany, Italy, Luxembourg and the Netherlands in August 1952. However, it might be noted that British association with the ECSC was subsequently secured in December 1954, as Macmillan had predicted, and in a manner which to some extent reprised the ideas of the Macmillan-Eccles plan.

### ***Macmillan and Messina***

Macmillan has, however, been widely portrayed as having done his best to sabotage the next stage of European integration, the Messina negotiations of June 1955 and their aftermath, which eventually paved the way for the Treaty of Rome and the creation of the European Economic Community in 1958. By now Macmillan was Foreign Secretary in Eden's government, and arguably in a position at last to ameliorate Britain's relations with Europe. He stands accused, however, of a rebuff to Europe no less than his immediate predecessors

(Bevin and Eden).

1955 was a busy year for diplomats, especially in terms of East-West relations. Macmillan was, for instance, in Geneva for Four Power talks when the Cabinet's Economic Policy Committee rejected British participation in the Common Market proposals. He was also kept fully occupied by events in Cyprus. Yet, despite the volume of Foreign Office telegrams and business, he managed to keep up his diary. Indeed, the Macmillan diary for 1955 is twice as long as for any other year. It is curious then that Messina is scarcely mentioned. Nor is the committee that was subsequently established under Paul-Henri Spaak to plan a customs union, despite Macmillan's long friendship with the chairman. Spaak at the time was Macmillan's opposite number for Belgium, and the two men met repeatedly during 1955 at various international gatherings. If, on any of these occasions, they discussed Spaak's committee, however, Macmillan's diary is silent on the subject.

The one thing Macmillan did do was ensure that Britain, as an associate power of the ECSC, was represented on the Spaak committee.<sup>17</sup> The official who was appointed, Russell Bretherton, however came from the Board of Trade. Macmillan therefore had no direct oversight of the British representative who, indeed, goes unmentioned in the diary. Nor was Bretherton's political boss, Peter Thorneycroft, amongst Macmillan's close allies. Those elements in the Foreign Office more suspicious of European integration, moreover, can hardly have been disappointed that another department had taken the lead on this matter.

This alone, however, is not sufficient to explain Macmillan's silence on the subject. After all, he comments in his 1955 diary on other aspects of the Board of Trade's work. Nor does Lamb's view that his interest in things European had waned seem appropriate as an explanation[Lamb 77]. The attention lavished on the consequences of the Spaak committee from December 1955 onwards suggests that this is untrue. But this still leaves unresolved why Macmillan seems to have largely ignored these developments up to that point.

There is little doubt that they were developments on which he was not overly keen. He subsequently admitted in his memoirs that at the time he did not favour a customs union [HMD III]. Such a development would cut across not only Britain's existing trading relations with the Commonwealth, but the established commercial links of many other of the non-communist European states. However, unlike in 1950 over the Schuman Plan, he made no attempt to put forward counter proposals.

17. See PRO: CAB 128/26, cabinet conclusions 19 (55), 30 June 1955.

One explanation is offered by Young, who suggests, on a selective reading of Macmillan's diary, that this was simply because he assumed that, as with the EDC, nothing would ever come of the Spaak committee's efforts. The passage Young quotes is from the entry for 14 December 1955, which is the first to refer in any detail to the Messina process. It was at this time Macmillan was widely seen as attempting to sabotage this process. This was certainly Spaak's view.<sup>18</sup>

What had happened was that on 17 November, presumably with Macmillan's authority on his return from Geneva, telegrams were despatched to the ambassadors in Bonn and Washington authorising them to explain the British opposition to the Common Market. Spaak was infuriated when he became aware of this development, particularly as he had received no hint of this line when in London on 18 November [Ellison 28-29]. This was not, however, Macmillan's fault, as Spaak did not meet him then. Nor does he seem to have kept Macmillan informed of developments on his committee on the occasions when the two did meet in the second half of 1955. Macmillan, accordingly, may not have been fully aware of how rapidly the Spaak Committee had progressed, or of the offence the British rebuff would cause. It was only when this offence was voiced that he was prompted to record:

There was a meeting of Western European Union at the Quai d'Orsay. Beyen (Netherlands) and Spaak (Belgium) opened rather a sharp attack on UK policy regarding the "Messina" or "6 Power" plans for a common market etc. I replied. I said that always before (e.g. with E.D.C. and steel) we had been accused for concealing our policy till it was too late. Now they complained that we had revealed it prematurely. Of course, there's a good deal behind all this. Neither the Germans nor the French spoke up at all. The French will never go into the "common market"—the German industrialists and economists equally dislike it, altho' Adenauer is attracted to the idea of closer European unity on political grounds. This of course is very important, and I made it clear that we wd welcome and assist the plan, altho' we cd not join, so long as a proper relation cd be established between the inner and outer circles—the 6 and the 15—Messina and OEEC. [HMD: 14 December 1955]

Adenauer, who Macmillan was trying at the time to persuade to stump up more money for the costs of stationing British troops in Germany, was clearly important. Otherwise this passage suggests that Macmillan had not realised how far advanced the Spaak proposals were (which would also explain his previous and uncharacteristic silence on the subject), or how much offence was caused by the British demarche. Indeed, until 28 January 1956, the lack of further references indicates that it took some time for this realisation to dawn. He then noted that:

18. P.-H. Spaak, *Combats inachevés* (Paris: Fayard, 1969), II, 77.

a merely negative attitude to European co-operation (as put forward by the Messina plan and the 6 powers) is not enough. We ought to try to find a constructive alternative.<sup>19</sup>

### **Conclusions**

It does not, however, indicate that he had ceased to be a “European,” merely that his view of Europe and European integration was different from that of the architects of the Common Market proposals. In this there was nothing new. The first obvious conclusion of this study is that Macmillan only appears inconsistent as a European if he is judged, not by his own attitudes, but by normative assumptions about the kind of European architecture he ought to have favoured. This architecture was the result of a mixture of security and economic considerations in various European countries. Macmillan’s preferences reflect his particular take on these considerations.

In security policy the biggest issues were how to deal with Russia and Germany. Macmillan, despite anxieties about what would happen after Adenauer, clearly felt that Russia was the greater threat. Finding in 1950 that Masigli

is still much alarmed about German rearmament and at the heavy price which the Germans will ask. I told him frankly that I thought we ought to have made all these political concessions long ago. But I am sure the French (as after the 1914-18 war) will haggle on every point and repeat all the mistakes which they made before. [HMD: 20 December 1950]

German rearmament within NATO seemed to him to be the best way of solving both the German and the Russian problems, particularly the nightmare of a reprise of inter-war Soviet-German treaties.<sup>20</sup> He therefore told the Cabinet in 1953 that Germany

must be kept from isolation and neutralism. That means the Stalin-Ribbentrop Pact over again in the long run. She must be bound to the West. If E.D.C. is the best method, well and good. Personally I prefer “Greater Europe” to “Little Europe” for in EDC Germany may become too strong. Instead of being bound to the West, she may bind the West to her. [HMD: 6 July 1953]

If anything, the fancy constitution-making of the French to prevent such an outcome, to Macmillan, made it more likely rather than less, since German domination could then be covert rather than overt. This was quite apart from his distaste for such arrangements anyway. He favoured loose arrangements

19. The fact that he was learning the ropes, in difficult economic circumstances, at the Treasury cannot have helped, and was no doubt as distracting as the build-up of pressure, on a very reluctant Macmillan, to leave the Foreign Office over October-December 1955.

20. On this see Mawby, especially chapter 5.

which could produce the widest possible agreement across Europe, rather than tight ones which only a few would buy into. This was the nub of the “federalist-functional” debate in Strasbourg in the early 1950s. As opposed to the preference of, for instance, Paul Reynaud, for “a European authority with limited functions and real powers” [Quoted in *HMD*: 19 November 1950], Macmillan favoured looking for a broader range of functions which European countries could share in delivering.

Indeed, he called for wider agreement than merely European, if possible. Sabine Lee has recognised this wider conception, but wrongly attributes it to a desire to embed the US within a European system.<sup>21</sup> Consider, for instance, his alternative to Churchill’s May 1953 speech, which was “‘All non-Europeans to leave Europe’—for this purpose, Russians and Americans both count as non-Europeans.” [*HMD*: 3 August 1953] This was, he recognised, a fairly risky idea, and he did not pursue it. However, it does indicate that an American presence was not, pace Lee, central to his idea of Europe. In fact, he was quite hostile when Reynaud suggested inviting the US Congress and Canadian Parliament to send observers to the Council of Europe Assembly [*HMD*: 5 May 1951]. Macmillan was less, not more Atlanticist than some of the federalist enthusiasts. This reflected scepticism both about the risks of American isolationism, and about American trade policy [*HMD*: 17 April 1953]. “Instead of trying to persuade the USA to adopt Free Trade,” he felt that Britain should be cultivating its Commonwealth and European connections.<sup>22</sup> It was because he favoured this alternative that he disliked Reynaud’s Atlantism, commenting in May 1951:

With regard to US many Europeans are frankly out to get what they can while the going is good—that is, while USA are so frightened of Russia that they must somehow keep the old world afloat. But more wise and more imaginative minds are beginning to be attracted by the idea of Europe and British Empire and Commonwealth getting together, and so reproducing something like the American wealth and power. This has been our Conservative theme whenever we cd put it forward or introduce it, with reasonable discretion. [*HMD*: 15 May 1951]

He was therefore much more interested in promoting contacts between the Commonwealth and Europe, such as the conference of imperial and European delegates over which he presided in May-June 1951. Quite what arrangements he would have favoured for achieving closer relations is, however,

21. Sabine Lee, “Staying in the Game? Coming into the Game?,” in *Harold Macmillan and Britain’s World Role*, edited by Richard Aldous and Sabine Lee (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996), 133.

22. *HMD*: 28 May 1953. Indeed, he felt there was little option unless the Americans amended their tariff policy to help reduce the dollar gap.

unclear. Nothing concrete was put forward at what were seen as exploratory talks, and he was certainly aware of the difficulties posed by the operation of the sterling area. He seems to have seen the later Free Trade Area proposals as, at least in part, incapsulating his earlier ideas. [Ellison 69] But it is likely that he had favoured looser arrangements than those he felt constrained to propose to the Messina powers in 1956. Whether they would have enjoyed more success in the early 1950s is another matter. Macmillan was constantly warning that contrary developments were taking place which would prevent such ideas being realised. This perhaps explains why he ceased to refer in his diary to the prospects of a Commonwealth/Europe relationship after 1953. The Free Trade Area proposals, however, demonstrate that elements of this idea, and of his preference for "Greater Europe," remained in the rather different European environment he had to address by 1956-57, changed as it was by the normalisation of relations with West Germany and the coalescence of the Six. That the 'Little European' approach pursued by the Six has since come to be seen as the norm of the European idea nevertheless does not mean that Macmillan was any less consistent or imaginative in his vision of Europe, simply broader.