

Nils A. Røhne

**Norwegian Attitudes
Towards the Briand Plan**

Introduction¹

Again, the relationship between Norway and Europe is the main issue in Norwegian foreign policy debates. The European architecture undergoes rapid changes, and developments both in the European Community and in Eastern Europe have brought new focus on Norway's European policy. In this study we will go back in history and look at the very first attempts, in newly independent Norway, to shape a European policy as an answer to plans for European integration. Norway was given the opportunity, or should we rather say was forced, to elaborate her own stance in the discussions about European cooperation that took place in the last half of the 1920s and in the beginning of the 1930s.

It was greatly to the credit of two men that the question of European integration was put on the agenda in the twenties. They were Richard N. Coudenhove-Kalergi, founder of the non-governmental Pan-European Union, and the French minister of foreign affairs, Aristide Briand. Briand "dared in carefully chosen words to propose to the Assembly of the League of Nations in September 1929 the project of a European federal union."¹

What was the Norwegian reaction to these thoughts about a new European design? How did Norway meet Briand's challenge?

Coudenhove-Kalergi versus Hambro

In 1943, in the midst of The Second World War, Richard N. Coudenhove-Kalergi, the persistent European who had devoted his life to the idea of European Unity, published his book *Crusade for Pan-Europa*.² In this autobiography Coudenhove-Kalergi continued his campaign for the need to create a *United States of Europe*. The same year Carl J. Hambro, President of the Norwegian Parliament (Storting) and from 1939 President of the Assembly of the League Nations (Hambro had been a very active delegate to the League of Nations since 1926!), also published a book,

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Crossroads of Conflict, European Peoples and Problems. In the introduction to the book Hambro puts his general argument in a nutshell, expressing what was a common view among those relatively few Norwegians who were occupying themselves with the question of European cooperation between the two world wars:

No "European problem" exists for the simple reason that *no Europe exists and no Europe has ever existed.* Europe is not a continent like America; it is just a part of the tremendous area made up of Asia, Africa and Europe. It has never been established where Europe ends and Asia begins, and there has never been a European history as we speak of the history of America or Australia because Europe never was a logical entity, but only a vague general denomination for an undefined territory. It is only in this sense the word can be used ..."³

These two books illustrate the wide gulf that, right back to 1905, has separated the ideology of European integration from prevailing Norwegian attitudes to Europe. The first book was written by one of the foremost ideological fathers of the non-governmental European movement, the other by an outstanding Norwegian politician (Hambro was for several periods leader of the conservative party in Norway). Coudenhove-Kalergi conveyed the message that "Europe [must] follow ... the inspiring example of the United States of America, by organizing ... a United States of Europe".⁴ Hambro, on the contrary, emphasized the great difference between the United States and Europe and called into question whether "such a political structure (as in the USA) would be possible anywhere else".⁵

This almost anti-European frame of mind was an integrated part of Norway's general foreign policy from the day she got her independence from Sweden in 1905. The first minister of foreign affairs in newly independent Norway, Jørgen Løvland, told the Storting in October 1905 that the task for Norwegian foreign policy was to keep Norway out of "combinations and alliances that can drag us into belligerent adventures together with any of the *European warrior states*".⁶ Norway adopted a foreign policy line consistent with this view. It rested on the two main pillars of neutrality and belief in a great power consensus about Scandinavia as a kind of sanctuary.⁷ Behind this declared policy of non-alignment from 1905 until 1940, we can find the hard core in Norway's foreign policy - the unspoken assumption that if great power consensus broke down and the policy of neutrality failed, then Great Britain would in her own interest come to her rescue.

This is the background and basis of Norway's position also in relation to the Briand plan, the main tenets of her thinking being:

- Neutrality and non-alignment;
- A feeling of remoteness from the conflict areas of the great powers, and resistance to schemes which threatened to undermine this situation;
- A feeling of distance geographically and politically from the European continent, in contrast to the not always outspoken, but very real affinity with Great Britain.

The first traces of Norwegian attention to the concept of "The United States of Europe"

In the spring of 1926 the leader of what was somewhat enigmatically called "The committee of those interested in Oslo" ("Komiteen av interesserte i Oslo", i.e. those interested in the plans for a United States of Europe) wrote to the Prime Minister asking for the government's views on the idea of a Scandinavian initiative towards "the creation of a United States of Europe."⁸ Prime Minister Lykke answered that he doubted, for the time being, that such a proposal was within the realms of feasibility. The Prime Minister emphasized that the main task for Norway at this stage was to contribute to the consolidation of the League of Nations.

Norwegian reluctance to give up any part of the newly won national freedom and sovereignty, even in a Scandinavian framework, surfaced. Lykke held the view that the Scandinavism apparent to him in the proposal would make Norwegian approval of the scheme even more difficult.⁹

In the same year the former Greek minister of foreign affairs, Nikolas Sokrates Politis, gave a number of lectures on the topic "L'organisation internationale de l'Europe" in the Norwegian Nobel Institute. This event attracted some attention in the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Politis' visit to Norway was also the starting-point for the first, however limited, discussions in the Norwegian press of the political re-organization of Europe - in effect, of the formation of a United States of Europe.

In an interview with *Aftenposten*, a conservative daily newspaper, Politis argued for the creation of a union of the 26 European states. Contrary to the Norwegian view, he claimed that such a Union actually would strengthen the League of Nations. Politis knew that one of Norway's

leading delegates to the League of Nations, Christian L. Lange, was against the idea.¹⁰ Lange had the previous year accompanied Coudenhove-Kalergi on his first trip to the USA, where Coudenhove-Kalergi made a series of speeches explaining the aims of the Pan-European Movement. Lange's task was to oppose this point of view on behalf of the League of Nations.¹¹ Lange and most articulate Norwegians, including members of the government and journalists, feared that a European Union would weaken the League of Nations and were not at all in favour of the idea. Politis hoped that support for the union would grow, and as he bluntly put it in the interview: "Maybe even Monsieur Lange in the end will say - "Oh, yes, the idea was not so silly after all.""

Briand puts the question of a European union on the agenda

Plans for a European Union or a European Federation, which appeared from time to time following the First World War, did not make any significant impression in Norway. Norway was forced to formulate her position only when the French Foreign Minister, Aristide Briand, proposed that the European states should form some kind of a European federation. Briand presented his proposal in a speech in the League of Nations September 1929. Spring 1930, the French government developed the scheme in a memorandum to the 27 European members of the League.

We are not here going to discuss Briand's motives, but only give a brief account of the substance of the plan. Briand's speech and the plan was vaguely worded, and it is difficult to see how he actually planned to combine his proposal of a European Federal Union with his assurances that national sovereignty would be fully respected. The memorandum contained four main points:

1. Based on a pact between the European members of the League of Nations, these states should take upon themselves the obligation to have regular meetings. The purpose of these meetings was to secure a constant development of European cooperation.
2. For this purpose, the establishment of new and independent European institutions was necessary. The memorandum mentioned a European Conference, an Executive Committee, and a European Secretariat.

3. The basic principles and directions for a European organization should be established. First of all, political cooperation should have priority over economic collaboration. Political cooperation should aim at reaching one essential objective - *federation*. Collaboration in the economic field between the nations of Europe should aim at the creation of a kind of common market, in which "the circulation of goods, capital and persons would be facilitated".
4. In addition to the political and economic aspects, Briand envisaged the launching of cooperative ventures in a variety of fields, from communication and transit, higher learning and the arts.¹²

The Norwegian reaction to Briand's initiative

Even though there had been some minor discussions of the topic, it was Briand's initiative September 1929 that gave the impetus for the only thorough debate on European integration in Norway in the period between the two world wars.

Two months before Briand's speech in the League of Nations, the Norwegian press reported that Briand in the near future would present an appeal for the creation of a United States of Europe.¹³ All the newspapers adopted a guarded attitude, but curiosity about Briand's imminently expected initiative was apparent. The mouthpiece of the growing Labour-party, *Arbeiderbladet*, drew distant historical parallels. The newspaper reminded its readers of another Frenchman who, over 300 years ago, had toyed with the same ideas as Briand: the French King Henry IV, Henry of Navarra. The concept of a United States of Europe was "pretty then and is still pretty. There was little chance for the idea to be realized at the beginning of the 1600s, and the chance is no greater in 1929", the newspaper said.¹⁴ The common view in Norway was that the concept of a United States of Europe was a highly unrealistic one.

Another aspect of the Norwegian attitude until Briand's September speech, was general agreement about his motives. The initiative was seen as a reaction to revision of the United States' customs tariff. A Norwegian business journal argued, for example, that the protectionism which was inherent in the proposed new customs tariff, would give the American textile-industry a monopoly in its home-market.¹⁵ The European answer to this challenge could be to organize herself along the same lines as the

USA. This was regarded by the Norwegians as Briand's most profound motive for his initiative.¹⁶

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs produced the first official comments on Briand's speech on September 5 in the League of Nations. The memorandum was written by Johan Ludvig Mowinckel, Prime Minister, minister of foreign affairs and Norwegian First Delegate to the tenth session in the League of Nations in 1929.¹⁷

The memorandum originates from a "déjeuner" Briand held for all European First Delegates on September 9, 1929. Briand's intention with the meeting was to discuss his thoughts about a "European confederation." The only Norwegian comment to be found in this document concerns the quantity of food and wine consumed at the meeting! The rest of the document refers to the reactions from other European countries. And even if it seems as though Mowinckel did not participate in the debate, we can assume that his views did not deviate much from those of Arthur Henderson, British Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs.

Henderson underlined the difficulty of creating a European group. In view of her imperial responsibilities, Great Britain in particular could not be expected to tie herself to this kind of European grouping. Then he made some critical remarks which Norway, with her sensitivity to the reactions of Great Powers, would presumably support. "We must not forget Russia ... Experience tells us how difficult these Soviets are in negotiations, and how suspicious they are of the rest of Europe." He feared that "irrespective of assurances that cooperation will be in the economic field only, Russia would allege that it was also military and that it was directed against the Soviet Union."¹⁸ The result of the meeting was that everybody accepted a Swiss proposal that the French government should take the initiative and approach each European government to elicit their opinion.

Two days after this "déjeuner", Prime Minister Mowinckel gave his main speech in the Assembly of the League of Nations. He made no comment on the Briand-plan whatsoever.¹⁹ Actually, Norway was very passive during the September meeting in 1929. Not once did the Norwegian delegates take part in the general debate.²⁰ This absence of interest was confirmed in the Storting in the beginning of May 1930. The Storting discussed the report from the September session of the Assembly. Nobody mentioned Briand's plan, and not one word was said about the need to do something about the organization of Europe.²¹

The same is true with regard to the Norwegian press. We can conclude that the Norwegian government and Norwegian opinion generally, at this stage, were not inspired by, or involved in, the Briand plan. Norway was still a rather lukewarm European.

Norway's answer to the French proposal

On May 17, 1930, Norway received the French memorandum including Briand's proposal of a scheme for European cooperation. Immediately, this triggered an unusual activity in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The memorandum was sent to all the ministries, to the National Bank, and of course to all the central advisers to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Most of the ministries did not recognize the importance of Briand's proposals, nor did the National Bank. But four of the answers, all from respected and influential people or ministries, went thoroughly into the matter. Together they give a fairly good picture of how the Briand-plan was seen by those in power in Norway.

The first comment was written by Professor Frede Castberg. Castberg, who in 1930 joined the Norwegian delegation to the League of Nations, was a prominent adviser to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. His advice to the government was to show "the greatest possible reservation" with regard to the French proposals. His reasoning was as follows:

1. Norway's policy, both before and after the establishment of the League of Nations, had been to "support universal cooperation between all the nations in the world, and discourage the establishment of regional groupings"; the Pan-European idea and the Briand plan were contrary to this political line.
2. A political union between the states of Europe could disturb the relationship with both Russia and the United States of America.
3. Europe as a geographical formation was not particularly suitable to provide the basis for a grouping of nations. "Are we going to include the British Empire in Europe?", Castberg asked. And if the answer was to be "No", then the question naturally suggested itself whether Norway had closer ties to, for example, the Balkan countries than to the British Dominions. Doubt about Europe as a natural unit, and scepticism as to whether the Balkan countries had a natural place in plans for European cooperation were central

elements in Norwegian attitudes before, during and after the Second World War.

4. In the French memorandum political cooperation had the first priority. Castberg expressed particular concern because the memorandum spoke about "a gradual extension, including the whole European community, of a policy based on international guarantees like those in the Locarno treaty." In connection with this, Castberg reminded the Ministry of Foreign Affairs that Norway resisted all arrangements that involved military commitments, even the sanction obligations under the Covenant of the League of Nations.
5. Last, but not least, Castberg raised a serious objection from the Norwegian point of view: the French proposal denied membership of the proposed organization to non-European countries, and even excluded one of the European states, namely Russia. (Only members of the League of Nations were allowed to join the projected European pact originally.)²²

This last point was emphasized in the comments from the Ministry of Defence and from the Commanding General, Ivar Bauck. Bauck saw the French initiative as a reflection of the deep divisions between the European states. To Bauck, the proposal indicated that even a power like France did not consider the existing agreements to be a sufficient guarantee for her security. The general also feared that the scheme would deepen existing differences between the states and that any security arrangement would be less effective if one of Europe's great powers, the Soviet Union, was excluded from the European cooperation. He pointed out that Russia herself had alleged that the "union plan was hostile to the Soviet Union." The Commanding General concluded his deliberations by stating that he would not recommend Norway to join a European Union of the kind proposed by France. Bauck argued that Norway's line of non-alignment was already weakened by joining the League of Nations, and that she should not continue this erosion of her main foreign policy line. He also repeated an argument that he knew would enlist the sympathy of almost everybody in Norway - that Norway should avoid involvement in European great power politics.²³

Christian L. Lange, who had taken part each year in the sessions of the League of Nations, sent his opinions of the French proposal. His views did not differ from those already mentioned. He insisted strongly that Europe lacked the preconditions for the creation of a federal organization. In his

opinion, the following elements would have been necessary for such a federation to be effective: a common spiritual heritage, a common language, a common history and common traditions, and, minimally, a certain degree of economic self-sufficiency. None of these, according to Lange, were present in Europe. His concluding remarks left no doubt:

There is no foundation for a special European organization. Europe is a purely geographical concept, and you cannot build a political organization exclusively on a geographical basis. That was what happened [...] with Norway and Sweden in 1905."²⁴

Christian L. Lange also commented on Coudenhove-Kalergi's "so-called Pan-Europe." Lange did not like this idea at all, because in his opinion it implied a political antagonism towards Russia and the alienation of Great Britain from continental Europe. He pointed out that the only British politician he knew who supported the idea of Pan-Europe, was Mr. Amery, a "declared imperialist, who finds the future of Great Britain in a custom-union with her dominions and colonies, and who looks at the League of Nations with cool contempt."²⁵

In her answer the Norwegian government expressed "great satisfaction" with the French initiative. The government supported the view that something had to be done about the present scattered European continent. But as to what exactly should be done the Norwegian government, like many other European governments, became vague. Doubts and objections emerged, which was not surprising considering the Norwegian attitude towards closer cooperation and considering the findings of government advisers. Norway rejected the French idea of giving precedence to political cooperation. While the Norwegian government fully supported the idea of *economic* cooperation between European nations, it argued that political cooperation was a

sore subject where ... national and historical considerations played a central part ... and certainly like other countries ... Norway could not give her approval to arrangements which could imply military commitment.²⁶

To conclude: The deliberations in Norway revealed a very sceptical attitude towards European integration. Norwegian attitudes to European integration highlighted some of the basic premises of Norway's foreign policy:

1. With regard to the impact of a European Union on the relationship between the great powers, Briand's exclusion of the Soviet Union evoked particular concern.
2. As to the geographical frames of a European integration scheme, doubt was raised concerning the European "nature" of the Balkan countries. Norway even called into question the use of the concept of "Europe" as suitable in discussions about schemes of cooperation.
3. Military cooperation between Norway and a continental grouping was rejected. Neither was there any desire for closer political links with continental Europe. Norwegian interest in European cooperation was limited to the economic field. Norway never contemplated a federation; she would only participate in traditional international cooperation between sovereign states.
4. Norway emphasized in her Foreign Policy the relationship to a small number of genuine great powers, and was sceptical to extensive cooperation between small states.
5. Norway based her security on isolationism combined with an unspoken great power, i.e. British, guarantee.

1930s: Briand's proposal fades away from the political agenda

After the thorough investigations preceding the Norwegian reply to the French government's memorandum, the Briand plan almost disappeared from the political agenda in Norway. The newspapers made only passing references to the matter. At the time of the official reply political commentaries, on the whole, emphasized the reserved attitude of almost all the European governments, including the Norwegian one.²⁷ *Dagbladet*, a daily newspaper of the same political persuasion as the government, was disappointed over the moderate tone of the government's reply. The newspaper demanded a more ambitious policy.²⁸ *Arbeiderbladet*, reflecting the views of the Labour party, was uncertain of Briand's motives, and had no doubt that the coming meeting of the League of Nations would arrange "a festive funeral" for the Briand plan.²⁹

As the September meeting in the League of Nations drew nearer, the image of Norway as a lukewarm and passive European, became clearer.

The meeting in Geneva and especially the Briand plan, were conspicuously absent in Norwegian political debates. As in the previous year, Norway was almost invisible and inaudible during the general debate in the Assembly of the League of Nations. In the end, Norway of course supported the proposal from Guiseppe Motta and Vojislav Marinkovic (Yugoslavia) to appoint a "Commission d'étude pour l'Union européenne". Neither were the European questions prominent when the Storting later debated and looked back on the government's foreign policy during the year 1930.³⁰ In a foreign policy survey in February 1931 Prime Minister Mowinckel briefly discussed the first meeting of the "Commission of Enquiry for European Union". This was, however, a purely technical review, and it did not evoke any comment or discussion.³¹

In the autumn 1930 Professor Frede Castberg, who, as mentioned before, was a prominent adviser to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, commented on the Briand plan in a newspaper interview. Not having changed his attitude towards the plan, he was far from positive. He emphasized that Europe needed the participation from non-European countries to solve the continent's problems and conflicts. Castberg re-asserted his view that a European organization should not be formed to the detriment of the League of Nations. His conclusion was that cooperation between groups of states with a common interest was preferable to a pan-European solution.³²

After the eleventh Ordinary Session of the Assembly of the League of Nations, Briand's initiative only once came into prominence in Norway. The occasion was the second session of the "Commission of Enquiry for European Union", which was held January 16-21, 1931.

Johan L. Mowinckel was attending the session as Norway's representative. His off-the-record judgement was that "the Europe conference [i.e. the Commission] had not developed very satisfactorily. 'Great-Power politics', with tricks and contra-tricks, have played a significant part."³³ Mowinckel was here referring specifically to the joint German and Italian proposal to invite the Soviet Union to join the Commission. This was, according to Mowinckel, done "to annoy France and a lot of other countries". On behalf of the Nordic countries, Mowinckel asserted that such an invitation was contrary to the League of Nations resolution establishing the Commission. In the final vote on this issue Mowinckel abstained, not because he was against cooperation with the Soviet Union as such, but because he had some formal objections, and he did not consider the question mature for decision. He was also doubtful about the ability of the

Soviet Union to give useful advice on the problems in "capitalistic Europe".³⁴ The Soviet Union had no appreciation of such nice distinctions, and *Izvestiia* attacked Norway for openly joining the anti-Soviet bloc.³⁵ According to *Izvestiia*, Mowinckel's conduct could only be regarded as the surfacing of latent hostility towards the Soviet Union. Even if this was only noise for propaganda purposes rather than real foreign policy reaction, it made some impression in Norway. Norway was reminded that her powerful neighbour, the Soviet Union, tended to be highly critical of schemes of European cooperation without Soviet participation.

Conclusion

The Briand initiative triggered the very first Norwegian discussions about European integration and about Norway's place in the integration process. It turned out that Norway was not ready to join any European cooperation scheme in the 1930s. In essence, she wanted to confine any cooperation to the economic field, and would not give up any part of her sovereignty. Norway showed no inclinations to deviate from her general foreign policy line.

There was a feeling in Norway, and probably in many other European countries as well, that Briand's initiative was ahead of its time. But there was also awareness of the long-term significance of Briand's proposal. Arnold Ræstad, one of the advisers to the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, wrote:

Irrespectively of the consequences, the fact that Briand prompted the discussion in this way, compelling all the governments of Europe to discuss the question and to be answerable before their own people and the whole world, would be an enduring honour for Briand.³⁶

In the words of a Norwegian journal: "It must be the fate and greatest political task of the new generation to erect the pillars of this new temple."³⁷

Norway today still hesitates as to whether she should move into "the temple". The arguments first raised against Norway joining Briand's Europe have received encouragement and renewed vigour each time Norway has discussed her position towards the forces of integration in Europe.

Since Norway became independent in 1905 Norwegian European policy has gone through three phases:

1. Until 1950 there was a tendency towards an anti-European image;
2. In the 1950s Norway judged European cooperation to be desirable, but Norway stopped short of direct participation;
3. In the late 1950s and in the early 1960s, Norway slowly realized that she was more and more an integrated part of Europe. This situation demanded a more active European policy. The political leadership came to the conclusion that Norway, on certain premises, both was able to, and in fact had to, participate in a organized Europe. Public opinion, however, did not unreservedly agree.³⁸

This is where Norway stands today: is the political leadership able to convince the Norwegian people that Norway needs to join the European Community ? Briand started the whole discussion in 1929; the definitive Norwegian answer will probably be given in the 1990s.

Notes

1. Walter Lipgens, *History of European Integration 1945-1947*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1982, p. 41.
2. Coudenhove-Kalergi, *Crusade for Pan-Europa*, G.P.Putnam's Sons, New York, 1943.
3. Carl J. Hambro, *Crossroads of Conflict, European Peoples and Problems*, The Church Peace Union, New York, 1943.
4. Coudenhove-Kalergi, op.cit., p. 252.
5. Hambro, op.cit., p. 4.
6. *Stortingsforhandlinger* (Parliamentary Debates), 1905-06, 7a, p. 46.
7. Olav Riste, *Isolasjonisme og stormaktsgarantiar*, Norwegian Institute for Defence Studies, *Defence Studies*, No. 3, 1991, p. 46.
8. Ministry of Foreign Affairs Archives, Oslo (MFA), 4/26, Vol. 1, April 4, 1926.
9. MFA, 4/26, Vol. 1, June 3, 1926.
10. *Aftenposten*, October 13, 1926.
11. Coudenhove-Kalergi, op.cit., p. 110.
12. MFA, 4/26, j.nr. 08304, "Memorandum om organiseringen av en europeisk føderal union-ordning".
13. *Tidens Tegn* (mouthpiece for a conservative wing of the liberal party in Norway, from 1909 organized in the party "Det Frisinnede Venstre" ("Liberal Left")), July 12 and 13, 1929. The journal was not without political influence.
14. *Arbeiderbladet*, July 18, 1929.
15. *Norges Handels og Sjøfartstidende* (a politically independent business paper), February 27, 1929.
16. *Tidens Tegn*, July 23, 1929; *Arbeiderbladet*, July 18, 1929; *Norges Handels og Sjøfartstidende*, July 27, 1929.
17. Johan L. Mowinckel was leader of the Norwegian liberal party, Venstre, and one of the foremost political personalities in Norway in the twenties and thirties.
18. MFA, 4/26, "Europas Forente Stater", Mowinckel's P.M., September 9, 1929.
19. *Dagbladet*, (liberal, independent newspaper, often taking the same position as the liberal party in political questions), September 13, 1929.
20. *Dagbladet*, September 25, 1929.
21. *Stortingsforhandlinger*, 1930, 7b, pp. 1550-68.

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