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**BRIAND AND THE  
UNITED STATES OF EUROPE**

A Series  
**THE WORLD TODAY**  
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## Briand and the United States of Europe

Ladies and Gentlemen: Tonight our subject is "Briand and the United States of Europe." On May 17 the French Minister of Foreign Affairs startled the world by proposing to the other twenty-six European states the formation of a United States of Europe. He said in substance: the wounds of the struggle of 1914-1919 are healed or healing; the war after the war is over; now is the opportune moment for Europe to undertake a great constructive work. It should unite so as to live more securely and more prosperously. The sentiment of the people is favorable; it is for the governments today to assume the responsibility for translating that sentiment into action.

### *A Concept Takes Form*

The idea of a United States of Europe is not new. In the seventeenth century another French statesman, Sully, dreamed of it. In the eighteenth century the German philosopher Kant planned for it. But this is the first time that a responsible official has formally blocked out a program for such a union. And his proposal bears added significance because it comes from the Foreign Minister of that country which today is financially and in a military sense the strongest on the European continent.

M. Briand chose for the announcement of his proposal the day on which the financial problems left by the war were officially taken out of the hands of the politicians and placed in those of the bankers and financiers; for it was on May 17 that the Reparation Commission ceased to exist and the Bank for International Settlements took

over the function of administering the reparation obligations of Germany to the Allies. Moreover, Briand's announcement came within two weeks of the evacuation of the last of the French troops from German soil. No wonder, then, that M. Briand felt the time was ripe for an ambitious co-operative effort to unite Europe.

### *Its Introduction at Geneva*

The French Foreign Minister's program was not unexpected. It was a direct outgrowth of a proposal he had made in Geneva at the meeting of the Assembly of the League of Nations last September. Speaking before that gathering of representatives of more than fifty nations, he pleaded for the elimination of those barriers between the European states which today divide the continent into twenty-seven political and economic units working at cross purposes and to their common disadvantage. A day or two later he invited the representatives of all of the European states members of the League to meet at luncheon. There, as he put it, between a pear and a bite of cheese, he sandwiched a definite proposal for a European federation. After a long discussion, he was unanimously invited to draft an outline of his scheme to be used as a basis for later discussion. His memorandum of May 17 is the result. He has asked the governments of the twenty-six European states to which his memorandum has been sent to reply with comments by July 15. Presumably he will then, on the basis of these comments, prepare a revised draft for consideration at a conference of representatives of the European states immediately after the meeting of the Assembly of the League of Nations in Geneva next September.

### *Description*

The French Foreign Minister's memorandum is in the form of a questionnaire with a preamble. The whole consists of about 6,000 words. In the preamble he declares that the French Govern-

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ment in its consideration of this plan has constantly kept in mind three essential reservations: (1) that the European federation must be worked out in cooperation with the League of Nations and must not be permitted to weaken the League; (2) that the European union must not be in opposition to any of the nations outside the League and must develop in friendly collaboration with all the states of the world; and (3) that the establishment of a federal link between the European governments must "not in any case nor to any degree affect the sovereign rights of the states which are members of the union." These three basic reservations are considered so vital that they are repeated in different form a number of times throughout the memorandum.

M. Briand approaches the problem of a European federation frankly from the political point of view. He does not consider it either possible or desirable to base such a union primarily on economic grounds. He denies that a *zollverein* or tariff union of European states can or should be the first step. He believes that amelioration of the present European tariffs must follow, not precede, closer political ties among the European states.

### *Legal Basis*

He looks upon a United States of Europe as a regional federation, and finds its legal basis in Article 21 of the Covenant of the League of Nations, which provides:

"Nothing in this Covenant shall be deemed to affect the validity of international engagements, such as treaties of arbitration or regional understandings like the Monroe Doctrine, for securing the maintenance of peace."

It is interesting that the first proposal for a United States of Europe should be based upon an article of the Covenant of the League, intended to meet a situation created by the Monroe Doctrine—a policy of the United States of America.

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### *Questionnaire*

The greater part of M. Briand's memorandum is the questionnaire. He asks four major questions, and comments at some length on each. First he asks, is there not a necessity for a general though perhaps elementary pact to affirm the principle of European solidarity and solemnly consecrate the fact of such solidarity? He suggests that this pact ought to be general in its terms, and, in order not to conflict with the Covenant of the League of Nations, be opened for signature only to those European states which are members of the League.

Secondly he asks, is it not necessary to create a "European Conference" as the indispensable machinery for enabling a United States of Europe to accomplish its task? He suggests that a conference should meet at regular intervals, its organization, periods and frequency of meeting to be determined later. He suggests further that the office of president of a "European Conference" should rotate every year among the member states, and proposes that the meetings of the conference take place in Geneva and that the regular meetings coincide with the sessions of the League. Gradually a "European Conference," it is hoped, would develop its own civil service.

M. Briand's third question concerns the scope of the general principles that should be laid down to guide a "European Conference" in its work. It is in this connection that he emphasizes the necessity of a political federation to precede efforts at economic union. But the degree of political unity which M. Briand desires is not very clearly stated. He says there should be a federation founded on the idea of union rather than unity, a federation that is sufficiently flexible to respect the independence and sovereignty of each state and at the same time assure each the benefit of concerted action.

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In his fourth question M. Briand suggests that at a first "European Conference" a study be made of specific questions that could best be dealt with through European cooperation. Under this heading he outlines a long list of projects. These include industrial cartels, public works such as roads and canals, communication and transit, finances, labor, hygiene, etc. In short, the European union would undertake to secure concerted action in many of the fields involving the interests of more than one European state.

In his conclusion M. Briand makes this appeal: "It is not a question of constructing a perfect institution . . . It is rather that of taking the first effective step . . . This is the decisive hour when waiting Europe can itself dictate its own destiny."

#### *Its Reception Abroad*

M. Briand's extraordinary program for a United States of Europe has evoked animated discussion in all of the countries concerned. German opinion on the plan is divided. Many of the conservatives and the extreme nationalists see in it little more than a device by France to perpetuate the territorial readjustments effected at the end of the war and thus assure to itself continued military and diplomatic supremacy on the European continent. But other Germans, particularly the more liberal and socialist in their tendencies, are more friendly toward M. Briand's proposal. They think that sympathetic study should be given it to determine whether the tariff barriers which divide Europe can by this means be reduced. Moreover, they realize that without Germany's cooperation, a United States of Europe is not possible, and they welcome the proposal as one more means of emphasizing the fact that Germany has at last reached the stage where she is courted rather than ostracized by her neighbors.

In Soviet Russia M. Briand's memorandum evoked derision from the official newspaper

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"Izvestia." That organ of the Soviet Government is convinced that a United States of Europe is directed against the United States of America and the Soviet Union.

In Great Britain M. Briand's idea has been favorably, though not enthusiastically received. Writers representing all shades of British opinion welcome the suggestion of closer cooperation among the continental European states, but are emphatic that, because of Britain's imperial connections, the British Isles can not be a part of a United States of Europe.

Here in the United States the idea of a European federation has met little criticism. Frequently, however, it has been interpreted as Europe's answer to our Government's high protective tariff policy. Evidently M. Briand did not intend it as a means of retaliation against the American tariff, but it might lead to preferential tariff rates or even free trade among the European states, thus eventually placing American products at a disadvantage in the European market.

I doubt, however, whether there is any necessary conflict between American interests and those of a federated Europe. A united Europe, by eliminating the present obstacles to trade throughout the continent, would create there a larger and richer market for American products.

#### *Chief Criticisms*

The two chief general criticisms that have been levelled at M. Briand's scheme are, on the one hand, that it is impracticable, and, on the other, that it is a threat to the League of Nations and would thus defeat one of M. Briand's avowed purposes, the strengthening of the League. Those who think M. Briand's proposal impracticable point to the heightened spirit of nationalism and the increasing tariffs of many of the European countries since the war; to the diversity of language, religion and cultural background of the

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various states; to the conflict of interests between Western Europe, which is primarily industrial, and Eastern Europe, which is primarily agricultural. These critics also point out that it is a fundamental mistake to assume that the European continent is an organic unit.

But assuming that a United States of Europe can be achieved, would it strengthen or weaken the League of Nations? Our answer to this question depends on whether we think that the present basis of organization of the League is sound. Today there is no intermediate organization between the individual states members of the League and the League itself. A United States of Europe would set the precedent of establishing a regional organization among the League membership. This, it is argued, would tend to weaken the League's authority and usefulness in Europe and its prestige as a world institution; but Briand, an ardent advocate of the League, argues the contrary.

### *Europe's Future*

M. Briand's plan is for the present little more than an ideal. He cannot hope that it will be quickly translated into a political reality. None the less, his suggested federation of the twenty-seven European states, whose territory taken together is considerably less than that of the United States of America, has dramatically projected on the screen of world public opinion the momentous question, "What of Europe's future?" Can the European states, divided as they now are, compete in a world where three great units—the British Empire, the United States, and the Russian Soviet Union—enjoy such manifest advantages in population, territory, and unity of economic policies? Europe in the eleven years since the war has almost come back to normality. M. Briand with prophetic statesmanship asks, how can the European states so readjust their relationships that the European peoples may continue in the future, as in the past, to be a growing factor in the history of civilization?