
Colonial or Continental Power? The Debate over Economic Expansion in Interwar France, 1925–1932

Forum: Visions of European Integration Across the Twentieth Century

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In the 1920s various French elites argued that the nation state was not viable in an increasingly interdependent world economy dominated by ‘continental blocs’ such as the United States and the Soviet Union; instead, they hoped to expand French economic power through larger political structures, whether France’s existing empire or a federal Europe. French foreign minister Aristide Briand called for the organisation of Europe at the same time that other elites advocated the consolidation of the French empire. Although imperial rivalry would trump European cooperation in the interwar years, the 1920s created a framework for post-1945 debates about whether France would achieve economic growth and maintain political independence through colonial development, continental cooperation or some combination of the two. Conventional narratives locate the origins of European integration in the devastations of the Second World War and the crisis of empire. This article argues that integration was conceived within and in tension with, not outside of, an imperial framework.

When the French Foreign Minister Aristide Briand went before the Assembly of the League of Nations in September 1929 and proposed a ‘federal bond’ among ‘people who are a geographical group’, he was referring, with the exception of the Soviet Union and Turkey, to his European neighbours.¹ Yet at the same time other French elites promoted the idea of a different community, that of Greater France: ‘our colonies are indispensable to us, and without them, France would no longer be France’.² In

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¹ Archives du Ministère des Affaires étrangères (hereafter AMAE), Y639. *Discours prononcé à Genève, le 5 septembre 1929 par M. Aristide Briand, Président du Conseil, Ministre des Affaires Étrangères, devant la 10me Assemblée de la Société des Nations* (Paris: Imprimerie des Journaux Officiels, 1929), 7.

² Léon Archimbaud, *La Grande France* (Paris: Hachette, 1928), 37.

the late 1920s and early 1930s metropolitan intellectuals, businessmen and politicians engaged in a debate about the place of the colonies and the European continent in French economic expansion. To my knowledge, no scholar has pointed to the paradox that Briand called for European economic cooperation at the same moment that other elites invested more than ever before in developing colonial markets.

This article is but a sketch – the beginning of a larger effort to think about the relationship between France’s colonial and continental strategies and how each was envisioned to serve metropolitan interests at a critical juncture in the history of twentieth-century French political economy. In the backdrop of these debates were imperial rivalries, rising US economic power, increasingly competitive world markets, growing anti-colonial sentiment and expectations for national self-determination created by the existence of the League of Nations.³ In the wake of a catastrophic war, Europe faced powerful ‘continental blocs’ – the United States, the Soviet Union, some writers included Great Britain – with access to cheaper resources and bigger markets.⁴ In response, imperial lobbyists asserted that ‘our future is enclosed in our colonial wealth. The immense treasure of commodities and raw materials that our colonial domains possess will alone be able to free us from the foreign markets that fleece us.’⁵ Against this imperial vision, Europeanists argued that France had to follow the trend of creating continental blocs or risk becoming a colony itself: ‘Europe should not be Americanised, Britishised, or Russified. Europe must remain Europe’,⁶ even if ‘Europe’ was often defined in French terms. The debate centred on whether France should organise colonial markets, European markets or both in order to increase France’s economic power and preserve its political independence.

The First World War may have laid the foundations for a world of nation states, but only in retrospect.⁷ In the 1920s numerous French intellectuals, businessmen and politicians posited that nation states were not viable in an increasingly interdependent world economy; as a result, they took seriously the idea of expanding French economic power through larger political structures, both within France’s existing empire and within a federal Europe. I chart these ideas in the period between 1925 and 1932, a period that corresponds to Briand’s last stay at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and that witnessed a heightened interest in overseas imperialism and continental cooperation. During this time, neither imperial France nor European France were

³ Recent work on these topics include Patricia Clavin, *Securing the World Economy: The Reinvention of the League of Nations, 1920–1946* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Erez Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007); Mark Mazower, *Governing the World: The History of an Idea* (New York: Penguin, 2012); Susan Pedersen, *The Guardians: The League of Nations and the Crisis of Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015) and Adam Tooze, *The Deluge: The Great War, America, and the Remaking of the Global Order, 1916–1931* (New York: Penguin, 2014).

⁴ Among the first to write at length about the new continental threats was Richard Coudenhove-Kalergi in *Pan-Europa* (Vienna: Pan-Europa-Verl., 1923).

⁵ Albert Sarraut, ‘Nationalisons l’idée coloniale’, *Europe nouvelle*, 1 May 1926, 580.

⁶ Gaston Riou, *Europe, ma patrie* (Paris: Valois, 1928), 24.

⁷ Frederick Cooper has made this point in numerous of his recent works, among them ‘Reconstructing Empire in British and French Africa’, *Past & Present* supplement 6 (2011), 197–9.

taken as a given, nor were they necessarily compatible, in the economic realm. One jurist summarised France's contradictory position: 'France is European; but it is also global . . . it will become absolutely intolerable if the European Conference knocks down its customs borders among continental states. This reform will have repercussions for France's relations with its extra-continental territories. Yet it's France that has taken the initiative to organise Europe.'⁸

An 'empire-state' more accurately describes France in the late 1920s than an 'imperial nation-state'.⁹ The French empire state contained multilevel political structures and diverse populations, insofar as a French nation existed alongside other nationalities such as Moroccan and Tunisian.¹⁰ The empire state's aim was to enhance the metropole's economic power and security. Layering a European political structure over the empire state would further complicate matters. Yet this was precisely what Briand sought to do, namely to develop a European political entity whose continental boundaries would overlap with but remain distinct from those of the colonies. His federal Europe would require European states to cooperate in administering the continent's diverse populations and resources in the interests of economic growth and security. Henry de Jouvenel, a former colonial administrator, one of Briand's collaborators and an advocate of fusing France's colonial and continental strategies, noticed the challenge of developing conflicting yet overlapping imperial and European political structures: 'who can take seriously the French proposition to federate Europe until we have federated the diverse parts of our empire?'¹¹ For, as de Jouvenel suggested, France already struggled to govern its empire.

Classic surveys on the twentieth-century French economy either ignore its imperial dimensions,¹² give them short shrift¹³ or leave the impression that imperialism was backward and Europeanism was progressive.¹⁴ This retrospective

⁸ Archives of the International Labour Office (hereafter ILO), CAT/6A/6. Joseph Barthélemy, 'Rapport sur le problème de la souveraineté des Etats', 2–4 June 1930, 17 bis.

⁹ I borrow the idea of an 'empire state' from, among others, Frederick Cooper. For an analysis of France acting more as an empire state than as a nation state from the French Revolution to the crisis of empire in the 1950s, see his 'Provincializing France', in Ann Laura Stoler, Carole McGranahan and Peter C. Perdue, eds., *Imperial Formations* (Santa Fe: School for Advanced Research Press, 2007), 341–77. The notion of the imperial nation state belongs to Gary Wilder in *The French Imperial Nation-State: Negritude and Colonial Humanism between the Two World Wars* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

¹⁰ For conceptualisations of empire, see, among others, Frederick Cooper, *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005); Charles S. Maier, *Among Empires: American Ascendancy and its Predecessors* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006) and Alexei Miller and Alfred J. Rieber, eds., *Imperial Rule* (New York: CEU Press, 2005).

¹¹ Henry de Jouvenel, 'Bloc africain et Fédération européenne', *La Revue des vivants* (Jan. 1930), 4.

¹² Richard F. Kuisel, *Capitalism and the State in Modern France: Renovation and Economic Management in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

¹³ Tom Kemp, *The French Economy, 1913–39: The History of a Decline* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1972), 22 and 66.

¹⁴ Pioneering economic historians of empire who leave this impression include Jacques Marseille, *Empire colonial et capitalisme français: Histoire d'un divorce* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1984) and Martin Thomas, *The French Empire between the Wars: Imperialism, Politics, and Society* (New York: Manchester University Press, 2005), 93–124.

view, where France lost its empire and became committed to European integration, obscures other possibilities that were prominent at the time. More work needs to be done on the producers and investors who supported overseas empire, European unity or both, how these economic actors changed their orientation and struck different kinds of alliances over time and how effective they were at influencing state policy.¹⁵ Colonial markets may have sustained uncompetitive economic interests such as the cotton industry.¹⁶ Dynamic economic sectors such as the automobile, chemical and electricity industries depended on already developed markets, but they were not adverse to developing colonial markets.¹⁷ It would be unfair to characterise the colonies as nothing more than a safety valve. In a context where ‘continental blocs’ controlled large supplies of resources and where the future of the world economy looked uncertain, colonial markets – if developed – showed promise in creating metropolitan prosperity.

Similarly, historians of interwar pan-Europeanism have largely treated France as a nation state instead of as an empire state.¹⁸ This tendency also reflects a common assumption that France had to retreat into the metropole before it could commit to European unification.¹⁹ Consequently, scholars often neglect the tension between

¹⁵ Scholars have examined French economic interests in overseas empire and continental Europe, but less has been said about the relationship between the two. For French economic interests in empire, see, for example, Hubert Bonin, Catherine Hodeir and Jean-François Klein, eds., *L'esprit économique impérial (1830–1970): Groupes de pression & réseaux du patronat colonial en France & dans l'empire* (Paris: Publications de la SFHOM, 2008); Catherine Hodeir, *Stratégies d'Empire: Le grand patronat colonial face à la décolonisation* (Paris: Belin, 2003) and Samir Saul, *Intérêts économiques français et décolonisation de l'Afrique du Nord (1945–1962)* (Geneva: Droz, 2016). For French economic interests in Europe, see, for example, Laurence Badel, *Un milieu libéral et européen: le grand commerce français (1925–1948)* (Paris: CHEFF, 1999); Eric Bussière, *Paribas, l'Europe et le monde, 1872–1992* (Antwerp: Fonds Mercator, 1992) and Eric Bussière and Michel Dumoulin, eds., *Milieus économiques et intégration européenne en Europe occidentale au XXe siècle* (Arras: Artois Presses Université, 1998).

¹⁶ Marseille, *Empire colonial et capitalisme français*, especially 247–61.

¹⁷ For example, Xavier Daumalin looks at the ways in which business interests in Marseilles took an interest in colonial electrification projects in *Le patronat marseillais et la deuxième industrialisation* (Aix-Marseille: Université de Provence, 2014).

¹⁸ Most histories of France's interwar pan-European movement have focused on the diplomatic relations of the Great Powers as nation states instead of empire states, or on the economic and ideological milieus that gave rise to Briand's European project. Some notable works include Laurence Badel, 'Les promoteurs français d'une union économique et douanière de l'Europe dans l'entre-deux-guerres', in Antoine Fleury and Lubor Jilek, eds., *Le Plan Briand d'Union fédérale européenne* (Brussels: Peter Lang, 1998), 17–29; Robert Boyce, 'Aristide Briand: Defending the Republic through Economic Appeasement', *Histoire@Politique. Politique, culture, société* 16 (Jan.–Apr. 2012), 1–22; Éric Bussière, 'La France et les premiers projets d'organisation économique de l'Europe, 1925–1930' in Jacques Bariéty, ed., *Aristide Briand, la Société des Nations, et l'Europe, 1919–1932* (Strasbourg: Presses Universitaires de Strasbourg, 2007), 300–9; Jean-Luc Chabot, *Aux origines intellectuelles de l'Union européenne: L'idée d'Europe unie de 1919 à 1939* (Grenoble: Presses Universitaires de Grenoble, 2005); Conan Fischer, 'The Failed European Union: Franco-German Relations during the Great Depression, 1929–1932', *The International History Review* 34 (2012), 705–24; Edward David Keeton, *Briand's Locarno Policy: French Economics, Politics, and Diplomacy, 1925–1929* (New York: Garland, 1987) and Vincent J. Pitts, *France and the German Problem: Politics and Economics in the Locarno Period, 1924–1929* (New York: Garland, 1987).

¹⁹ See, for example, Jane Burbank and Frederick Cooper, *Empires in World History: Power and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 439 and Norman Davies *Europe: A History* (New York: HarperCollins, 1998), 1064.

the French empire and European integration.²⁰ Charles–Robert Ageron first charted interwar ideas of Eurafrica, a concept that envisioned European cooperation in developing France’s African territories.²¹ More recently Peo Hansen and Stefan Jonsson have revealed the intimate connections between Africa and European integration between the 1920s and the 1960s.²² Yet all of these authors neglect the contested nature of the idea. Hansen and Jonsson claim that ‘from the interwar period up until the late 1950s practically all of the visions, movements and concrete institutional arrangements working towards European integration placed Africa’s incorporation into the European enterprise as a central objective’.²³ They build their case, however, on the ideas of ardent Eurafricanists such as the Austrian Richard Coudenhove–Kalergi and show less interest in examining the wider French context, the most important environment for understanding the idea’s emergence. Official French interests in colonial development and continental cooperation were often conflicting and only occasionally complementary.

Briand’s movement to organise Europe must be placed in its tense and overlapping relationship with other elites’ efforts to organise the overseas empire. In the international context of the 1920s, in a world that had become war-weary and critical of European imperialism, some French elites pushed for greater European cooperation, even if in practice this did not lead to a repudiation of French imperialism. Briand called for European unity in order to preserve the liberal peace and a post-war settlement that had dismantled all the continental empires.²⁴ On the foundations of old empires were built new nation states in Central and Eastern Europe, many of which partially depended on French economic and military aid, as well as a promise of protection against possible German aggression. Germany had

²⁰ This is changing, but here too scholars tend to write off the late 1920s. See, for example, Frederick Cooper, *Citizenship between Empire and Nation: Remaking France and French Africa, 1945–1960* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), especially 202–10 and 263–78; Giuliano Garavini, *After Empires: European Integration, Decolonization, and the Challenge from the Global South, 1957–1986* trans. Richard R. Nybakken (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Seung-Ryeol Kim, ‘France’s Agony between “Vocation européenne et mondiale”: The Union Française as an Obstacle in the French Policy of Supranational European Integration, 1952–1954’, *Journal of European Integration History* 8 (2002), 61–84; Laura Kottos, ‘A “European Commonwealth”: Britain, the European League for Economic Co-Operation, and European Debates on Empire, 1947–1957’, *Journal of Contemporary European Studies* 20, 4 (Dec. 2012), 497–515; Yves Montarolo, *L’Eurafrrique, contrepoint de l’idée de l’Europe: Le cas français de la fin de la deuxième guerre mondiale aux négociations des Traités de Rome (Aix-en-Provence: Publications de l’Université de Provence, 2010)*; Anne-Laure Ollivier, ‘Entre Europe et Afrique: Gaston Defferre et les débuts de la construction européenne’, *Terrains et Travaux* 8 (2005), 14–33 and Nicholas J. White, ‘Reconstructing Europe through Rejuvenating Empire: the British, French, and Dutch Experiences Compared’, *Past & Present*, supplement 6 (2011), 211–36.

²¹ Charles–Robert Ageron, ‘L’idée d’Eurafrrique et le débat colonial franco-allemand de l’entre-deux-guerres’, *Revue d’histoire moderne et contemporaine*, 22, 3 (July–Sept. 1975), 446–75.

²² Peo Hansen and Stefan Jonsson, *Eurafrica: The Untold History of European Integration and Colonialism* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014).

²³ Peo Hansen and Stefan Jonsson, ‘Bringing Africa as a “Dowry to Europe”’, *Interventions* 13,3 (2011), 444–5.

²⁴ On the post-war settlement, see, for example, Sally Marks, *The Illusion of Peace: International Relations in Europe, 1918–1933* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003, 1976) and Zara Steiner, *The Lights that Failed: European International History, 1919–1933* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

lost a significant portion of its continental territory and all of its overseas colonies. Throughout the 1920s German diplomats looked to revise the settlement and repossess these lost territories. Enforcing the settlement would contain Germany's territorial demands on these new nation states and maintain a French-led European order and a right to possess a global empire. Although differences certainly existed between France's colonial and continental strategies, more so than in the German case,²⁵ both strategies sought to maintain security and create favourable economic conditions for metropolitan France and to that end drew on different ruling strategies over multiethnic populations: political imposition and exploitation in the overseas colonies and economic cooperation and incentives on the continent. Whether French elites wished to dominate the continent or achieve genuine European cooperation, we arrive at the same conclusion: European unification was conceived within and in tension with, but not outside of, an imperial frame of mind.

French Empire

The support that the French colonies gave the metropole in men and materials during the First World War raised awareness among some metropolitan elites about the need to maximise colonial productivity in order to restore French economic power. As international protectionism grew across the 1920s²⁶ and as inter-empire competition persisted, imperial lobbyists hoped to stir the public's and the government's enthusiasm for empire. In addition, in the earlier twentieth century French foreign investors had largely concentrated their money in Russia. The communist revolution that broke out there in 1917 forced investors to look to other places such as the colonies or to the new nation states of Central and Eastern Europe.²⁷ Imperial lobbyists, hoping to interest government, business and investors in the colonies, called for 'a new entity where the continental homeland and the overseas colonies, if not merged, at least tightly interlocked, would compose the real power of a Greater France resting its security no longer on 40 million, but on 100 million human beings'.²⁸ A report on France's economic expansion after the war declared that 'the essential basis of our return to normal economic conditions' is the 'development (*mise en valeur*) of

²⁵ For an analysis of Germany's colonial and continental strategies before 1914 and their relationship to Nazism, see Geoff Eley, 'Empire by Land or Sea? Germany's Imperial Imagination, 1840–1945', in Bradley Naranch and Geoff Eley, eds., *German Colonialism in a Global Age* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014), 19–45.

²⁶ On the rising tide of protectionism in the late 1920s and League responses to it, see Clavin, *Securing the World Economy*, 39–46.

²⁷ French investment in the colonies jumped fourfold between 1914 and 1940; see Christopher M. Andrew and A.S. Kanya-Forstner, *The Climax of French Imperial Expansion, 1914–1924* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1981), 248. For French investment and trade in Central and Eastern Europe, see Alice Teichova, 'East-Central and South-East Europe, 1919–1939', in Peter Mathias and Sidney Pollard, eds., *The Cambridge Economic History of Europe*, vol. VIII (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 887–983.

²⁸ Albert Sarraut, *La mise en valeur des colonies françaises* (Paris: Payot, 1923), 17.

our colonies'.²⁹ The colonies were to become 'centres of production and no longer museums of specimens', the empire a factory with a highly specialised division of labour.³⁰

The 1920s saw the publication of numerous works that called attention to France's colonial economic potential. Charles Régismanset, a bureaucrat in the Ministry of Colonies, Armand Megglé, an economist and diplomat, Albert Sarraut, a Minister of the Colonies, Octave Homberg, a businessman and diplomat, and Léon Archimbaud, a reporter on the colonial budget and president of the colonial group in the Chamber of Deputies, all published works in the first decade after the First World War that made the case for the economic importance of empire and thus championed colonial development. Collectively, the writings of these imperial lobbyists argued that imperial economic strategies would help to develop the colonies, increase the colonies' role in supplying the metropole with raw materials, secure an outlet for metropolitan goods, and keep out the Germans and Italians.³¹

These lobbyists were critical of how imperial economic policy had developed over the centuries. This policy, known as the 'colonial pact', had created a situation where the 'colonies are made to serve the metropole'.³² Colonial producers were to trade only with the metropole. In the late nineteenth century various tariff regimes slowly undermined the colonial pact, even if imperial economic policy became more byzantine and even if the metropole maintained a privileged trade relationship with the colonies. The Méline tariff of 1892 distinguished between assimilated and non-assimilated colonies. With exceptions, products from the assimilated territories – Algeria (metropolitan officials had created a customs union with Algeria in 1867), the Antilles, Guiana, Indochina (officials had established a customs union with Indochina in 1887), Mayotte, Réunion, Tunisia and, in 1897, Madagascar – entered duty-free into metropolitan France just as metropolitan goods entered freely into these colonies. The assimilated colonies had to impose tariffs on foreign goods at the metropolitan rate, which limited the ability of the colonies to trade with other countries. Any trade agreement that metropolitan officials signed with other countries did not apply to the colonies unless it was 'explicitly stipulated'.³³ The tariff regimes of the non-assimilated colonies – French West Africa (AOF) except for the Ivory Coast and Dahomey, Gabon (a law of 1928 changed its status from an 'assimilated' into a 'non-assimilated' colony), New Caledonia (a law of 1928 changed its status from an 'assimilated' to a 'non-assimilated' colony), Saint-Pierre and Miquelon (a law of

²⁹ Quoted in Stephen H. Roberts, *The History of French Colonial Policy, 1870–1925* (London: Frank Cass, 1963, 1929), 609.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 613.

³¹ Charles Régismanset, Georges François and Fernand Rouget, *Ce que tout Français devrait savoir sur nos colonies* (Paris: Émile Larose, 1918); Armand Megglé, *Le domaine colonial de la France, ses ressources et ses besoins: guide pratique de l'Algérie, des colonies, des pays de protectorat et territoires à mandat* (Paris: F. Alcan, 1922); Sarraut, *La mise en valeur des colonies françaises*; Octave Homberg, *La France des cinq parties du monde* (Paris: Plon, 1927); and Archimbaud, *La plus grande France*.

³² Quoted in Sarraut, *La mise en valeur des colonies françaises*, 82.

³³ Gratién Candace, 'Le régime douanier de la France et ses colonies', *Revue politique et parlementaire* 160 (10 July 1934), 71.

1912 changed its status from an ‘assimilated’ to a ‘non-assimilated’ colony) and the French Settlements in Oceania (EFO) – were characterised by their diversity. Each of these colonies developed its own tariff system so long as it granted preferential trading rights to the metropole. Usually goods that circulated between metropole and colonies were at least lightly taxed upon entering each. The open-door colonies – Dahomey, Ivory Coast, Morocco, French Equatorial Africa (AEF) except Gabon and other outposts – were bound to international trade agreements and therefore generally had low levels of tariffs on all imports and exports.³⁴

This complex imperial trade network often prevented colonial producers from selling in the dearest markets and colonial consumers from buying in the cheapest; it also created numerous conflicts between metropolitan and colonial producers on the one hand, and among colonial producers on the other, all of whom competed for the same markets. For example, wheat production held economic importance for metropolitan France, Algeria and Morocco; producers in each wanted to limit imports from the others. In the early twentieth century some colonial producers began to protest against the metropole’s privileged position and lobby for greater freedom of commerce for the colonies.³⁵ In the 1920s Sarraut and other imperial lobbyists responded to this discontent by calling for a more complementary, if still unequal, relationship between metropole and colonies.³⁶

If the imperial economy lacked complementarity, the imperial administration lacked unity.³⁷ Imperial authorities – policy makers in Paris, officials in the colonies, European settlers, tribal leaders and various ethnic communities – maintained rule through complex, asymmetrical power relations. The empire consisted of colonies, protectorates, dominions, spheres of influence and, after the First World War, mandates. The state – especially in an era when officials trumpeted rule through ‘association’ – was reluctant to centralise the colonial administration. Algeria fell under the Interior Ministry, Morocco and Tunisia under the Foreign Affairs Ministry and the other territories under the Ministry of the Colonies. Some imperial lobbyists in the 1920s blamed this lack of coordination for the inability of business and the state to exploit the empire’s economic potential.³⁸

Although France possessed the world’s second largest empire and created an imperial trade policy that served metropolitan interests, the colonies did not make

³⁴ More work needs to be done on the politics of France’s colonial tariff regimes. For an overview, see Candace, ‘Le régime douanier de la France et ses colonies’, 58–75 or, more recently, Robert Aldrich, *Greater France: A History of French Overseas Expansion* (New York: Palgrave, 1996), 169–72.

³⁵ S.M. Persell, *The French Colonial Lobby, 1889–1938* (Stanford: Hoover Institution, 1983), 137–9.

³⁶ It is worth noting that tensions between metropolitan and colonial producers would continue into the 1930s. On this topic, see Samir Saul, ‘Milieux d’affaires de l’Outre-Mer français et Grande Dépression des années 1930’, *French Colonial History*, 10 (2009), 209–43 and his more recent ‘Les pouvoirs publics métropolitains face à la Dépression: La Conférence économique de la France métropolitaine et d’Outre-Mer (1934–1935)’, *French Colonial History*, 12 (2011), 167–91.

³⁷ For examples of the asymmetries within the French empire, see, for example, Burbank and Cooper, *Empires in World History* and Mary Dewhurst Lewis, *Divided Rule: Sovereignty and Empire in French Tunisia, 1881–1938* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013).

³⁸ For example, Régismanset, François and Rouget, *Ce que tout français devrait savoir sur nos colonies*, 139–62.

the metropole self-sufficient in raw materials, nor did they generate revenue. In 1913 the metropole took in 53 per cent of colonial exports and provided 54 per cent of the colonies' imports;³⁹ only 9.3 per cent of French capital was exported to the colonies.⁴⁰ In terms of commerce, the empire as a whole came in third after trade with Britain and Germany.⁴¹ Nine-tenths of colonial goods entering the metropole came from foreign colonies.⁴² In 1920 only 21 per cent of the metropole's imports came from the colonies and 48 per cent of its exports went to the colonies.⁴³ France bought the bulk of its raw materials from elsewhere. In 1926 France purchased 1,000 tonnes of bananas from its own colonies but another 45,000 to 50,000 from 'Anglo-Saxon' firms.⁴⁴ Nor did the future look promising. The colonies lacked capital for development projects. In 1918, given France's large war debt, metropolitan capital exports had been forbidden. Not until the end of the 1920s did the metropole provide the colonies with more capital.⁴⁵

If France still profited little from its colonies in the 1920s then why did imperial lobbyists think that empire would lead to world power? Collectively these lobbyists believed that empire was necessary for future economic and security reasons. They tried to persuade the French public that France's long-term economic interests depended on French investment in the empire's raw materials and markets, further integrating its colonial subjects into the market economy and creating a more complementary relationship between the metropole and its colonies. Imperial lobbyists also claimed that without colonies French security was at stake. The colonies not only provided France with a sense of grandeur as it lost some of its power on the continent, but after 1870 colonies also boosted France's demographic strength. French elites acknowledged the important role of colonial subjects in the First World War. Moreover, European powers were imperial powers; colonies therefore gave France great power status. Finally, France faced the rising continental powers of the United States and the Soviet Union. Imperial lobbyists believed that French power depended on the development of Greater France.

Imperial lobbyists complained about the government's unwillingness to fund colonial development schemes. In 1921 Sarraut introduced an ambitious bill in the Chamber of Deputies to carry out colonial economic development, but the majority of parliamentarians showed little interest in funding his project. The success of Sarraut's project depended on German reparations, which the Germans failed to meet, and the financial generosity of Parliament, which was rare.⁴⁶ Imperial lobbyists

³⁹ Roberts, *The History of French Colonial Policy*, 608.

⁴⁰ Robert Cornevin, 'La France d'outre-mer', in Alfred Sauvy, ed., *Histoire économique de la France entre les deux guerres*, vol. 3 (Paris: Fayard, 1972), 292.

⁴¹ Thomas, *The French Empire between the Wars*, 104.

⁴² Roberts, *The History of French Colonial Policy*, 61.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 608.

⁴⁴ Charles Régismanset, 'La mise en valeur des colonies', *Europe nouvelle*, 1 May 1926, 586.

⁴⁵ Persell, *The French Colonial Lobby*, 155.

⁴⁶ Sarraut wanted more state involvement in the colonial enterprise. See Martin Thomas, 'French Empire Elites and the Politics of Economic Obligation in the Interwar Years', *The Historical Journal*, 52, 4 (Dec. 2009), 989–1016.

faced parliamentary scepticism. In 1918 only fifteen senators had participated in a discussion about boosting colonial production.⁴⁷ Some politicians were sufficiently sceptical of the value of colonies that they suggested selling them in order to pay off war debts.⁴⁸ Yet Archimbaud noted the impossibility of selling colonies: 'France will never cede the smallest parcel of its colonial domain. Have you ever seen a country sell itself?'⁴⁹ Archimbaud tried to naturalise the link between France and its colonies in order to spark enthusiasm for the empire and frustrate German ambitions for colonial revisionism once Germany entered the League of Nations in 1926. In the face of perceived threats from Germany he was highly critical of this 'governmental apathy'⁵⁰ and wished to create an 'imperial mentality' among the French population in order to get the state to invest more in colonial development.⁵¹

Some of domestic and international opinion was indifferent to, or critical of, French imperial rule.⁵² The United States opposed closed imperial trading blocs, even if it did not oppose the existence of the European empires. The Soviet Union was critical of colonialism, even if it developed its own federated empire. French communists, like the Soviet Union, opposed imperialism on the grounds that it served capitalist interests, even if they did not always take a solid stand against it.⁵³ Finally, some powerful metropolitan interests were threatened by colonial competition. For example, the rice, sugar beet, wheat and wine lobbies called for protection against the colonies. A parliamentarian had to remind the metropolitan wine lobby that Algeria 'buys from us more than it sells',⁵⁴ which led to idle threats of an Algerian boycott of French goods.

To win over French and international publics, imperial lobbyists positioned themselves as reformers who took seriously the spiritual development of the colonised, thereby justifying their intervention in the colonies. Sarraut proclaimed the 1920s to be a new era of 'association' that would grant colonial elites representative assemblies, preserve indigenous cultures and carry out humane projects of economic development and social welfare.⁵⁵ Colonial development would benefit not only

⁴⁷ Roberts, *The History of French Colonial Policy*, 611.

⁴⁸ As observed by Léon Perrier, the Minister of the Colonies, in 'La France et ses colonies sont solidaires', *Europe nouvelle*, 1 May 1926, 578.

⁴⁹ Archimbaud, *La plus grande France*, 50.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 7–8.

⁵² To gain a more thorough understanding of the place of empire in French public opinion, see Charles-Robert Ageron, 'Les colonies devant l'opinion publique française (1919–1939)', *Revue française d'histoire d'outre-mer*, 77, 286 (1990), 31–73 and Tony Chafer and Amanda Sackur, eds., *Promoting the Colonial Idea: Propaganda and Visions of Empire in France* (New York: Palgrave, 2002).

⁵³ For more on how the threat of communism influenced Sarraut's plans for colonial economic development, see Martin Thomas, 'Albert Sarraut, French Colonial Development, and the Communist Threat, 1919–1930', *The Journal of Modern History* 77, 4 (Dec. 2005), 917–55.

⁵⁴ Quoted in Paul Birebent, *Hommes, vignes et vins de l'Algérie française (1830–1962)* (Nice: Editions Jacques Gandini, 2007), 132.

⁵⁵ For an understanding of association in West Africa, see Alice L. Conklin, *A Mission to Civilize: The Republican Idea of Empire in France and West Africa, 1895–1930* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), especially 174–211.

France but also the colonies. Sarraut explained that ‘development will attenuate the cost of living, supply our industries against the dearth of raw materials and our workers against the misery of unemployment, fatal generator of trouble and violence. Colonies are thus for future France a triple guarantee of liberty, wealth, and social peace.’⁵⁶ As this passage indicates, Sarraut underlined the benefits of imperialism to metropolitan France. He also claimed that colonial subjects would profit by guaranteeing outlets for their raw materials and by improving the welfare of the population through schools and public health. Yet Sarraut’s brand of colonial development, in turn, put a brake on rapid industrialisation and urbanisation in the colonies, which comforted metropolitan economic interests that feared competition and a political elite that worried about colonial protest. It should be noted, however, that preventing colonial industrialisation could frustrate metropolitan interests such as the automobile industry that wished to find more consumers. According to Sarraut’s idealism, creating stronger economic ties between the metropole and the colonies, ones that were complementary and non-competitive, could improve living standards in the colonies and stimulate the economy at home.

Imperial lobbyists also emphasised the brutish behaviour of Germany toward colonial subjects at a time when these lobbyists feared the German propagation of anti-French sentiment in the mandates. Germany’s entry into the League in 1926 caused consternation in France because it gave Germans the same rights and privileges in the mandates. Even though local administrators tightened controls and surveillance on its mandate populations,⁵⁷ Homberg worried that the Germans would seek to retake their colonies.⁵⁸ He told his readers to be ‘vigilant in thwarting all their intrigues that seek to obtain a mandate on such and such of their former colonies or even on such a colony that certain powers could be disposed to give them’.⁵⁹ Archimbaud also argued that Germans’ colonial behaviour explained why Germany had lost its colonies after the First World War: ‘Germany practiced an abominable colonial policy of which civilised nations can only be ashamed. . . . It would be to fail in our duties toward the indigenous races to wipe clean the colonial past of Germany.’⁶⁰ Underlining German mistreatment of colonial subjects distracted attention away from French behaviour in the colonies and worked to mobilise readers against concessions to Germany.

In the late 1920s and early 1930s, during a period of rising protectionism among US and European powers, of thwarted colonial development plans and of attempts at Franco-German reconciliation that made some worry about colonial revisionism in Germany, imperial lobbyists intensified their efforts to drum up public support for

⁵⁶ Albert Sarraut, ‘Nationalisons l’idée coloniale’, *L’Europe nouvelle*, 1 May 1926, 580. Interestingly, in this newspaper, which promoted European collaboration and peace, Sarraut does not refer to European collaboration in the French colonies.

⁵⁷ Michael D. Callahan, *A Sacred Trust: The League of Nations and Africa, 1929–1946* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2004), 27.

⁵⁸ Homberg, *La France des cinq parties du monde*, 64.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 291.

⁶⁰ Archimbaud, *La plus grande France*, 64.

empire.⁶¹ In 1927 Sarraut lobbied the Poincaré government to create a ‘national week of colonial propaganda’. The André Tardieu government of 1929–1930, in which Briand was the foreign minister, also actively supported empire. Widely distributed dailies such as *Le Petit Parisien* and *Le Temps* paid more attention to the colonies. The specialised colonial press also attracted a wider readership.⁶² All this suggests that imperial lobbyists achieved some success in raising colonial consciousness among the public, even if Tardieu could still say in 1929: ‘the French are unfortunately too little informed about our colonial empire’.⁶³

At the same time, a law of 1928, passed just over a year before Briand’s federal Europe speech, reinforced the metropole’s privileged trade policy with its colonies. Although the law made no major alterations to the 1892 law, it demonstrated the state’s interest in rationalising the imperial division of labour by encouraging the colonies to produce goods that the metropole did not already produce. Significantly, after a Franco-German commercial agreement of 1927 caused a small increase in trade between Germany and its former African colonies⁶⁴ and as pan-European sentiments spread, the 1928 law continued to limit foreign products from entering French colonies.⁶⁵ Yet Imperial lobbyists had difficulty getting the state to finance colonial economic development. Faced with the challenges of consolidating the imperial economy, Homberg tried to persuade the public that, thanks to colonies, France ‘is still a global nation, and not just a little European nation’.⁶⁶

French Europe

In the late 1920s, as imperial lobbyists struggled to drum up support for Sarraut’s ambitious plan to organise the empire, some intellectuals, businessmen and diplomats worked to organise Europe. Briand warned fellow Europeans that ‘it’s each day more necessary to organise and rationalise production and trade, in presence especially of an increasingly intense global competition that might become irresistible if we don’t find a solution to the anarchical state of the European market’.⁶⁷ Briand’s federal Europe project emerged at a time of rising protectionism across the world and growing concerns about Germany’s territorial ambitions in its former colonies and in Eastern Europe. In calling for peace and continental cooperation, Briand could maintain the post-war settlement, which meant collaborating with and containing Germany, presenting France as the protector of weaker European states and assuming moral

⁶¹ On this topic see, Ageron, ‘Les colonies devant l’opinion publique française’, 45–54.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 48.

⁶³ Quoted in *Ibid.*, 49.

⁶⁴ Chantal Metzger, *L’Empire colonial français dans la stratégie du Troisième Reich (1936–1945)*, vol. 1 (Brussels: Peter Lang, 2002), 29–30.

⁶⁵ AMAE, B27/47. ‘Les vingt-quatre plus grands clients à qui la France achète et vend dans le monde entier’, 1928.

⁶⁶ Homberg, *La France des cinq parties du monde*, 7.

⁶⁷ AMAE, B27/47. Quoted in Lucien Coquet, ‘Lettre ouverte aux conseillers du commerce extérieur de la France à l’occasion du congrès national d’Alger’, 1930, 3.

leadership in Europe, all the while protecting colonial resources and securing access to continental raw materials and markets. This form of rule, in which continental states would share power and have incentives to maintain the peace, differed from France's harsher policy of exploitation and outright political control in its overseas colonies.

The Locarno Treaty of 1925 ushered in a period of Franco-German diplomatic rapprochement, which caused anxiety about possible German demands to reclaim their lost colonies in Africa and territories in Eastern Europe. At least in his conversations with Gustav Stresemann, Germany's foreign minister, Briand left open the possibility of territorial revisionism in Eastern Europe and in Germany's former colonies. This period inspired a spate of literature on the importance of pan-Europeanism to continental peace and power, much of it in the French language.⁶⁸ Gaston Riou, an influential politician, syndicalist and author of two important books on the Europeanist cause, *Europe, ma patrie* (1928) and *S'unir ou mourir* (1929), the second of which Briand prefaced, called on Europeans to federate because 'it alone can reconcile the legitimate diversity of its parts and the common desire for peace and unity'.⁶⁹ Riou's vision of a federal Europe ignored France's overseas empire. At the same time that France and Germany worked to reconcile their differences, French Europeanists around Briand used the imperative of peace to contain Germany's territorial ambitions.

Neither at the Assembly of the League of Nations in September 1929 nor in his memorandum of May 1930 did Briand challenge state sovereignty or mention the colonies. 'It's on the basis of absolute sovereignty and of entire political independence that the understanding among European nations must be realised.'⁷⁰ Yet within the federal state, which in fact looked more confederal, France and its Eastern European allies might be able to limit Germany's territorial ambitions. The fact that Briand's federal Europe would not have infringed on state sovereignty was justified in part because Briand became aware, having heard the concerns of the other French statesmen and European diplomats, that his government and the other imperial powers would refuse to lose jurisdiction over their overseas territories.⁷¹ At the League of Nations in 1925 Briand had claimed that 'there was nobody who in any way wanted to deny this moral right of Germany [to own colonies]'.⁷² Then, in March 1926, the Belgian, British and French governments declared that 'as a member of the League of Nations, Germany could be a possible candidate for colonial mandates'.⁷³

⁶⁸ On the variety of this literature, see, for example, Chabot, *Aux origines intellectuelles de l'Union européenne*, 14.

⁶⁹ Riou, *Europe, ma patrie*, 119.

⁷⁰ AMAE, Y640. *Mémoire sur l'organisation d'un régime d'union fédérale européenne*, 6.

⁷¹ Ibid., 128. Also see Anne-Isabelle Richard, 'Competition and Complementarity: Civil Society Networks and the Question of Decentralizing the League of Nations', *Journal of Global History* 7, 2 (July 2012), 243. It should be pointed out, however, that I see more tension between Briand's federal Europe and the French empire than Richard's article suggests.

⁷² Quoted in Wolfe W. Schmokel, *Dream of Empire: German Colonialism, 1919–1945* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1964), 83. Also quoted in Hansen and Jonsson, *Eurafrica*, 49.

⁷³ Quoted in Archimbaud, *La plus grande France*, 57.

It should be underscored, however, that such signs of appeasement seemed to have been fleeting. Practice did not match rhetoric. By 1929–1930 Briand's vision for peace and prosperity was continental, not overseas.

While imperial lobbyists contended that the colonies 'are an integral part of and inseparable from the mother-country', French Europeanists tended to push for unity without including colonies.⁷⁴ Interestingly, many French Europeanists refused a role for Great Britain in Europe on the grounds that it was an empire, as if France itself had no colonial holdings.⁷⁵ At international conferences in the 1920s Archimbaud complained that France was always treated as a European state instead of as an imperial state: 'the British empire has six votes in the Assembly of the League of Nations . . . France has but one vote'.⁷⁶ If the French state administered the colonies in various forms, and if the state was to cede some of its power to a larger European political entity, then the corollary would be that an international body, whether a federal Europe or the League of Nations, would govern the French colonies. Yet, in 1927, a member of the French delegation in Geneva declared that France 'intends to have no obligation . . . as far as the ensemble of its colonies, protectorates, and territories placed under its sovereignty or mandate is concerned'.⁷⁷ For diplomats around Briand, empire and Europe remained separate spheres of influence.

League officials promoted an open world economy and thus disagreed with the distinction that French diplomats made between empire and Europe. France was not to play an imperial game on the one hand and a European game on the other. Just after Briand's September 1929 speech and as the Belgians and British proposed a tariff truce as a counterbid,⁷⁸ one League official, interestingly from Italy, a country looking to carve out a colonial sphere of influence of its own, asserted that 'the zone of economic solidarity, the free market on which we focus our efforts, should equally include the colonial possessions and protectorates of the said nations'.⁷⁹ At the same time, German jurists and former colonial officials lobbied the League to enforce an open-door policy in the mandates.⁸⁰ Yet French officials were among the staunchest opponents of sharing the mandates. When it came time to implement the tariff truce, the French delegation in Geneva resisted its application to French colonies,⁸¹ even though one French official warned that the failure of the tariff truce would cause 'grave inconveniences for Briand's European policy'.⁸² Even the International Labour

⁷⁴ Léon Perrier, 'La France et ses colonies sont solidaires', 578. Perrier apparently made this comment before the Chamber of Deputies.

⁷⁵ This contradiction had been exposed at the League of Nations. See Marie-Renée Mouton, 'La Société des Nations et le Plan Briand d'Union européenne', in Fleury and Jilek, eds., *Le Plan Briand d'Union fédérale européenne*, 245–6.

⁷⁶ Archimbaud, *La plus grande France*, 35.

⁷⁷ AMAE, Y629. Incoming telegram from Serruys in Geneva, 5 Nov. 1927.

⁷⁸ On this topic, see Clavin, *Securing the World Economy*, 45.

⁷⁹ AMAE, Papiers 1940, Léger, 3. Pietro Stoppani, *Mémorandum relatif à l'idée d'un accord collectif pour une meilleure organisation des relations économiques internationales en Europe*, 11 Oct. 1929, 27.

⁸⁰ On this topic, see Pedersen, *The Guardians*, 195–286.

⁸¹ AMAE, SDN/IJ/1428. 'Note pour Monsieur Massigli', 17 Oct. 1929.

⁸² AMAE, Y631. Incoming telegramme from Flandin in Geneva, 11 Mar. 1930.

Office (ILO) admitted that the ‘French colonies are an integral part of the metropole’ and asked ‘from a political and economic point of view, would a strictly European federation take into consideration their resources, their needs?’⁸³

If France’s colonial territories fell to various degrees under French sovereignty, then why were they often omitted from French visions of European unity? One, French officials feared losing control over the colonies. In the 1920s the German colonial lobby demanded colonial revisionism at the same time that the League of Nations wished to internationalise empire. Two, open markets would allow other European farmers and industrialists to compete with France’s metropolitan producers in France’s own colonies, and France’s colonial producers would have the freedom to find the most lucrative markets. Officials drew a line between empire and Europe so that metropolitan interests could profit from both.

France’s modern industries depended on trade with the other Great Powers, especially given the state’s reluctance to organise colonial markets. The academic André Siegfried, son of the imperial lobbyist Jules Siegfried, observed that ‘we remain especially European: in our exports, neither foreign countries outside of Europe nor our colonies hold a primordial place’.⁸⁴ The economist and syndicalist Francis Delaisi, who was close to Briand and who would influence the discussions about European unification at the League and the ILO, came to the same conclusion:

We have misled public opinion in making it believe that Europe depended principally on expanding into ‘colonial’ countries . . . the white man has everywhere the same needs, takes an interest in the same products, and works energetically to obtain them. It’s why the Romanian peasant, or the farmer from New Zealand, will always be a better customer for London, Paris, or Hamburg than the Negro, the Hindu, or the Chinese. The economic equilibrium of Europe is mainly based on the European race.⁸⁵

Delaisi, too, refuted the belief that empire would pay and assumed that race determined economic complementarity: ‘the salvation of the European is in the return to Europe’.⁸⁶ Between 1928 and 1930 France’s ten main clients included those shown in [Table 1](#). In other words, France sold close to home. Yet, as [Table 2](#) shows, it cast a wider net in its purchases. Based on these tables, it is clear that apart from Algeria the colonies held less economic value than other parts of the world.

In the 1920s the structure of French production underwent a transition that made it increasingly reliant on more developed European markets just as those markets closed to French goods. Industry began to adopt mass production to stay competitive with the United States. As the result of economies of scale, and the retaking of Alsace–

⁸³ ILO, CAT/6A/6. ‘Etats-Unis d’Europe’, 9, no date but likely 1930. For more on the ILO’s view of European unification, see Denis Guérin, *Albert Thomas au BIT, 1920–1932: De l’internationalisme à l’Europe* (Geneva: Institut européen de l’Université de Genève, 1996).

⁸⁴ André Siegfried, ‘Les marchés étrangers et notre action diplomatique’, in Henry de Jouvenel, Daniel Serruys, et al., eds., *Notre diplomatie économique* (Paris: Félix Alcan, 1925), 223. Laurence Badel has shown the importance of European markets compared to colonial markets in *Un milieu libéral et européen*, 109–30.

⁸⁵ Francis Delaisi, *Les Deux Europes* (Paris: Payot, 1929), 200.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 205.

Table 1. *Value of French Exports*

Country	Sales (millions of francs)
Britain	7,484
Belgium/Luxembourg	6,874
Germany	4,840
Algeria	4,343
Switzerland	3,234
United States	2,934
Italy	2,006
Spain	1,504
Netherlands	1,275
Morocco	1,220

Source: *Alfred Sauvy, Histoire économique de la France entre les deux guerres vol. 2 (Paris: Economica, 1984), 160.*

Table 2. *Value of French Imports*

Country	Purchases (millions of francs)
Germany	6,515
United States	6,495
Britain	5,496
Belgium/Luxembourg	4,053
Algeria	3,040
India	2,504
Australia	1,986
Argentina	1,940
Netherlands	1,702
Spain	1,548

Source: *Alfred Sauvy, Histoire économique de la France entre les deux guerres vol. 2 (Paris: Economica, 1984), 160.*

Lorraine, production soared during the decade. At the same time, French population growth stagnated, which limited demand.⁸⁷ French industrialists therefore searched for new outlets. No country in the period between 1913 and 1928 experienced as rapid an increase in its exports as France.⁸⁸ Yet, as the world economy slowed down in the late 1920s, rising production was met with contracting foreign markets. Not only had the markets of the Soviet Union and China closed, but the United States also raised high trade barriers. The automobile, chemicals and electricity sectors, as well as luxury goods such as silk and wine, depended on securing export markets. Imperial lobbyists argued that colonial markets had potential, but it was clear that they did not yet absorb rising production. In 1927, for example, the AEF had but

⁸⁷ For the relationship between population growth and the French economy, see, for example, Kemp, *The French Economy, 1913–1939*, 165.

⁸⁸ Marseille, *Empire colonial et capitalisme français*, 229.

384 registered motor vehicles.⁸⁹ As industrial and luxury sectors lost their ability to sell to other industrialised countries, as Latin American countries industrialised and protected their home markets and as colonial markets were not yet sufficiently developed to purchase automobiles and other luxuries, the leaders of these sectors called for European unification as the surest way to sell their goods.

Some businessmen wished to rationalise European markets through cartels or a customs union, but their European orientation does not necessarily mean that they lacked an interest in colonial markets. As production rose, modern economic interests saw a need in developing colonial infrastructure and encouraging public works. The industrialist Louis Loucheur, another of Briand's supporters, lobbied for electrification in Africa. Automobile sales had brighter prospects in industrialised European markets, but with the onset of the Depression André Citroën wished to change that by making a baby's first three words 'mama, papa, and car'.⁹⁰ Automobile exports to the colonies doubled between 1925 and 1929.⁹¹ Between 1927 and 1930 the steel industry's exports to Germany diminished, but its colonial exports increased from 207,000 to 282,000 tons.⁹² These industries could profit from separating colonial markets and integrated European markets.

French calls for European unity resembled France's imperial strategy in that politicians tried to convince industrialists and investors to do business in Central and Eastern Europe as a way to deepen France's ties to the region, hem in German resurgence and carve out a continental economic space that would guarantee raw materials and markets for France's industrial and military supplies.⁹³ In both his September 1929 speech and his memorandum of May 1930 Briand assured the League that he was working within its universal framework, but given that Europe dominated the League, and France still dominated continental diplomacy, we might conclude that the French had a disproportionate amount of influence in defining the 'universal'. Market integration served to benefit French and German industrialists by keeping Eastern Europeans on the land as primary producers and consumers of industrial goods. The Belgian electrical engineer Dannie Heineman, who prefaced Delaisi's *Les Deux Europes*, suggested developing the infrastructure of Eastern and Southern Europe through initiatives such as providing electrification.⁹⁴ He did not, however, wish to industrialise these regions but rather to make their agriculture

⁸⁹ Thomas, *The French Empire Between the Wars*, 97.

⁹⁰ Quoted in Marseille, *Empire colonial et capitalisme français*, 265.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 263.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 268.

⁹³ Georges-Henri Soutou has argued that French security interests in Eastern Europe motivated its economic imperialism in the region in 'L'impérialisme du pauvre: la politique économique de gouvernement français en Europe Centrale et Orientale de 1918 à 1929', *Relations internationales*, 7 (1976): 219–39. Among works that examine Franco-German rivalry in Eastern Europe are Stephen G. Gross, *Export Empire: German Soft Power in Southeastern Europe, 1890–1945* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016); esp. 48–67 and 107–38 and David E. Kaiser, *Economic Diplomacy and the Origins of the Second World War: Germany, Britain, France, and Eastern Europe, 1930–1939* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), esp. 3–56.

⁹⁴ Dannie Heineman, preface in Delaisi, *Les Deux Europes*, 16–9.

more productive and profitable so that its farmers could purchase Western Europe's industrial goods.

The core versus periphery relationship that France had with its colonies was also to be found in its relationship with Eastern Europe. Michel Augé-Laribé, a French agricultural expert, rightfully noted that industrialised countries such as France and Germany were also agricultural countries,⁹⁵ which would ultimately work to the disadvantage of other parts of Europe. One Hungarian official feared that with the removal of customs barriers 'cost prices would be wonderfully low, but the number of unemployed would be very greatly increased and in consequence workers were in many countries strongly in favour of Customs protection'.⁹⁶ Not without reason, Eastern Europeans feared being colonised by the more industrialised Western Europeans.⁹⁷ The Czech foreign minister Edvard Beneš complained that 'the French were always seeking to attach political conditions to financial transactions'.⁹⁸ Eastern European officials expressed concern that their countries would become a dumping ground for industrial surpluses, thereby hurting their own infant industries.⁹⁹ French Europeanists promoted a similar type of economic relationship in Eastern Europe as imperialists had promoted in other parts of the world.

Through Briand's federal Europe, France might better defend Central and Eastern Europe against Germany's own imperial ambitions. Both security and economic interests motivated France's Eastern policy. After Briand released his memorandum, Loucheur travelled to Central and Eastern Europe to lobby on his government's behalf, combating the idea that Briand's project was a way to assert French hegemony in Europe, or a strategy to exclude American products and influence, suggesting that 'we must search together for the economic solution that will give Europe status'.¹⁰⁰ Loucheur was not without personal interest: not only did he promote the electrification of Eastern Europe, but he had also invested in a French chemical company there, and, ironically, this apostle of peace sold arms to Poland and Yugoslavia. Loucheur also had a stake in Romanian oilfields.¹⁰¹ Behind the language of peace and security lay powerful economic interests looking to secure markets.

The French government was far from fulfilling the free trade ideal. It was selective about which products it admitted from other European countries. One Polish official noted that 'exports from Poland are nearly exclusively agricultural, and that if the industrialised countries raise tariff barriers against these products . . . the agricultural

⁹⁵ AMAE, B27/47. *Premier congrès d'Union douanière européenne*, Aug. 1930, 6.

⁹⁶ League of Nations Archives (hereafter LoNA), SCE/II/PV4. Committee on Industry, International Economic Conference, 'Provisional Minutes of the Fourth Meeting', 10 May 1927, 8.

⁹⁷ AMAE, Y630. See, for example, Telegram from Ristelhueber in Kovno, 11 Feb. 1930.

⁹⁸ Quoted in Piotr Stefan Wandycz, *The Twilight of French Eastern Alliances, 1926–1936: French-Czechoslovak-Polish Relations from Locarno to the Remilitarization of the Rhineland* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 191.

⁹⁹ AMAE, Y630. See, for example, incoming telegram from Vienne in Budapest, 8 Feb. 1930.

¹⁰⁰ Hoover Institution Archives (hereafter HIA), Loucheur Papers, Box 7, Folder 7, 'Discours de M. Louis Loucheur', Romania, no date but surely late May 1930.

¹⁰¹ For more on Loucheur's Eastern European investments, see Keeton, *Briand's Locarno Policy*, 82.

countries are forced to defend themselves'.¹⁰² Interestingly, some Eastern Europeans, like some of France's colonial interests, defended free trade against fortress France.

Briand's call for European unity would preserve the French empire at the same time as it would curb Germany's territorial ambitions, illustrating the way in which European unification could be forged within empires instead of against them. One French politician called the frontier of Poland 'the frontier of France'.¹⁰³ Some officials in other European empires or aspiring empires suspected, not incorrectly, that Briand's Europeanism was a ploy to maintain France's continental hegemony.¹⁰⁴ The German foreign minister who succeeded Stresemann claimed that 'there can be no doubt that France is thinking in the first place of perpetuating existing relations to the east and southeast of Germany'.¹⁰⁵ *Le Figaro* observed that 'European nations are divided into two groups, those who want to maintain the territorial status quo and those who don't. That doesn't make for a favourable beginning to a federation.'¹⁰⁶

A Eurafrikan Synthesis?

Between 1929 and 1932 the European unity movement, like the campaign for colonial economic development, struggled to pick up momentum. One month after Briand announced his federal Europe plan, Stresemann died. Thereafter, fiercer nationalists took charge of the German government.¹⁰⁷ In addition, the beginning of the Great Depression at the end of October further intensified inter-empire competition, further contracted world markets and slashed government spending on public works projects. For these reasons, a third strategy that fused colonial economic development with European cooperation increased in visibility. A motley group of imperialists, quasi-fascist intellectuals, syndicalists, Germanophiles and pacifists promoted the notion of Eurafrika, first coined by the Austrian pan-Europeanist Richard Coudenhove-Kalergi in 1929.¹⁰⁸

European cooperation in Africa had existed before the concept of Eurafrika. In the nineteenth century, intellectuals like Saint-Simon and Victor Hugo had called on Europeans to unite and commit themselves to the economic and human development of Africa. European businessmen and statesmen had also periodically collaborated in Africa. At the Berlin Conference of 1884–1885, Europeans came together to end slavery and implement 'freer' trade.¹⁰⁹ During the scramble for African colonies,

¹⁰² AMAE, Y630. Incoming telegram from Tripier in Warsaw, 29 Nov. 1929.

¹⁰³ Quoted in Wandycz, *The Twilight of French Eastern Alliances*, 187.

¹⁰⁴ For example, No. 189: 'Memorandum on M. Briand's proposal for a European Federal Union [W5585/451/98]', Foreign Office, 30 May 1930, in E.L. Woodward and Rohan Butler, eds., *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919–1939*, (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1947), 328.

¹⁰⁵ Quoted in Peter M.R. Stirk, *A History of European Integration since 1914* (New York: Pinter, 1996), 37.

¹⁰⁶ AMAE, Y653. André Chaumeix, 'Le projet d'union européenne', *Le Figaro*, Aug. 1930 (the exact day is unclear on the document).

¹⁰⁷ Even if Franco-German dialogue did not come to halt. See Fischer, 'The Failed European Union'.

¹⁰⁸ Richard Coudenhove-Kalergi, 'Afrika', *Panewropa* 5, 2 (1929), 3–18.

¹⁰⁹ On the link between the Berlin Conference and Eurafrika, see Kaye Whiteman, 'The Rise and Fall of Eurafrique: From the Berlin Conference of 1884–1885 to the Tripoli EU-Africa Summit of 2010', in

diplomats in France's Foreign Ministry periodically tried to cooperate with Germany in order to prevent British domination.¹¹⁰ In the First World War some socialists in the Allied countries supported the need for supranational control not only of conquered German colonies but also of the other European colonies in Africa. After the war, Woodrow Wilson and his advisers, opposed as they were to the insularity of European empires, called for the internationalisation of Africa. In the 1920s an occasional writer, usually from the Radical or Socialist Party, advocated Franco-German collaboration in Africa, but such appeals failed to gain traction at the official level.

The idea of Eurafica interested imperial lobbyists who continued to struggle to persuade the government to fund colonial development and Europeanists who wanted to prevent their movement from flagging. 1930 marked the 100th anniversary of the conquest of Algeria. The following year, Paris held a colonial exposition. All the European empires except Great Britain displayed their colonial possessions at the Colonial Exposition. Hubert Lyautey, former governor general of Morocco, hoped that European collaboration at the Exposition would lead to cooperation in the colonies. He promoted a 'union of all the colonising nations in a policy of association for the greater moral and material profit of all'.¹¹¹ Empire became a way for Europeans collectively to take pride in their scientific achievements in Africa. Moreover, in 1931 French policy makers were reconsidering the Sarraut Plan and needed to find ways to finance it. Although the plan would ultimately be set aside, some intellectuals hoped to convince the Germans to help finance it while it remained on the table.

In 1931 imperial lobbyists such as Sarraut and Archimbaud, earlier hostile toward Germany, became supporters of European unification as a way to promote colonial economic development. Archimbaud lamented Briand's silence on empire, arguing that European imperial powers had 'a big political and economic interest in envisaging the reorganisation of Europe not only in the framework of Europe, but in the wider framework of Europe and its colonial dependencies'.¹¹² Such an assertion was doubtlessly a way to persuade the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to treat access to colonial markets as a bargaining chip at a time when half-hearted discussions proceeded in Geneva about the creation of a federal Europe. Similarly, Sarraut now connected colonial economic development to the creation of a federal Europe.¹¹³ Sarraut

Adekeye Adebajo and Kaye Whiteman, eds., *The EU and Africa: From Eurafrique to Afro-Europa* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 23–43.

¹¹⁰ For various instances of pre-First World War efforts at Franco-German collaboration, see Christopher M. Andrew, *Théophile Delcassé and the Making of the Entente Cordiale: A Reappraisal of French Foreign Policy* (New York: St. Martin's, 1968), esp. 158–79 and Raymond Poidevin, *Les relations économiques et financières entre la France et l'Allemagne de 1898 à 1914* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1969), esp. 411–611.

¹¹¹ Cited in Patricia A. Morton, *Hybrid Modernities: Architecture and Representation at the 1931 Colonial Exposition, Paris* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2000), 314.

¹¹² Léon Archimbaud, 'Le Quai d'Orsay et nos colonies', *Les Annales coloniales*, 23 July 1931.

¹¹³ Sarraut, *Grandeur et servitude coloniales* (Paris: Éditions du Sagittaire, 1931), especially 216–85. For Sarraut's views of Eurafica, see Yves Montarsolo, 'Albert Sarraut et l'idée d'Eurafrique', in Marie-Thérèse Bitsch and Gérard Bossuat, eds., *L'Europe unie et l'Afrique: De l'idée d'Eurafrique à la Convention de Lomé I* (Brussels: Bruylant, 2005), 77–95.

believed in using the League of Nations to spread European influence and contain the United States and the Soviet Union.¹¹⁴ In his mind, the common development of Africa could reaffirm European values, which in his view were largely French values: ‘Colonial Europe must think and act like us’.¹¹⁵

The promotion of Eurafrica supported efforts to internationalise and therefore re-legitimise the possession of African colonies at a time when colonialism was under attack by some of its subject populations and international opinion. Right-wing intellectual Pierre Drieu La Rochelle predicted that ‘the organisation of Africa, by relaxing the principle of the mandate system, which should no longer be national but international and should directly be a matter of the League of Nations, will be the touchstone of the European Union’.¹¹⁶ Sarraut used a similar line of reasoning: ‘Europe, under penalty of death, must remake its broken unity since the war in order to defend, with a European spirit, the influence and structure of this “colonial creation”’.¹¹⁷ The language of national self-determination at the League had created new expectations among colonial subjects. Improving living standards in the colonies could make colonial subjects satisfied with French rule. The syndicalist Georges Valois suggested that in Africa Europeans needed to find *development sites*, not *markets*.¹¹⁸ The choice of language was not innocent. Instead of overtly exploiting the indigenous population and its resources, European banks, investors and businesses would join hands to create new markets that would benefit all involved in Eurafrica, which would become ‘one of the three pieces of the world economy . . . the American system, the Russo-Asian system, and the Eurafrican system’.¹¹⁹

Political economist Bertrand de Jouvenel, Henry’s son, highlighted the contradiction between France’s need for European markets at the same time that it closed its colonial markets to its European competitors. He criticised France’s and Great Britain’s imperial preference, expressing concern that while, in Africa, France found an outlet for 15 percent of its total exports and Britain 11 percent, Germany exported only 2 percent of its total to Africa. ‘British and French imperial policy . . . thus gravely threatens the economic balance of the industrialised powers of Europe, and particularly Germany’.¹²⁰ De Jouvenel called for European ententes as a way to suppress tariffs, rationalise the European economy and pursue colonial economic development.¹²¹ By including the Germans in the Eurafrican project, intellectuals

¹¹⁴ Sarraut, *Grandeur et servitude coloniales*, 240.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 280.

¹¹⁶ Pierre Drieu La Rochelle, *L’Europe contre les patries* (Paris: Gallimard, 1931), 138. Refer to the footnote on this page, which indicates that this quote comes from *Genève ou Moscou* in 1928. On Drieu La Rochelle’s continental Europeanism, see Sarah Shurts, ‘Continental Collaboration: The Transition from Ultrationalism to Pan-Europeanism by the Interwar French Fascist Right’, *French Politics, Culture, & Society* 32, 3 (Winter 2014), 79–96.

¹¹⁷ Sarraut, *Grandeur et servitude coloniales*, 12.

¹¹⁸ Georges Valois, ‘L’Afrique chantier de l’Europe’, *Cahiers bleus*, 27 June–4 July 1931, 7.

¹¹⁹ Valois, ‘L’Afrique chantier de l’Europe’, 7.

¹²⁰ Bertrand de Jouvenel, ‘Un plan de valorisation colonial et de collaboration européenne’, *Cahiers bleus*, 28 Mar. 1931, 16.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 29.

like de Jouvenel hoped to ensure peace and prosperity in the colonies and on the continent. The colonies could become, as de Jouvenel put it, 'an opportunity to rationalise Europe'.¹²²

Eurafricanists looked to develop colonial markets, not as the nationalists of the late nineteenth century had done, but through European cooperation and overcoming nationalist barriers. Before he had coined the word Eurafica, Coudenhove-Kalergi suggested that Europeans transform the Sahara into a cultivable land and eradicate sleeping sickness, work to be done 'neither by generals nor by politicians, but by engineers and doctors'.¹²³ While generals and politicians defended national interests, engineers and doctors served the broader interests of the economy and humanity. Eugène Guernier, who worked in foreign commerce, saw Africa as free of a 'burdensome past' and the 'excessive notion of nationalism'.¹²⁴ He called for the creation of a trans-African railway that would unite economically and culturally all of Europe's colonies in Africa and check the growth of nationalism, an ideology which Africans could use to throw off their chains and which caused European wars.

Eurafica might also help solidify the peace between France and Germany. If competition for resources led to war, then cooperation in the colonies might keep the peace. Dispossessing Germany of its colonies after the First World War had caused some consternation amongst Germans, as it deprived German industry of markets and an outlet for its overpopulation.¹²⁵ In the Reichstag in 1925 the colonial lobby demanded the return of Germany's colonies.¹²⁶ Germany's entry into the League during the Locarno era allowed Germans access to their former colonies, which caused controversy in France. Although the German colonial lobby was strong, Stresemann seemingly cared less about the colonies than Eastern Europe. All the same, in the interests of peace and colonial development, French socialists called for 'the internationalisation of the colonies under the control of the League of Nations'.¹²⁷

While Eurafica could potentially re-legitimise the imperial system in the international community against rising indigenous discontent, it could also remove the threat of social instability from metropolitan Europe. To ease European unemployment during the depression, some members of the ILO proposed to the Commission of Enquiry for European Union (CEEU) to send workers to the

¹²² *Ibid.*, 29.

¹²³ Richard N. Coudenhove-Kalergi, *Panurope*, trans. Philippe Simon (Paris: Editions Paneuropeennes, 1927), 139.

¹²⁴ Eugène L. Guernier, 'Les grands courants modernes des migrations humaines: L'Afrique, champ d'expansion de l'Europe', *La Quinzaine coloniale*, 25 Nov.1930. Guernier elaborated on his ideas in *L'Afrique, champ d'expansion de l'Europe* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1933).

¹²⁵ On the German colonial lobby's efforts to reassert its authority over its colonies, see Schmokel, *Dream of Empire*, 77–8.

¹²⁶ For an understanding of the German demand for a return of Germany's colonies and of the broader German claim on French colonies, see Metzger, *L'Empire colonial français dans la stratégie du Troisième Reich (1936–1945)*, vol. 1.

¹²⁷ Quoted in Ageron, 'Les colonies devant l'opinion publique française', 40.

colonies.¹²⁸ A draft resolution of the Unemployment Committee of the CEEU noted that ‘the economic equilibrium of Europe would be better re-established if the surplus population which it cannot make use of could be employed for the exploitation of territories which are in a position to absorb it to good purpose’.¹²⁹ By sending Europe’s jobless to Africa, European leaders could put them to work, improve their purchasing power and perhaps even uproot radicalism from the metropole.

Between 1929 and 1932 Eurafricanists worked to reinvigorate interest in colonial development and European cooperation by making them one and the same. Eurafrica was presented as a way, however fanciful, for France to maintain the moral high ground as the champions of peace and the territorial status quo all the while securing European and colonial markets. Ultimately, however, the economic depression, the death of Stresemann in 1929 and of Briand in 1932 and the rise of Adolf Hitler in 1933 thwarted hopes that Eurafrica would become a political entity, even if some late Third Republic and Vichy officials would open the colonies to greater German trade as a form of appeasement to Germany’s resurgent continental dominance.¹³⁰ In the interwar years imperial rivalry remained a reality and European or Eurafrican unity a dream.

Conclusion

That French policy makers ultimately worked to integrate Europe in the name of peace and prosperity while having their empire discredited in the international community can lead to a simplistic assumption that empire was backward and Europe was progressive. Historian Jacques Marseille argued that the ‘divorce’ between France and its colonies began in 1930,¹³¹ just as French elites debated colonial and continental strategies. Yet his retrospective view, one in which France and its European partners achieved unity as the process of decolonisation unfolded, ignores the simultaneous but often separate interest in colonial and continental strategies in the late 1920s and again after the Second World War. To frame empire as backward and Europe as progressive is to misinterpret how various French intellectuals, businessmen and politicians viewed these spheres of influence at the time and overlooks certain parallels between colonial and continental strategies.

The 1920s established a framework for post-1945 debates over France’s colonial and continental positions, even if each of these periods presented a unique constellation of actors that operated in a historically specific set of circumstances, not least the fact that after 1945 Eastern Europe fell inside the Soviet orbit. In the 1920s French

¹²⁸ LoNA, CEUE/23. Conseil d’administration du Bureau international du travail, ‘Extrait du procès-verbal de la huitième séance’, 22 Apr. 1931, 16.

¹²⁹ LoNA, CEUE/43. Unemployment Committee, CEEU, ‘Draft Resolution’, 10 July 1931, 2.

¹³⁰ Hansen and Jonsson, *Eurafrica*, 63–8; Gordon Dutter, ‘Doing Business with the Nazis: French Economic Relations with Germany under the Popular Front’, *Journal of Modern History* 63 (June 1991), 296–326.

¹³¹ Marseille, *Empire colonial et capitalisme français*, 503.

elites identified structural problems facing the metropole that would become more pressing in the 1950s: containing Germany's economic potential, standing up to US and Soviet power, appeasing colonial discontent and adapting to intensely competitive world markets. These changing circumstances forced various elites to rethink their strategies in order to stimulate economic growth and maintain France's independence and global influence. Because the French standard of living stagnated in comparison to some of France's international rivals, the debate over economic expansion also had implications for the state's legitimacy at home. After 1945 French policy makers would commit themselves more fully to developing the overseas colonies on the one hand, and more cautiously to extending French influence through a European framework on the other.

Although scholars go too far in claiming that 'there was no Europe to begin with, unless it was also Eurafrica',¹³² it can be argued that French efforts to organise Europe both in the 1920s and in the 1950s were conceived in a tense relationship with French efforts to organise empire. As an idea and a proposition, Eurafrica may have been found at nearly every twist and turn, but policy makers did not necessarily always take it seriously. In fact, Eurafrica was arguably less tenable than separate colonial and continental visions because it would have demanded the most coordination, it would have caused greater competition among European businesses for colonial markets and it would have required a willingness among French officials to relinquish at least some control over their colonies. As had become clear in the 1920s, and as policy makers realised again in the early 1950s, too much was at stake in integrating the French empire into a European political structure. Moreover, as the most powerful continental state in both the 1920s and early 1950s, French leaders did not necessarily have a reason to share their colonial markets, which inconveniently recalled French subservience to Nazi Germany. Distinct colonial and continental strategies would allow France to reinforce its global presence and extend French influence on the continent through a European political structure.

French policy makers thought that they could play both a colonial and a continental game, but the course of events in the 1950s suggested otherwise, as colonial wars forced them to see the merits of the Eurafrican synthesis. As in the Great Depression, certain French elites found Eurafrican visions useful during another world crisis. But unlike during the Great Depression, a growing number of French officials and some African leaders now took seriously the implementation of some form of Eurafrica. For metropolitan officials, Eurafrica became a way to pressure France's European partners to help fund colonial development, appease colonial discontent and give the French empire renewed legitimacy at a time when the empire was coming undone. Some African leaders believed that Eurafrica could provide Africans with social and economic benefits that political independence through the nation state could not provide. Through hard bargaining, French policy makers succeeded in integrating Algeria, still an administrative part of the metropole, and including France's other African colonies as associated territories in the European Economic Community

¹³²Hansen and Jonsson, *Eurafrica*, 14.

(EEC) in 1957. Yet fusing France's colonial and continental interests did not hand over control of the French empire to a European political structure, nor did it lead to greater political rights for Africans within Europe; instead, it meant maintaining economic ties between the two continents. In fact, calls for a political Eurafrica were not to last. By the late 1950s a new awareness of the social and economic costs of Eurafrican integration, plus a push for political independence in Africa, shelved the idea. Ties of association between the EEC and Africa would have to do.¹³³ That an economic form of Eurafrica became official policy in the mid-1950s and a precondition of France's entry into the EEC, despite the difficulty of integrating vastly different economies, demonstrates just how far French officials were willing to go to preserve the empire state.

In the 1920s many French elites worried that the nation state could not manage the international challenges that France faced; instead, they turned to organising larger political structures – empire (which became the French Union in 1946), supranational Europe or Eurafrica – as ways to stimulate economic growth and maintain France's political independence. In the 1950s French elites drew on these interwar concerns and strategies. When France retreated from empire in 1962, French leaders invested ever-greater energy into the construction of the EEC on French terms, as evidenced by the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and the Empty Chair crisis. At the same time, France, both on its own and through the EEC, maintained economic and cultural ties to its former colonies. Expansionary strategies, and the language used to describe them, may have changed over time (from 'imperial rivalry' to 'European cooperation'), but the ultimate aim of French policy did not. French elites, in the name of preserving world peace and a Francocentric idea of European civilisation, looked to secure resources and markets abroad in order to maintain a high standard of living at home, the basis on which the civilising narrative depended.

¹³³ For details about Eurafrica in the mid-1950s from two different perspectives, see Cooper, *Citizenship between Empire and Nation*, esp. 263–70 and Hansen and Jonsson, *Eurafrica*, 147–238.