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Competition and complementarity: civil society networks and the question of decentralizing the League of Nations*

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Abstract

This article examines debates on the decentralization of the League of Nations that took place in the civil society networks surrounding it. Set in the wider framework of regionalist debates, particularly in Latin America, it focuses on two organizations, the International Federation of League of Nations Societies, which promoted the League, and the Comité Fédéral de Coopération Européenne, which focused on European cooperation. The analysis of the debate on regionalism and universalism highlights the role that Europe played in the League, and points to the use of universalist arguments to further British imperial ends. It shows that interwar internationalism was a multifaceted phenomenon, in which national, imperial, regional, and universal projects and concerns were profoundly entangled. Finally, the article stresses the overlap between official and civil society networks, which complemented each other's activities.

Keywords European cooperation, global civil society, interwar internationalism, League of Nations, pan-Americanism

Introduction

In February 1927, the Fédération Française des Associations pour la Société des Nations (FFASDN, French Federation of Associations for the League of Nations), many of whose members were both League and European cooperation activists, adopted a resolution for the decentralization of the League. While they unequivocally supported the League, they also recognized its imperfections. They felt that regional unions, and in particular a European union, were a necessary step towards a truly universal League of Nations. These regional unions would strengthen the League and thus contribute to world peace. The Fédération

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Française subsequently sought to have a similar resolution adopted by the International Federation of League of Nations Societies (IFLNS) at its general assembly in Berlin in 1927.

This resolution was, however, rejected. Rather than strengthening the League, 'decentralization' (the term used for regionalization at the time) was considered a potential threat. The political committee of the IFLNS concluded that the League:

> cannot divide or delegate its responsibility in the supreme issue of peace and war. That matter is always potentially a world problem since wars now tend to become world-wide. … The great international issues to-day are world issues. They are no longer merely regional or continental. Strong continental federations of states, linked together by a weak world league might result in aggressive continentalism of which the end could only be another world war. Our goal must be a united and universal League strongly supported by public opinion the world over.[1]

Although Article 21 of the League Covenant explicitly referred to 'regional understandings like the Monroe Doctrine', projects aimed at decentralizing the League remained controversial, both in the League and in civil society networks surrounding it. Nonetheless, from 1929 the consensus temporarily and partially changed with regard to European regionalism. Triggered by growing concerns over the League's effectiveness, and by the Briand plan for European Union, the IFLNS extensively studied the question of European cooperation, and several Europeanist organizations became officially affiliated to the IFLNS. However, from 1933, with the international situation worsening, the appeal of internationalist arrangements, including European projects, diminished.

The focus of this article is on forms of regionalism that sought to complement internationalism at the global level of the League. To use a concept that came into currency a little later, it focuses on 'open' regionalism.[2] 'Closed' or 'bloc' regionalism, as practised by Japan or Germany during the 1930s, in contrast, aimed to strengthen the region or nation.[3] While the regional projects examined here emphasized their internationalist aims, the fear that these projects would nonetheless lead to closed regionalism was paramount among their critics. They feared that creating a European union would lead to bloc formation and exclusion. This article examines the reasons that led some to advocate decentralization of the League, and those that led others, both in Europe and beyond, to oppose it. In so doing, it contributes to an understanding both of interwar internationalism and of the role that Europe, and particularly Britain, played in this broader system.

The timing of these regional projects is pertinent, for the interwar period witnessed a profound change in Europe's global position. Before the First World War, the idea that Europe effectively was 'the universe', instead of one of a number of regions, was not uncommon among many Europeans.[4] After the war, this 'universality' was increasingly put

1 League of Nations Archives, Geneva (henceforth LoNA), International Federation of League of Nations Societies (henceforth IFLNS), P93, XI Plenary Congress, Berlin, 26–31 May 1927.

2 Hans Aufricht, 'Pan-Americanism and the United Nations', *Social Research*, 10, 4, 1943, pp. 417–35.

3 Peter Katzenstein, *A world of regions: Asia and Europe in the American imperium*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005.

4 Sarah Wambaugh, 'Regional versus universal solutions', in Institute of World Organization, *Regionalism and world organization*, Washington, DC: American Council on Public Affairs, 1944, p. 49.

to the test, owing to the rise of the United States, the Soviet Union, and Japan, greater assertiveness by the 'White Dominions' of the British empire, spreading colonial unrest, and European fears of civilizational decline.[5] The reluctance of the United States to assume leadership on the global stage, however, apparently left Europe's predominant political position largely intact. That Europe's position was nevertheless also in apparent decline prompted vigorous debate on the question of European regionalism in the framework of the League.

Despite these global linkages, this question has predominantly been examined from a European, or even a French, perspective.[6] Setting the question of European regionalism in a wider, more global, framework of decentralization illuminates the reasons why this particular regionalism was so problematic for the League. Thus, pan-Americanism is brought in as a point of comparison, as well as an inspiration for Europeanist projects. Whereas much of the extant literature addresses economic regionalism, this article, loosely following the distinction between 'political' and 'technical' questions, focuses predominantly on the 'political' question of whether decentralization of the League was feasible.[7]

This article focuses on the debates about regionalism that took place in civil society networks that surrounded the League. As Susan Pedersen has pointed out, every aspect of the League's work was marked by a 'symbiotic relationship with interest groups and publicity'.[8] The League served as a pole of attraction for numerous organizations comprising global civil society, becoming the site of an intricate interplay between governments, civil servants, experts, and private international organizations.[9] National, imperial, regional, and international causes and considerations converged as interwar internationalism was enacted. This article therefore answers Pedersen's call for greater attention to the complex relationship between the League and these 'mobilized publics', and its consequences in various policy fields.[10]

It was the lobbying by various Europeanist groupings that put European cooperation on the agendas of both the League and private international organizations initially opposed

5 Michael Adas, 'Contested hegemony: the Great War and the Afro-Asian assault on the civilizing mission ideology', *Journal of World History*, 15, 1, 2004, pp. 31–63; Prasenjit Duara, 'The discourse of civilization and decolonization', *Journal of World History*, 15, 1, 2004, pp. 99–130; Cemil Aydin, *The politics of Anti-Westernism in Asia: visions of world order in pan-Islamic and pan-Asian thought,* New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2007; Erez Manela, *The Wilsonian moment: self-determination and the international origins of anticolonial nationalism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007; Daniel Laqua, 'Transnational intellectual cooperation, the League of Nations, and the problem of order', *Journal of Global History*, 6, 2, 2011, pp. 223–47. For European decline, see Oswald Spengler, *Der Untergang des Abendlandes: Umrisse einer Morphologie der Weltgeschichte*, Munich: Beck, 1918–22; Paul Valéry, 'La crise de l'esprit', *Nouvelle Revue Française*, August 1919.

6 Ralph T. White, 'Regionalism versus universalism in the League of Nations', *Annals of International Studies*, 1, 1970, pp. 88–114; Eric Bussière, 'Premiers schémas européens et économie internationale durant l'entre deux guerres', *Relations Internationales*, 123, 2005, pp. 51–68; Jean-Michel Guieu, *Le rameau et le glaive: les militants français pour la Société des Nations*, Paris: Presses de Sciences Po, 2008; Jacques Bariéty, ed., *Aristide Briand, la Société des Nations, et l'Europe, 1919–1932*, Strasbourg: Presses Universitaires de Strasbourg, 2007.

7 Patricia Clavin and Jens-Wilhelm Wessels, 'Transnationalism and the League of Nations: understanding the work of its Economic and Financial Organisation', *Contemporary European History*, 14, 1, 2005, p. 466; Commission d'étude du problème de la collaboration européenne, Zoppot, *Bulletin de l'Union Internationale des Associations pour la Société des Nations* (henceforth *Bulletin UIASDN*), 5, 1930, p. 71.

8 Susan Pedersen, 'Back to the League of Nations', *American Historical Review*, 112, 4, 2007, p. 1092.

9 Lyman C. White, *The structure of private international organizations*, Philadelphia, PA: George S. Ferguson, 1933, p. 11.

10 Pedersen, 'Back to the League', p. 1093.

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to regionalism. Civil society offers a privileged site from which to examine these debates. While discussion of such projects often remained reluctant in official bodies, for fear of compromising national interests, they could be explored more openly in unofficial forums. This does not mean that these discussions were merely academic, even if it can be useful to distinguish between the official sphere and civil society for analytical purposes.[11] This case rather shows a profound entanglement, with both sides appropriating each other's tools. Extensive overlap between voluntary organizations and official circles meant that discussions were not as unhampered as in more radical organizations, but it also provided greater relevance to eventual policy-making.

Two organizations are considered here: the IFLNS, which aimed primarily at strengthening the universal League and which united League of Nations societies across the world, and the Comité Fédéral de Coopération Européenne, which conceived of European cooperation within the framework of the League and united committees across Europe. Despite its semi-official position at the League, and the research on national League societies, the IFLNS itself has so far received scant attention.[12]

I will first sketch the question of decentralization of the League on an official level by comparing the treatment of Latin America with that of the Briand plan for European union. I will then address the entwined civil society network in which these organizations operated. Finally, I will analyse the way that these activists conceptualized European cooperation within the framework of the League, and how this project was negotiated in order to dispel (mostly British) objections.

Re-imagining the League of Nations

After the cataclysm of the First World War, many hoped that the creation of the League of Nations would produce a new, more peaceful, international order. The 'Old Diplomacy' of secret bilateral treaties and power politics, which were seen to have caused the war, had to make way for the 'New Diplomacy': multilateral, democratic, and proceeding in public view. The much-debated merits, and alleged novelty, of the 'New Diplomacy' are less relevant for our purposes than the fact that civil society networks surrounding the League explicitly conceived of themselves in relation to it.[13] Moreover, the League itself was often portrayed as the incarnation of the New Diplomacy and as such thought to safeguard the peace.

11 Sunil Khilnani, 'The development of civil society', in Sudipta Kaviraj and Sunil Khilnani, eds., *Civil society: history and possibilities*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001, pp. 24–5.

12 Helen McCarthy, *The British people and the League of Nations: democracy, citizenship and internationalism, c.1918–45*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011; Christian Birebent, *Militants de la paix et de la SDN*, Paris: L'Harmattan, 2007; Donald S. Birn, *The League of Nations Union, 1918–1945*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981; Remco van Diepen, *Voor Volkenbond en vrede: Nederland en het streven naar een nieuwe wereldorde, 1919–1946 (For League of Nations and peace: the Netherlands and the pursuit of a new world order, 1919–1946)*, Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, 1999; Pedersen, 'Back to the League', p. 1113. For exceptions, see Guieu, *Le rameau*; and Daniel Gorman, 'Ecumenical internationalism: Willoughby Dickinson, the League of Nations and the World Alliance for Promoting International Friendship through the Churches', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 45, 1, 2010, pp. 51–73.

13 Arno J. Mayer, *Political origins of the New Diplomacy, 1917–1918*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1959, p. 58; Ruth B. Henig, 'New diplomacy and old: a reassessment of British conceptions of a League of Nations, 1918–1920', in Michael Dockrill and J. Fisher, eds., *The Paris Peace Conference 1919*, Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001, pp. 157–74.

However, in its actual shape the League did not correspond to the hopes and aspirations that had been pinned on it.

Despite its universal pretensions, the League was a predominantly European affair. While Asian countries such as Japan and China, and even colonial India, had been founding members, many aspects of the lives of colonized peoples remained outside the realm of the League, which focused on mandates and the technical sphere.[14] Among independent states, the United States had not joined, while Germany, the Soviet Union, and Mexico were not even invited to become members. Germany only joined in 1926, leading to scepticism regarding this 'victor' League, in Germany and elsewhere.[15] Moreover, a number of countries, particularly from Latin America, withdrew from the League more or less formally.[16]

The deficit in universality was further expressed through a lack of attention paid to certain areas of the world, notably Latin America. This was an area where regionalism played a significant role, offering a point of comparison with Europe. There was a tendency in League circles to see Latin America as a bloc, and its conflicts as being of secondary importance to world peace. Moreover, given the Monroe Doctrine of the United States, European powers hesitated to become involved in thorny border disputes, such as those between Chile, Peru, and Bolivia, preferring to leave these matters to the United States.[17]

There was also disappointment regarding the capabilities of the League, which did not become 'a substitute for great-power politics, as Woodrow Wilson had intended, but an adjunct to it'.[18] The failure of the Geneva Protocol of 1924, on collective security, arbitration, and disarmament, intended to fill the 'gaps' in the Covenant, did not dispel these concerns.[19] Some activists regarded the Locarno Treaty of 1925 as a more tangible approach to safeguarding peace, on a regional rather than a global basis. The treaty, which guaranteed Germany's western borders and brought the country into the League, was negotiated in the context of the League but not by the League. Described as a revived 'Concert of Europe', it was a regional arrangement between France, Belgium, Germany, Britain, and Italy. Indeed, the success of the treaty was in part attributed to it being a limited arrangement.[20] Wilhelm Heile, a central figure in the German internationalist movement, suggested in the title of one

14 Susan Pedersen, 'The meaning of the mandates system: an argument', *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, 32, 4, 2006, pp. 560–82; Michael D. Callahan, *A sacred trust: the League of Nations and Africa, 1929–1946*, Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2004; Annique H.M. van Ginneken, 'Volkenbondsvoogdij: Het toezicht van de Volkenbond op het bestuur in Mandaatgebieden, 1919–1940 (League of Nations tutelage: the supervision of the League of Nations of the administration in the Mandated territories, 1919–1940)', PhD thesis, Utrecht University, 1992.

15 Van Diepen, *Voor Volkenbond en vrede*.

16 Thomas Fischer, *Die Souveränität der Schwachen: Lateinamerika und der Völkerbund, 1920–1936*, Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2012.

17 *Ibid.*, pp. 185, 415, p. 183.

18 Zara Steiner, *The lights that failed: European international history, 1919–1933*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005, pp. 349, 650.

19 League of Nations Protocol for the Pacific Settlement of International Disputes. See Andrew Webster, 'International arbitration, the pacific settlement of disputes and the French security-disarmament dilemma (1929–1931)', *French History*, 24, 2, 2010, pp. 236–61.

20 Steiner, *Lights*, pp. 387–97, 421; Georges-Henri Soutou, 'L'ordre européen de Versailles à Locarno', in Claude Carlier and Georges-Henri Soutou, eds., *1918–1925, Comment faire la paix*, Paris: Economica, 2001, p. 322.

of his articles, 'From Versailles via Locarno to – Europe', that such an approach could be the way to proceed to a more stable future. Once other regional organizations had been founded, it would be 'a first step on the long way to the United States of mankind'.[21]

Not everyone shared the enthusiasm for Locarno, however. For some, it signified the return to power politics, moving away from the multilateral model of the League. In the aftermath of the controversy over the accession of Germany to the League and the Council, Brazil and Spain withdrew from the League. Together with Germany, four small powers were admitted to the Council, thus diluting its significance and stimulating Great Power tête-à-têtes. Some people therefore wondered whether a European organization might better be able to safeguard truly multilateral relations.[22]

Decentralization

Decentralization was one of the paths suggested to address these limitations of the League. The principal idea was that in organizing discussion, coordination, and perhaps even cooperation on a regional level, all areas would receive the attention that they deserved, and conflict could be mediated more effectively. Since this would take place within the framework of the universal League, the danger of conflict between regions was minimal.

Europeanism was only one of a number of regional movements. Pan-Americanism was perhaps the most significant other movement among League members, while pan-Asianism, under Japanese leadership, gained strength during the 1930s.[23] Although they featured less prominently in discussions on decentralization, pan-Africanism and pan-Islamism also experienced a 'golden age' during the interwar years.[24] The British Commonwealth was sometimes held up as a blueprint for European union.[25] Indeed, the Commonwealth was perhaps the only limited arrangement that did not arouse severe criticism, but was, instead, seen as a model for the League.[26]

'Open' regionalism was conceived of in the framework of the League and seen as but a step in the process from nation-building to world federation.[27] However, League supporters did not automatically welcome regional schemes, even those that conceived of themselves as being in accordance with the League. While advocates of pan-Americanism argued that the League was

21 Wilhelm Heile, 'Von Versailles über Locarno nach – Europa', *Die Hilfe*, 31, 1925, p. 436.

22 Guieu, *Le rameau*, pp. 150–1.

23 For pan-Asianism in India, see Carolien Stolte's article in this special issue; Prasenjit Duara, 'The discourse of civilization and Pan-Asianism', *Journal of World History*, 12, 1, 2001, pp. 99–130; Aydin, *Politics*.

24 Aydin, *Politics*; Andreas Eckert, 'Bringing the "Black Atlantic" into global history: the project of pan-Africanism', in Sebastian Conrad and Dominic Sachsenmaier, eds., *Competing visions of world order: global moments and movements, 1880s–1930s*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007, p. 247; Gary Wilder, *The French imperial nation-state: négritude and colonial humanism between the two world wars*, Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2005.

25 Leopold S. Amery, 'The British Empire and the pan-European idea', *Journal of the Royal Institute of International Affairs*, 9, 1, 1930, pp. 1–22; Richard N. Coudenhove-Kalergi, *Paneuropa*, Vienna: Paneuropa Verlag, 1923.

26 Mark Mazower, *No enchanted palace: the end of empire and the ideological origins of the United Nations*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009.

27 Georges Scelle, *Une crise de la SDN: la réforme du conseil et l'entrée de l'Allemagne à Genève*, Paris: PUF, 1927, p. 252.

an extension of the Pan-American Union on a global scale, the League was reluctant openly to encourage a pan-American arrangement within its organization. The same went for pan-Asianism and pan-Europeanism, which were regarded even more sceptically in League circles. Perhaps revealing his Foreign Office background, Secretary-General Sir Eric Drummond voiced the fear that, if power were to be devolved to regional organizations, 'the League would be reduced to a purely European machine'.[28] Conversely, if a European organization was created, the fear was that little would be left of the League. Both these consequences would be highly problematic for the British Commonwealth, spread across all continents.[29]

Article 21 of the Covenant of the League of Nations was often referred to as the legal basis for regional projects within the League. With its reference to 'regional understandings like the Monroe Doctrine', it was inserted to appease American criticism of Article 10, which guaranteed the territorial integrity and political independence of member states. However, the French representative Léon Bourgeois 'feared that the introduction of the Monroe Doctrine might prevent action by non-American members of the League on the American continent and, still more important, might give the United States a ground for declining to intervene on the European continent, even for the purpose of carrying out the Covenant'.[30] If the United States could use this article to disengage from Europe, there was little point in convincing Americans to join the League.

The League of Nations and pan-Americanism

Most Latin Americans also disliked the Covenant's reference to the Monroe Doctrine. To them, the doctrine did not just mean protection from European interference in the western hemisphere, because it also justified unilateral intervention by the United States south of the Rio Bravo (or Grande).[31] The doctrine's characterization as a 'regional understanding', suggesting a multilateral relationship, was ambiguous.[32] The appeal of the League was that it provided these self-styled 'weak states' with recourse to a multilateral framework containing several Great Powers, in which they could negotiate their relations with the United States.[33] If the League placed the western hemisphere outside its framework, and the United States did not join the League, the relevance of the League to Latin America greatly diminished. After the inclusion of Article 21, a number of Latin Americans aimed to reformulate the Monroe Doctrine into a multilateral policy of equal states, along the lines of traditional pan-Americanism.[34] Indeed, the relationship between

28 Cited in James Barros, *Office without power: Secretary-General Sir Eric Drummond, 1919–1933*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979, p. 212.

29 Robert W. D. Boyce, 'Britain's first "No" to Europe: Britain and the Briand plan, 1929–1930', *European Studies Review*, 10, 1, 1980, pp. 17–45; Robert Boyce, 'The Briand Plan and the crisis of British liberalism', in Antoine Fleury and Lubor Jilek, eds., *The Briand plan of European federal union: national and transnational perspectives, with documents*, Bern: Peter Lang, 1998, pp. 121–44.

30 Frank P. Walters, *History of the League of Nations*, London: Oxford University Press, 1952, p. 56.

31 Fischer, *Souveränität*, p. 281.

32 D. Perkins, *A history of the Monroe Doctrine*, London: Longmans, 1960, pp. 276–346; G. Smith, *The last years of the Monroe Doctrine, 1945–1993*, New York, NY: Hill & Wang, 1994, pp. 21–40.

33 Fischer, *Souveränität*, p. 414.

34 *Ibid*., pp. 337–8.

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the United States and Latin America changed in this direction with the Good Neighbor Policy from 1933.[35]

The League ameliorated its relations with Latin America somewhat in 1928, when the Council responded to a Costa Rican call to clarify the meaning of Article 21. The Council posited that the Monroe Doctrine could not trump the League, and that a regional arrangement outside, or in contradiction with, the League could not be based on this article. This statement buttressed the position of the Latin American countries vis-à-vis the United States in two ways: it gave a boost to multilateral pan-American reform movements, and it confirmed that the League had a task to fulfil in Latin America, despite the existence of a certain regional framework.[36]

Indeed, the significance of this regional framework was still very much in flux at the time. Pan-American conferences had been meeting since the nineteenth century, and cooperation in the legal field, in particular, was progressing.[37] Numerous activists on both sides of the Atlantic lobbied for further developments, and referred to pan-Americanism as a model for European cooperation. An example of the former was the Uruguayan president Baltasar Brum, who argued for a regional organization on a confederate model, including Latin America and the United States, to address the lack of attention paid to the affairs of the New World. The 'Association of all Countries of the New World' would complement the League, with the subsidiarity principle regulating the competences between the regional and the global level.[38]

The Chilean international lawyer and pan-American activist Alejandro Álvarez was an advocate of regionalism more broadly, also drawing up a project for European union.[39] One of Álvarez's proposals was very similar to Brum's subsidiarity idea. Álvarez argued that the League should become 'a universal organisation, that not only does not oppose a continental or regional one, but actually presupposes it'.[40] Another of his suggestions took the European focus of the League to its logical conclusion, by proposing that the League of Nations continue as a European society. This European league would establish an association with the Pan-American Union 'so that they work in the interests of the world, and they should call for collective action against any state that threatens world peace'.[41] Betraying an Atlantic bias, he argued that, for now at least, the European and American unions would be the only ones, since Asia and Africa were 'politically dependent on Europe'.[42]

35 Irwin F. Gellman, *Good Neighbor diplomacy: United States policies on Latin America 1933–1945*, Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979.

36 Fischer, *Souveränität*, pp. 321–39.

37 *Leiden Journal of International Law*, 19, 4, 2006, issue dedicated to Alejandro Álvarez.

38 Baltasar Brum, 'Solidaridad mundial', *La Nacion*, Buenos Aires, 21 January 1923. See also James Brown Scott, 'Editorial', *American Journal of International Law*, 14, 3, 1920.

39 Alejandro Álvarez and A. de Lapradelle, *Exposé des motifs et projet d'union internationale européenne*, Paris: Union Juridique Internationale, 1930, p. 3.

40 Alejandro Álvarez, *La réforme du pacte de la Société des Nations sur des bases continentales et régionales*, Issoudun : Impr. rapide du Centre, 1926, pp. 86–7.

41 *Ibid*., pp. 96–7.

42 *Ibid*., p. 83. See also Liliana Obregón, 'Noted for dissent: the international life of Alejandro Álvarez', *Leiden Journal of International Law*, 19, 4, 2006, pp. 983–1016.

Attention to cooperation in the western hemisphere also came from Europe. The influential German pacifist and Nobel Peace Prize winner Alfred Fried devoted a whole book to the pan-American movement. Discerning a less belligerent attitude, and drawing on the experience of the Pan-American Conferences, he argued that Europe should follow the American model and cooperate to their own and the world's benefit.[43] Count Richard Coudenhove-Kalergi, the Austrian leader of the prominent Paneuropa movement, drew heavily on Fried's analysis. To Coudenhove, the pan-American system was attractive because it was different from previous federations: Pan-America was not aimed against another state system but instead aimed at eradicating war and stimulating the communal progress of civilization. Paneuropa should follow this example: it 'should be a step on the way from nation-state to World Federation, from world anarchy to world peace'.[44]

Despite these and other projects for pan-American cooperation and the hesitant coordination in the framework of the Union of American Republics, regionalism was still regarded sceptically within the League. Critics argued that, if Latin America formed its own organization, the League had little universal application left. Moreover, if the League could not try to solve issues in Latin America, what point was there in having a worldwide organization? In practice, however, other concerns resulted in a more lenient approach to pan-Americanism. These countries were peripheral, their conflicts would probably not have global repercussions, and the League did not want to upset its delicate relationship with the United States.

The League thus wavered in its approach to Latin America as a region. The Latin American Bureau, founded in 1922, was another example of this. The purpose of the Bureau was to increase understanding of the League in Latin America and to improve contacts, but it was dissolved in 1926 because it could not be the aim of the League to stimulate 'internal administrative regionalization'.[45] Tensions between universalism in principle and regionalism in practice also surfaced during the Chaco incident of December 1928. After an initial reluctance to react, the League Council intervened by sending telegrams to the Bolivian and Paraguayan governments, calling on them to cease hostilities and to refer their conflict to the Inter-American Conference on Conciliation and Arbitration. By intervening in the western hemisphere, the League confirmed its relevance outside Europe. However, by leaving the mediation of the conflict to a regional body and to the United States, it showed that the universal level and the regional level were not mutually exclusive, but could reinforce each other, not unlike the subsidiarity scheme proposed by Brum.[46]

The Briand plan for European cooperation, 1929–30

The French foreign minister, Aristide Briand, had played a crucial role in the League's intervention in the Chaco incident, asserting the League's relevance by sending telegrams,

43 Alfred H. Fried, *Pan Amerika: Entwicklung, Umfang und Bedeutung der zwichsenstaatlichen Organisation in Amerika 1810–1910*, 2nd edn, Zurich: Art. Institut Orell Füssli, 1918.

44 Coudenhove-Kalergi, *Paneuropa*, pp. 19, 76–8; idem, 'Europäische Frage', *Die Friedenswarte*, 1923, p. 11.

45 Fischer, *Souveränität*, pp. 203–12.

46 Cited in Yannick Wehrli, 'Briand, la Société des Nations et l'Amérique latine le conflit du Chaco, 1928–1929', in Bariéty, *Aristide Briand*, p. 234.

while leaving the practical mediation to a regional organization and a Great Power. This approach was in line with his vision for Europe.[47] There were a number of realpolitik reasons why Briand proposed European cooperation in 1929, centring on concerns about the changing power balance between Germany and France and the lack of a British or American guarantee. However, his conviction that, within a universal framework, certain questions were better elaborated by regional organizations, was crucial.[48] Numerous individuals and organizations had been arguing along these lines since the early 1920s, with support from the Quai d'Orsay.[49]

This reciprocal relationship culminated in the Briand plan of 1929–30, which in turn led to a surge in civil society initiatives. In a speech to the tenth General Assembly of the League, Briand argued that: 'Among peoples grouped geographically like the peoples of Europe there should exist a sort of federal bond; such peoples should at all times be able to get in touch, discuss their interests, take joint resolutions, and establish among themselves a bond of solidarity which would enable them, if need be, to meet any grave emergency that might arise.' He further proposed that the association would be first and foremost active in the economic field, where action was most urgent.[50]

Reactions by non-European governments to the proposal were mixed. Latin American representatives stated that it could only be welcomed if the Europeans followed the model of the Pan-American Union. Delegations from the British Commonwealth and Asia were far from enthusiastic, arguing that Europe already occupied a privileged position, which this plan would only perpetuate.[51]

If initial reactions by European delegations to Briand's appeal were not unwelcoming, official reactions were much more critical by the time that the Quai d'Orsay had transformed Briand's idea into a memorandum in May 1930. The project had significantly changed in character. While most governments were expecting a memorandum containing general remarks, emphasizing economic cooperation, they were given a fairly detailed project for political cooperation. While this change was probably aimed to assuage the impression that the plan retaliated against the American Smoot–Hawley tariff, or British plans for imperial free trade, the political project was far too encompassing to elicit positive reactions.[52] Moreover, circumstances had changed, both personally and structurally. The statesmen with whom Briand had fostered the 'Locarno spirit'– Gustav Stresemann, Austen Chamberlain, and Raymond Poincaré – had left office. The world situation had also taken a turn for the worse, following the disappointing outcome of the Tariff Truce Conference and the Wall Street crash.

47 *Ibid*.

48 Steiner, *Lights*, pp. 583–4, 617. For the Briand plan, see Christine Schwarte, 'Le Plan Briand d'Union Européenne: de sa genèse au Quai d'Orsay à son échec dans la diplomatie des grandes puissances européennes (1929–1931)', PhD thesis, Institut d'Études Politiques de Paris, 2003; Fleury and Jilek, *Briand plan*; Bariety, *Aristide Briand*.

49 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.

50 League of Nations, *Journal of the Tenth Assembly*, Geneva, 1929, no. 4, 5 September 1929, pp. 51–5.

51 Walters, *History*, p. 43.

52 Marie-Renée Mouton, 'La Société des Nations et le plan Briand d'union fédérale européenne', in Fleury and Jilek, *The Briand plan*, pp. 235–56; Boyce, 'Britain's first "No"'.

Of the twenty-seven governments that replied to the French Memorandum, only six supported the proposal.[53] Notwithstanding numerous references to the difficult economic situation that called for coordination, most replies were politely dismissive of the proposed political union, referring to state sovereignty, the shift from economics to politics, relations with other continents, and the League. In terms of the relationship with other continents, the most general critique was that a European Union 'might create tendencies to inter-continental rivalries and hostilities'.[54] Countries with a large diaspora, such as Ireland, argued that extensive emigration created 'a bond of moral union in no degree less binding [with extra-European countries] than that which [existed] between this country and the other European states'.[55]

Although Italy and France herself did not, other colonial powers raised concerns about their colonial possessions. These responses reflected where empires were predominantly located. Those with colonies mainly in Asia were concerned that creating a European union might trigger an Asian organization, threatening empire. The Dutch government thus replied that it 'must always bear in mind that the Kingdom does not consist of its European territory alone'.[56] Given the perceived state of development in Africa, this was less of a concern there. Moreover, the contiguous situation of Europe and Africa offered opportunities for Eurafrican cooperation. So, while European cooperation could benefit countries with empires predominantly in Africa, the purportedly universal League was better suited to European 'imperial nation-states' with empires in Asia.[57]

The final theme in government replies to the French Memorandum was the threat to the League. Neither references to Article 21 nor French efforts to situate the proposal within the League framework silenced concerns over the compatibility of a European organization with the League.[58] The British reply pointed out that since 'the League [had] already begun work on virtually the whole of the programme …, it [was] difficult to see how these new European institutions would operate without creating confusion, and perhaps also rivalry. … It could hardly fail to diminish both the efficiency and authority … of the League.'[59] Britain, with its worldwide empire and Commonwealth, was apprehensive. Regardless of whether Britain itself participated, Lord Robert Cecil, Foreign Office advisor and president of the League of Nations Union (LNU), saw European regionalism as a centrifugal force that would add to 'the pan-American movement [and] the Asiatic feeling which already exist', and remarked 'Even if we can keep out of a European group, could Canada hold aloof from an American or India from an Asiatic group? It seems doubtful.' The component parts of the empire would ultimately be driven into separate geographical blocs.[60]

53 LoNA, SDN (1928–1932) 50/21848/19816 - R3589, 'Documents relatifs à'organisation d'un régime d'Union fédérale européenne' (henceforth 'Documents'), Rumania (8 July 1930), Norway (12 July 1930), Greece, Czechoslovakia (14 July 1930), Yugoslavia (21 July 1930), Bulgaria (19 July 1930).

54 *Ibid*., Great Britain (16 July 1930).

55 *Ibid*., Ireland (16 July 1930).

56 *Ibid*., The Netherlands (30 June 1930).

57 Anne-Isabelle Richard, 'Colonialism and the European movement in France and the Netherlands, 1925–1936', PhD thesis, University of Cambridge, 2010; Wilder, *French imperial nation-state*.

58 LoNA, 'Documents', The Netherlands, Italy (4 July 1930); Germany (11 July 1930); Great Britain.

59 *Ibid*., Great Britain.

60 Cited in Boyce, 'Britain's first "No"', p. 35.

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Within the League Secretariat, apprehensions about the impact of a European regional union were considerable. As Drummond had already pointed out in 1921, given the importance of Europe in the League, what would be left if Europe founded a separate organization?[61] In 1930, the Secretariat asked in practical terms 'which questions could the organisation deal with, only 100% European questions'? And who would define such questions?[62] In addition to these potentially divisive effects, a separate organization was also superfluous because a European forum already 'existed'. Sir Arthur Salter, the British Director of the Economic and Financial Section, advocated economic cooperation in Europe.[63] He was, however, strongly against French political plans. Salter pointed to the Tariff Truce Conference, where 'by a process of self-selection the Conference became European'.[64] Although this particular reference was contentious, given British insistence on an unconditional most-favoured-nation clause, which had hampered success, Salter voiced an argument that was not uncommon.[65] While regionalism in the political sphere was highly contested, it was much more easily acceptable in the economic sphere.

Despite negative government reactions and scepticism among League officials, the idea was not dropped altogether on the official level. A League of Nations committee was set up, the Commission of Enquiry for European Union. This Committee met several times to explore the terrain, and contributed usefully to technical debates. However, the Depression, rising nationalism, and British opposition turned the Committee primarily into a means of shelving the idea without causing France, and Briand, to lose too much face. In existence until 1938, the Committee stopped convening after Briand's death in 1932.

The comparison of League attitudes to regionalism in Latin America with Briand's proposal reveals significant differences. In the Latin American case, decentralization was presented as a remedy to the lack of attention given to the area. The League wavered between principled concern for universalism and pragmatic considerations regarding the position of the United States, distance, and the likelihood of escalating conflict. There was less room for manoeuvre regarding Europe, partly because there was a concrete proposal in the European case, rather than ad hoc arrangements. Furthermore, the proposal was probably too far-reaching. The reaction to Briand's speech by Latin American countries was not unsurprising, given their own steps on the road to regional cooperation. Neither was the reaction by governments that welcomed the Briand memorandum, which were by and large clients of France. Most states, however, were not overly enthusiastic, and the negative British attitude proved decisive. While Britain expressed concern about the effects of centrifugal forces on the League, the underlying concern was for the effects on its empire. For the League Secretariat, Europe's central role in the League was the fundamental reason to caution against a European project. The only room for manoeuvre was in the economic sphere, where, by 1929–30, the situation was pressing, and where repercussions for the universality of the League were less obvious.

61 Barros, *Office*, p. 212.

62 LoNA, R3589, CEUE/Com.Sec./P.V.1, Commission of Enquiry for European Union Special Secretariat Committee, Provisional minutes, 8 October 1930.

63 *Bulletin UIASDN*, Seconde Conférence Économique, 1930, pp. 25–7.

64 Arthur Salter, *The United States of Europe and other papers*, London: George Allen & Unwin, 1933, p. 109.

65 Boyce, 'Britain's first "No"', p. 35.

Although nothing ultimately came of the French proposals during the interwar period, they succeeded in generating attention for the cause of European cooperation, spurring Europeanist civil society activities, but also compelling organizations with a different (primary) focus, such as League of Nations societies, to address the issue. The recurring themes in the reactions described above were also at the forefront of discussions in the civil society field, with the British again playing a pivotal role.

The IFLNS as the 'avant-garde' of the League

Théodore Ruyssen, French philosopher, secretary general of the IFLNS, and president of the French Association Paix par le Droit (Association of Peace through Justice), pointed out in 1925 that the League could only function if it could rely on moral power stronger than national egoisms. To this end, the role of public opinion was crucial: it was essential in order to spread knowledge about the League, to defend it against attack, and to act as a critical voice, stimulating it to fulfil the high aspirations for which it had been created. The national societies for the League of Nations, which existed in over thirty countries across the globe, were instrumental in fostering this programme of public engagement and education.

In turn, the IFLNS was created to facilitate cooperation between national societies, to make their work more effective, and, perhaps most importantly, to spur them into action. It was explicitly made up of national organizations; although national egoisms had to be overcome, 'love of the fatherland was as honourable as love of humanity'.[66] On a more general level, the objective of the IFLNS was also to bring members of the various national organizations together, and so contribute to the 'development of a wider realisation of international interdependence' and the creation of what, retrospectively, might be called a global civil society.[67]

Despite the declared universalism of the IFLNS, most League societies were European.[68] This was a concern for the Federation. There were some non-European countries represented, such as the United States, Argentina, and India, but the emphasis was on European activities. It was hoped to address this problem through the distribution of the quarterly *IFLNS Bulletin*, by entertaining a worldwide correspondence with influential personalities, and by sending envoys to promote the League.[69] Most of the non-European societies relied on compatriots in Europe to represent them at the IFLNS.[70] Another means to address the issue was bringing the Federation itself outside Europe. After initial discussions in 1925, the Chinese society offered to hold the assembly in China in the late 1930s. This was part of a more general offensive by the Chinese to use international forums such as the IFLNS to strengthen their position in the face of Japanese aggression.[71] Given the volatile situation in China, the 1939 assembly was finally scheduled for New York. Owing to the outbreak of war, it never took place.

66 LoNA, IFLNS, P93, Assembly files, General Assembly Lyon 1924, M. W. F. Treub.

67 LoNA, IFLNS, P93, XI Plenary Congress, Berlin 26–31 May 1927, Political committee.

68 LoNA, IFLNS, P102, Interview with Theodore Ruyssen, Brussels, February 1931.

69 *Bulletin UIASDN*, Assemblée, 1928, p. 25; Salvador de Madariaga was to visit Latin America in 1929: *Ibid*., p. 45.

70 *Bulletin UIASDN*, 3, 1935, p. 165.

71 *Bulletin UIASDN*, 4, 1925, p. 28; *Bulletin UIASDN*, 3, 1934, p. 119.

Of the members of the IFLNS, the LNU was the only organization that could truly boast a grassroots membership. Most other organizations had an 'elite' membership, including journalists, academics, politicians, and foreign office representatives, facilitating close ties between national organizations and states. Until 1934, when it moved to Geneva, the IFLNS secretariat was based in Brussels.[72] There were four standing committees, modelled on the League. A fifth committee, the special study committee for the Briand project for European cooperation, was created in 1930. The aim of this committee was to integrate a European organization into the League framework, while avoiding repetition and competition.[73]

The IFLNS regarded itself as an 'avant-garde' of the League in a number of ways.[74] It functioned as a channel of contact with countries that were not yet, or were no longer, members of the League, such as the United States, Argentina, or Japan, whose League of Nations Association remained an increasingly beleaguered member of the IFLNS until 1938. While Germany did not join the League until 1926, the Deutsche Liga für Völkerbund (German League of Nations Society) was a member from the start. In actively lobbying for the admission of Germany to the League, the Deutsche Liga deliberately adopted a different policy from the Wilhelmstrasse. While German public opinion was still quite hostile because of the *Diktat* of Versailles, the Deutsche Liga was to fulfil a pioneering role in facilitating German accession to the League. In 1920, the foreign minister, Walter Simons, put it as follows: 'The Liga should as a matter of course pursue a different policy from the government and work more actively for the accession of Germany to the League, otherwise she would not have a right to exist. … We want the League to come to us.'[75] This episode showcases the role that the IFLNS played as a channel of contact with non-League member states, as well as the pursuit of national goals through internationalist civil society means.[76]

The idea of 'avant-garde' also related to the topics that the IFLNS investigated. The League Secretariat closely followed the assemblies of the Federation, with a representative reporting on the debates. The IFLNS in turn sent projects of resolutions to various League bodies, conceiving of its activities as preparation for League discussions.[77] On balance, the Secretariat was positive about the work done by the IFLNS; the more sceptical evaluation by Donald Birn seems to reflect LNU opinion.[78] Although the Secretariat acknowledged that 'a lot of irresponsible and useless discussion' took place, 'much useful work was done at these meetings' too.[79] Ludvig Krabbe, a Danish member of the League of Nations Information

72 *Bulletin UIASDN*, 5, 1933, p. 321. Initially, the secretariat was based in Bordeaux.

73 LoNA, IFLNS, P102, Interview with Theodore Ruyssen, Brussels, February 1931.

74 *Bulletin UIASDN*, 1, 1929, p. 9.

75 Cited in Jost Dülfer, 'Vom Internationalismus zum Expansionismus: die Deutsche Liga für Völkerbund', in Wolfgang Elz and Sönke Neitzel, eds., *Internationale Beziehungen im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert: Festschrift für Winfried Baumgart zum 65. Geburtstag*, Paderborn: Schöningh 2003, p. 255.

76 Jürgen C. Heß, 'Europagedanke und nationaler Revisionismus: Überlegungen zu ihrer Verknüpfung in der Weimarer Republik am Beispiel Wilhelm Heiles', *Historische Zeitschrift*, 225, 1977, pp. 572–622.

77 LoNA, R3590, Theodor Ruyssen to Joseph Avenol, 6 January 1931.

78 Birn, *League of Nations Union*, pp. 13–14.

79 LoNA, IFLNS, R3302, Gabrielle Radziwill, 'Report on the twelfth annual meeting of the League of Nations Unions', The Hague, 30 July 1928.

Section, 'was impressed by the importance of the debates in which men of great value took part and who succeeded in shedding light on many problems'. As he remarked about the IFLNS assembly in Geneva in 1930

> The fact that many of those who took part in the discussion were also delegates to the Assembly of the League of Nations, contributed to creating an impression that one was present less at a manifestation of *representatives of public opinion* of the various countries, than of a League Assembly in miniature which took place in calmer circumstances …, far from the political passions.[80]

Civil society therefore also offered politicians another forum to debate the questions of the times, away from the pressure of official representations, thus facilitating discussion.

As referred to above, the question of decentralization of the League, and in particular of European cooperation, was discussed by the IFLNS in 1927. It did this at the instigation of the Fédération Française. Alphonse Aulard, its delegate, stressed that the aim was to strengthen the League. Most delegates were unconvinced. While the idea of a European union, albeit within the framework of the League, was considered inopportune, since it did 'not correspond to the political and economic organization of the world', the dismissive political committee of the IFLNS nonetheless acknowledged that 'regional groups formed for the purposes of economic co-operation or regional committees of the League itself may prove useful, provided that the League itself never gives up the last word'.[81] The less sceptical IFLNS assembly added that regional groupings were in certain cases 'necessary as a transition from national political regimes to the entire universality of the League'.[82] Moreover, the economic committee was less vehemently opposed to regional (European) cooperation, the advantages of which were recognized explicitly.[83] While the IFLNS officially rejected the idea of decentralization and European cooperation in 1927, this rejection was not unequivocal. Those in favour did not give up, and the debate continued.

From 1929, when Briand introduced his project, attention to the question of European cooperation grew considerably within the IFLNS. In the intervening years, Europeanist organizations across Europe had been pushing the issue. They were convinced that the main threat to world peace was war in Europe, and in particular war between France and Germany. European cooperation was the best way to prevent this and simultaneously strengthen Europe in the face of the rise of other centres of power. With his proposal, Briand then gave official backing to this idea. After the IFLNS statutes had been changed to allow organizations not specifically devoted to League propaganda to join, the Comité Fédéral became a member of the IFLNS in 1930.[84] The annual meetings of the Comité Fédéral and the IFLNS were held consecutively, so that delegates would only have to travel once.[85]

80 LoNA, IFLNS, R3303, Report Ludwig Krabbe, 14e Assemblée Général, Geneva, 5–9 June 1930.

81 LoNA, IFLNS, P93, XI Plenary Congress, Berlin 26–31 May 1927, Political Committee.

82 *Bulletin UIASDN*, Assemblée, 1927, p. 87.

83 LoNA, IFLNS, P93, XI Plenary Congress, Berlin 26–31 May 1927, Economic Committee.

84 *Bulletin UIASDN*, 5, 1930, p. 17.

85 Bibliothèque de Documentation Internationale Contemporaine, Paris (henceforth BDIC), Comité Fédéral de Coopération Européenne (henceforth CFCE), 4e assemblée générale, Geneva, 2–4 juin 1930.

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Given that, from this date, the debate on European cooperation was very much a mutual discussion, it is worth sketching the creation of the Comité Fédéral, which according to the Quai d'Orsay, 'seemed to be one of the most serious among institutions working for European cooperation'.[86]

The Comité Fédéral de Coopération Européenne

Before the Comité Fédéral was founded in 1928, the main protagonists had been involved in organizing like-minded spirits since the early 1920s.[87] Members of the Reichstag and the French Chamber had come together to promote their belief that peace and unity in Europe were preconditions for the realization of League ideals across the world. Wilhelm Heile was the central figure in the German network. Active in numerous organizations, Heile was an example of those internationalists who pursued several routes simultaneously to further the cause of peace.[88] Together with his French counterpart, Émile Borel, he set up a number of organizations, among which was the Fédération pour l'Entente Européenne (Federation for European Entente).[89] Initially, however, these initiatives did not come to fruition, owing to the lack of activity on the British side and a paralysing rivalry in Germany with the well-known Paneuropa Union of Count Richard Coudenhove-Kalergi.[90] The active participation of the British was a crucial point for the Fédération. First, the Fédération believed that British participation was essential for any European project. Second, since Paneuropa excluded Britain, on the grounds that she already constituted a federation with the Commonwealth, including her was a prominent means for the Fédération to distinguish itself.[91]

In order to reinvigorate the campaign, Borel returned to the national level and founded the Comité Français de Coopération Européenne in early 1927. The aim of the Comité Français was 'to further the cooperation of the European peoples in the framework and spirit of the League of Nations'.[92] Its members considered themselves to be 'convinced partisans'

86 Archives du ministère des Affaires étrangères, Paris (henceforth AMAE), SDN, EU, 2496, Comité Fédéral de coopération européenne, 1931, Comité français, Internal note, MAE, 'A.s. d'un comité de coopération européenne', 7 July 1933.

87 For the Comité Fédéral, see Jean-Michel Guieu, 'Le Comité Fédéral de Coopération Européenne: l'action méconnue d'une organisation internationale privée en faveur de l'union de l'Europe dans les années trente (1928–1940)', in Sylvain Schirmann, ed., *Organisations internationales et architectures européennes (1929–1939)*, Metz: Centre de Recherche Histoire et Civilisation de l'Europe Occidentale, 2003, pp. 73–91; Karl Holl, 'Europapolitik in Vorfeld der deutschen Regierungspolitik: zur Tätigkeit proeuropäischer Organisationen in der Weimarer Republik', *Historische Zeitschrift*, 219, 1, 1974, pp. 33–94.

88 Guieu, 'Le Comité Fédéral'; Holl, 'Europapolitik'; Heß, 'Europagedanke'.

89 Jean-Michel Guieu, 'L'engagement européen d'un grand mathématicien français: Émile Borel et la coopération européenne des années vingt aux années quarante', *Bulletin de l'Institut Pierre Renouvin*, 5, Summer 1998, pp. 15–32; Guieu, *Le rameau*. Other organizations included the Comitees für europäische Interessengemeinschaft (Committees for European Entente) and the Verband für europäische Verständigung (League for European Understanding).

90 Anita Ziegerhofer-Prettenthaler, *Botschafter Europas: Richard Nikolaus Coudenhove-Kalergi und die Paneuropa-Bewegung in den zwanziger und dreißiger Jahren*, Vienna: Bohlau, 2004; Frank Théry, *Construire l'Europe dans les années vingt: l'action de l'Union Paneuropéenne sur la scène franco-allemande, 1924–1932*, Geneva: Institut Européen de l'Université de Geneve, 1998.

91 Coudenhove-Kalergi, *Paneuropa*.

92 Archives Nationales, Paris (henceforth AN), 313 Archives Privées (henceforth, AP) 220, Appel, n.d. (after 25 March 1927).

of the League.[93] While the importance of conceiving of Europe within the framework of the League was emphasized throughout, the prominence of Europe in the world was no less obvious. As Paul Doumer, the president of the French Senate, put it:

> Europe exists … she is the mother, the creator of modern civilization. Scientific and industrial civilization, through which man dominates nature, provides her with its secrets and riches to put to use for the good of mankind. What are those big and small nations of the Americas, of northern and southern Africa, of Oceania – but the daughters, the colonies of Europe?[94]

While fear of 'European decline', both in geopolitical and civilizational terms, was widespread during the interwar period, and contributed to the perceived necessity of European cooperation, Europe was simultaneously conceived as the bearer of civilization and as indispensable for the wellbeing of the world.

The members of the Comité Français were predominantly radicals and politicians of the centre: in 1927, more than half were députés or sénateurs. Other members included academics, (international) civil servants, representatives of employers' organizations and trade unions, journalists, and artists.[95] As such, the Comité Français was representative of the upper- and middle-class milieus that were interested in cooperation across Europe. At the same time, the membership highlighted the interwoven character of political and civil life. This was reinforced by the fact that the funding of the Comité Français came from various sources, including (as for most European societies) the Quai d'Orsay.[96] The committee continued to exist until the late 1930s.

The Comité Français explicitly referred to its foundation as a national committee, conscious that it emanated from a particular political milieu, with means and responsibilities specific to that milieu. Its members argued, perhaps as a means of distinguishing themselves from communist internationalisms, that this consciousness of particular circumstances would facilitate cooperation with other national committees and thus international understanding.[97] So, while the aims were transnational, it was a transnationalism that emanated and derived its strength from national organizations.[98] In this the Comité Français was not alone. The IFLNS, for example, operated on the same basis.[99]

The efforts of the Comité Français at creating a Europe-wide movement were more successful than previous attempts. In November 1928, the Comité Fédéral de Coopération

93 Arthur Fontaine, *Solidarité européenne et organisation internationale*, Paris: Comité Français de Coopération Européenne, 1929.

94 AN, 313 AP 220, CFCE, 'Extrait du procès verbal de l'assemblée générale', 25 March 1927.

95 AN, 313 AP 220, 'Brochure Comité Français de Coopération Européenne', 1927.

96 AMAE, Papiers 1940, Léger, 3, Lucien le Foyer to Alexis Léger, 28 July 1929.

97 AN, 313 AP 220, 'Brochure Comité Français de Coopération Européenne', 1927.

98 Alfred E. Zimmern, *Nationality and government*, London: Chatto & Windus, 1918, p. 54; Jeanne Morefield, '"A liberal in a muddle": Alfred Zimmern on nationality, internationality and commonwealth', in David Long and Brian C. Schmidt, *Imperialism and internationalism in the discipline of international relations*, Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, pp. 93–116.

99 For the complementarity of internationalism and nationalism, see Madeleine Herren, *Hintertüren zur Macht: Internationalismus und modernisierungsorientierte Aussenpolitik in Belgien, der Schweiz und den USA*, Munich: Oldenbourg, 2000. See also Carolien Stolte's article in this special issue.

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Européenne was founded, uniting around twenty national organizations, with varying levels of activity, and including a British LNU committee. Again, many of those involved in the Comité Fédéral were also prominent in the IFLNS and were often part of national delegations to the League Assembly. The aims of the Comité Fédéral developed from those of the Comité Français. Like the latter, it worked in the first instance towards European understanding, in the hope that this would facilitate its ultimate goal of worldwide cooperation and peace. It worked at both national and international levels to unite all forces that sought 'on the political, economic, cultural and moral plane to unite Europe'. This broad aim meant that it only proposed a minimal programme. With an eye to keeping Britain within the project, Borel argued that 'it [was] better to construct Europe on a modest basis in order to start a large Europe, than to content oneself to organize a small Europe'.[100]

In its practice, the Comité Fédéral situated itself within the 'New Diplomacy'. Borel was convinced of the virtues of unofficial diplomacy by private organizations and individuals, who were not bound by the same constraints as government representatives. With this in mind, the Comité Fédéral decided to set up an information bureau in Geneva, run by the Spaniard Alfonso Albeniz. The aim was to intensify contacts with the League and the IFLNS, to report on developments in Geneva, and, if possible, to influence them. Albeniz sought official recognition from the League, and in particular from the Commission of Inquiry for European Union. The League, however, was not very forthcoming. Despite the familiar network from which the bureau emanated, the Secretariat was of the opinion that 'although it is possible that this organisation may be of some use, we know very little about it and I think that in this stage we should adopt an attitude of great reserve'.[101] The International Labour Organization (ILO) was more receptive to the ideas of the Comité Fédéral, with Director-General Albert Thomas supporting its work.[102]

Europe and the League: competition or complementarity?

At the 1930 general assemblies of the Comité Fédéral and the IFLNS, held consecutively in Geneva, the question of European cooperation was extensively debated. This question remained on the agenda throughout 1931 and 1932, with the joint Committee for European Cooperation meeting regularly.[103] In 1933, attention started to wane. In that year, the Rumanian Federation of League of Nations Societies argued that the League, lacking sanctions, was but a feeble barrier against war. Every state still defended its absolute sovereignty. According to the Rumanian Federation the only solution was a new 'organisation … in the form of a confederation of states'.[104] However, the Rumanian call fell on deaf ears, and the

100 Lecture Émile Borel, College Libre des Sciences Sociales, 21 November 1929, *Le Monde Nouveau*, 10 December 1929, p. 752.

101 LoNA, R3589, Note from G. H. F. Abraham to Eric Drummond, 24 October 1930.

102 BDIC, CFCE, 4e assemblée générale, Geneva, 2–4 June 1930. See also Denis Guérin, *Albert Thomas au BIT 1920–1932: de l'internationalisme à l'Europe*, Geneva: Institut Européen de l'Université de Genève, 1966, p. 90.

103 LoNA, IFLNS, P102, Circulaires, 1930–1934; P113, Circulaires, 1930–1934.

104 LoNA, IFLNS, P98, Committee files, Legal and political questions, 'European confederation', Rumanian Federation of League of Nations Societies, February 1933.

issue remained unresolved.[105] The downturn in 1933 was largely due to the changes in the international situation and to the fact that the Deutsches Comitee ceased to exist after Hitler came to power.

It is to the intervening years, between 1929 and 1932, that we now turn. When Briand held his speech at the League Assembly, the Comité Fédéral decided to draft a questionnaire on European cooperation, in order to facilitate the League discussions. Addressed to the national committees of the Comité Fédéral, it was drawn up by the Comité Français, the Deutsches Comitee, and the LNU.[106] It was published in several periodicals, and also by the former French prime minister Edouard Herriot in his book, *Europe*.[107]

The first question inquired into the preferred form of European cooperation, whether it could extend to the political sphere, and, if so, what form this should take: a union, a federation, or an organization similar to the League or the Commonwealth. Rejecting a union, most committees thought a federation was something to aspire to, while an organization similar to the League was seen as the most immediate aim. The committees envisaged a regular meeting of foreign ministers, supported by a secretariat. Over time, this political framework could be expanded.[108] While political cooperation was widely understood to be more intrusive than economic cooperation, the committees nonetheless supported it. The very restrained nature of the proposals made this step possible. The Comité Français explained the necessity of combining economics with politics by pointing out that it was highly unlikely that any people would be willing to 'make economic sacrifices' unless there existed some form of European solidarity. Other questions referred to the position of colonies, which topics would fall within the scope of a European organization, and whether a study centre would be useful to examine these questions.[109]

The fourth general assembly of the Comité Fédéral took place in June 1930, while official reactions to the French Memorandum were coming in. Secretary-General Jules Rais presented his report on the questionnaire here, stressing the level of agreement between the committees, the Comité Fédéral, and the French Memorandum. This had the happy consequence of 'parallelism between the work undertaken by the Federation and the current official negotiations'. However, in their response, the British expressed reservations regarding the consequences of a European project for the League. They tended to see it as a threat to the League and to the British empire.[110] The latter concern was more serious, but it was left more implicit. In particular, the creation of a permanent committee or secretariat was regarded as compromising the League and the empire. Instead, British delegate Hudson referred to Sir Arthur Salter's thoughts (without mentioning him) on the Europeanization of the Tariff Truce Conference. This formula had the advantage that all states – including those outside Europe – could comment on resolutions, whereas if a separate European body was

105 LoNA, IFLNS, P102, Circulaire 128, 7 July 1933, 'The political organization of Europe'.

106 BDIC, CFCE, 4[e] assemblée générale. The individuals involved were Jules Rais, secretary-general of the Comité Français, Wilhelm Heile, president of the Deutsches Comitee, and Captain A. E. W. Thomas, overseas secretary of the League of Nations Union.

107 For example, in *L'Europe Nouvelle*, 21 December 1929; E. Herriot, *Europe*, Paris: Reider, 1930, pp. 54–6.

108 BDIC, CFCE, 4[e] assemblée générale.

109 *Ibid.*

110 Birn, *League of Nations Union*, p. 80.

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set up, this body could make decisions without taking serious account of objections from non-members.[111] These discussions led to the paradoxical situation that the assembly discussed numerous measures to facilitate British participation, whereas British suggestions were all geared toward ensuring influence for non-members.

The debates continued, in a slightly more sceptical fashion, at the fourteenth general assembly of the IFLNS, which immediately followed the assembly of the Comité Fédéral. Most delegates expressed their agreement with the idea of European cooperation in general terms, mentioned concerns about intercontinental rivalry and cooperation within the framework of the League, and then expressed their more specific support for cooperation in the economic field. The Dutch and the British rejected a resolution containing the expression 'federal connection between States'.[112] In the end a compromise declaration was adopted, which stated that:

> the congress, recognizing that there [was] widespread conviction that a system of regular cooperation between States, even if confined to certain parts of the world, [would,] provided it [was] an integral part of the League of Nations, tend to eliminate many causes of international conflicts; [recommended] that a most careful study be devoted to the proposal … by the French government.[113]

At the next IFLNS council meeting, held in Danzig in October 1930, the creation of a 'Committee for the study of the problem of European cooperation' was discussed. The majority of the IFLNS bureau had proposed to compose this committee, half from IFLNS and half from Comité Fédéral delegates. The British delegation, however, renewed its objections made in the bureau. The LNU was of the strong opinion that the committee should be a uniquely IFLNS creation, active within the IFLNS and responsible to the general assembly of the Federation. This had the added advantage of conforming to the procedure that the League had followed in the creation of the Commission of Enquiry for European Union. A compromise was suggested, in order officially to recognize the position of the Comité Fédéral, while giving the last word to the IFLNS. Again, Lord Dickinson of the LNU objected to this interpretation, insisting that the committee should be an exclusively IFLNS body. Stanislaw Stronski, the Polish delegate, suggested that, if the IFLNS council approved the suggestions by both presidents, the committee could be regarded as an IFLNS body. Émile Borel, a member of the IFLNS but attending in his capacity as president of the Comité Fédéral, conceded the point.[114]

This episode reveals the emotions that the question of European cooperation raised, especially for the British. In practice, the constitution or influence of the committee would not have been very different either way, given the large overlap in membership between the two organizations. Although the Comité Fédéral went to great lengths to accommodate the British and to secure their participation, for the British it remained easier to defend a reluctant position in the IFLNS than in the Comité Fédéral.

111 BDIC, CFCE, 4e assemblée générale, 2ème session.

112 LoNA, R3303, Report Ludwig Krabbe, 14e Assemblée Général, Geneva, 5–9 June 1930.

113 *Ibid.*; *Bulletin UIASDN*, 4, supplement, 1930, p. 107.

114 *Bulletin UIASDN*, 5, 1930, pp. 17–18.

In the end, both a committee and a sub-committee 'of investigation of the problem of European co-operation within the framework of the League of Nations' were formed. The sub-committee met for the first time in Copenhagen. Since the Danish foreign minister, Peter Munch, was a member, the meetings took place in the Foreign Ministry, giving them an official touch.[115] On the agenda was a report by Jules Rais, on the question of 'how a close collaboration between European governments in all spheres of international activity [could] be exercised in complete harmony with the League of Nations and in observance of all the principles inscribed in the Covenant'.

Rais started his report by asserting that 'Europe [existed]' and that no one would 'dispute the moral values of European civilisation'. Nor would anyone dispute that Europe was in crisis, economically and perhaps also morally; therefore 'Europe must have her confidence restored.'[116] Like many interwar liberal internationalists, Rais and his colleagues were convinced of the centrality of Europe for the wellbeing of humanity.[117] As Rais put it: 'The maintenance of the peace of the world [constituted] only the first of the indispensable conditions for the progress of European civilisation which itself is a condition for the progress of humanity.'[118]

Having thus emphasized the importance of the project at hand, the main aim of the report was to convince sceptics of the unthreatening nature of European cooperation. Referring to previous discussions in the Comité Fédéral and the IFLNS, Rais stated that it was accepted that cooperation between the states of Europe was 'of capital importance for the maintenance of peace'. Close collaboration should be pursued within the framework of the League and conceived of as a regional entente, which implied respect of national independence and equality of states. This close collaboration extended to all spheres of international activity, meaning that not only would specifically European problems be addressed but also European aspects of more general questions. Taking up an important British concern, Rais explained that non-European and non-member states could participate in the discussions, which meant that no state would be compelled to enter a European federation, and that the federation would remain open to all who wished to join. Duplication would be avoided, since the League Secretariat would act as European Secretariat.

Rais stressed that if these principles were accepted, there would be no reason to fear that a European federation would harm the League or its universality. Nor would there be problems for states on the outskirts of Europe, or for those with possessions outside of Europe. Further trying to placate the sceptics, Rais stressed that:

> far from restricting or duplicating the prerogatives of the League, far from disputing its competence or its supreme authority, the European institution not only should remain within the spirit and frame of the League – … it should introduce no new frame into the existing frame but should contend itself with *revealing* in the picture placed in that frame, perspectives already to be found in the foreground – still

115 *Bulletin UIASDN*, 1, 1931, p. 4.

116 LoNA, IFLNS, P117, S.G. 3762, 3 January 1931, 'Provisional report, sub-committee of investigation of the problem of European co-operation', Jules Rais, Copenhagen, 15 December 1930.

117 Morefield, '"A liberal"', p. 105.

118 LoNA, IFLNS, P117, S.G. 3762, 3 January 1931, 'Provisional report'.

> further, it would give to the League of Nations a *right of control* over this Regional Entente such as has not up to now … been given by any other regional entente.[119]

Rais even built on Salter's argument that European cooperation would come about through self-selection and by means of a conference of European foreign ministers. He argued that conferences of European foreign ministers had served as a precedent for the work for European federation. They had been regarded as 'a matter of course' and had never hampered the work of the League, nor been superfluous or exclusive; instead, 'they had contributed to the appeasement of dissent and conflict'.[120]

The discussion of Rais's report in the full committee suggested that the numerous accommodating remarks had overshot their mark. While the British delegation kept attempting, unsuccessfully, to diminish the influence of the European committee, several delegates observed that the resolutions proposed at Copenhagen were too non-committal.[121] As the Swiss professor Ernest Bovet remarked, they did not add anything to the League Study Committee, and, if they were aimed at public opinion, the resolutions were too long and too vague.[122] Borel, however, insisted on the adoption of the Copenhagen programme. It was a minimal programme, which could be expanded when the time was ripe.[123] In Budapest in May 1931, the committee observed that the ideas put forward were in accordance with those proposed by the League Committee of Inquiry. Given the fate of the League Committee, the self-congratulation by the IFLNS 'on having usefully played its role of avant-garde' seems a little premature.[124]

The constitutional question proved nearly impossible to solve. On the one hand, British participation was necessary; on the other, it would deprive the project of most of its substance. Despite all the facilitating measures, British opposition remained too strong. Whereas most measures aimed at synchronizing a regional project in the universal League, the real issue was the British Commonwealth and the ties that Britain had to all continents. Cooperation initiatives in the practical field were more successful, even if they suffered from a turn for the worse in world affairs.

Conclusion

The president of the Comité Fédéral, Émile Borel, was convinced of the universality of European culture: 'Working for the preservation of the European ideal, we work for the whole of humanity.'[125] While he and his fellow activists actively lobbied for a regional scheme, this project was explicitly conceived of as complementing a global project and, above all, of having a global impact. In a world undergoing profound change, Europe had to be saved. The world would otherwise be a poorer place.

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119 *Ibid.*

120 *Ibid.*

121 *Bulletin UIASDN*, 2, 1931, Committee of investigation of the problem of European co-operation, Brussels, 14 February 1931.

122 *Ibid.*, pp. 14–15.

123 *Ibid.*

124 *Bulletin UIASDN*, 1931, pp. 93–4, 145–6.

125 Émile Borel, 'La cooperation européenne en Sorbonne', *Le Monde Nouveau*, 15 March 1928, p. 53.

This article has examined the debates about the 'decentralization' of the League. In practice, these debates centred on whether regionalism, and particularly European regionalism, could complement the League's universalism, or whether regionalism automatically constituted competition. The advocates of decentralization argued that regional systems would allow all parts of the world to receive the attention they needed, and conflicts to be better managed. Decentralization would thus ultimately strengthen the League. As the examination of Latin American regionalism showed, principled universalism could be moderated in practice: regional cooperation was possible in the context of the League. However, despite the model that pan-Americanism provided for European cooperation, opposition to decentralization remained strong in the European case.

In part this was due to the fact that protagonists explicitly raised the 'constitutional question', rather than exploring cooperation on a more pragmatic basis, as in Latin America or, indeed, in Europe after the Second World War. However, part of the difference was also related to the fact that, while Latin America was viewed as peripheral, self-contained, and unthreatening to world peace, Europe was still seen to play a pivotal role in world affairs.

Europeanists argued that Europe's centrality to world peace and civilization made it necessary to explore all means of preventing another regional conflict and further civilizational decline. Others maintained, however, that because Europe was conceived to be so central, because it was seen to set the standard in virtually all fields, including war and peace, it could not create its own 'club', since there would be nothing left of the universal club, the League. The fear of the repercussions of European regionalism was therefore expressed as concern for the universality of the League.

Although objections expressed in these terms were used to a large extent to veil concern for ramifications for the British Commonwealth, and although empire in general was a concern for European 'imperial nation-states', French enthusiasm for European projects precludes any general statement that the existence of colonies frustrated closer European cooperation. The status of the relationship with the metropolis, dominion, or colony, and the geographical situation, in Africa or in Asia, had a significant impact on the appreciation of European cooperation by imperial countries.

Even though some saw the Commonwealth as an example of how the League could successfully decentralize, the British – both in the official and in the civil society sphere – were concerned about the centrifugal forces that decentralization would unleash, and the impact that this would have on empire and Commonwealth, particularly on Canada and the Asian parts of the empire. Not all Europeanists included Britain in their European projects. Coudenhove's Paneuropa notably excluded Britain for a long time. A Europe without Britain was, however, much less appealing than a Europe with Britain. It was for this reason that both Briand and the Europeanists examined here did everything they could to facilitate British participation. Paradoxically, this led to a very minimal programme, which still did not suffice to convince the British. In fact, their participation in these discussions was geared to minimizing the impact of the project, and drawing it as much as possible back into the League.

This analysis of the question of decentralization of the League has shown that interwar internationalism was a multifaceted phenomenon, in which national, imperial, regional, and universal projects and concerns were profoundly entangled. The interwar period is often referred to in binary terms, as one of either nationalism or internationalism. These organizations,

however, are examples of a strong internationalist movement that remained grounded in national contexts. While working toward larger units, these national contexts were acknowledged, and their diversity was valued. Moreover, it is important to recognize the interaction between different forms of internationalism. For some, global, regional, or imperial projects complemented each other; for others, they were in competition. It is nonetheless imperative to examine them in conjunction.

The analysis of this question has also shown the entanglement in terms of personnel and methods between the official and civil society fields. In the atmosphere of the 'New Diplomacy', where public opinion, loosely defined, played such a prominent role, civil society networks informed public opinion, functioned as a link between public opinion and official spheres, and provided an alternative, parallel channel in which to float ideas and debate sensitive questions in a serious manner, without direct political consequences. In drawing attention to the question of European cooperation, official and civil society complemented each other, spurring one another on. Without the work of civil society organizations, it would have been even harder for Briand to make his proposal, while his backing stimulated their efforts and also drew organizations with a broader aim, such as the IFLNS, to examine the question.

Ultimately, the League was not decentralized, and the 'closed' regionalisms of Germany, Japan, and Italy became more powerful in the 1930s. However, after the cataclysm of another world war, with Europe's position in the world further weakened and empire in Asia receding, these issues were taken up again. Although the constitutional question remained problematic, more practical initiatives did bear fruit. Moreover, the regional commissions that the United Nations set up from 1947 demonstrated how internationalism on various levels could become feasible in a purportedly universal organization.[126]

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126 See, for example, Richard T. Griffiths, *Europe's first constitution: the European Political Community, 1952–1954*, London: The Federal Trust, 2000.