

THE CREATION OF A EUROPEAN CONSCIOUSNESS

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"The ultimate foundation of our culture is not the nation state; but the European unity. It has not hitherto achieved political form and perhaps may never do so, but it is a real society and not an intellectual abstraction" (Dawson, 1946 p.25).

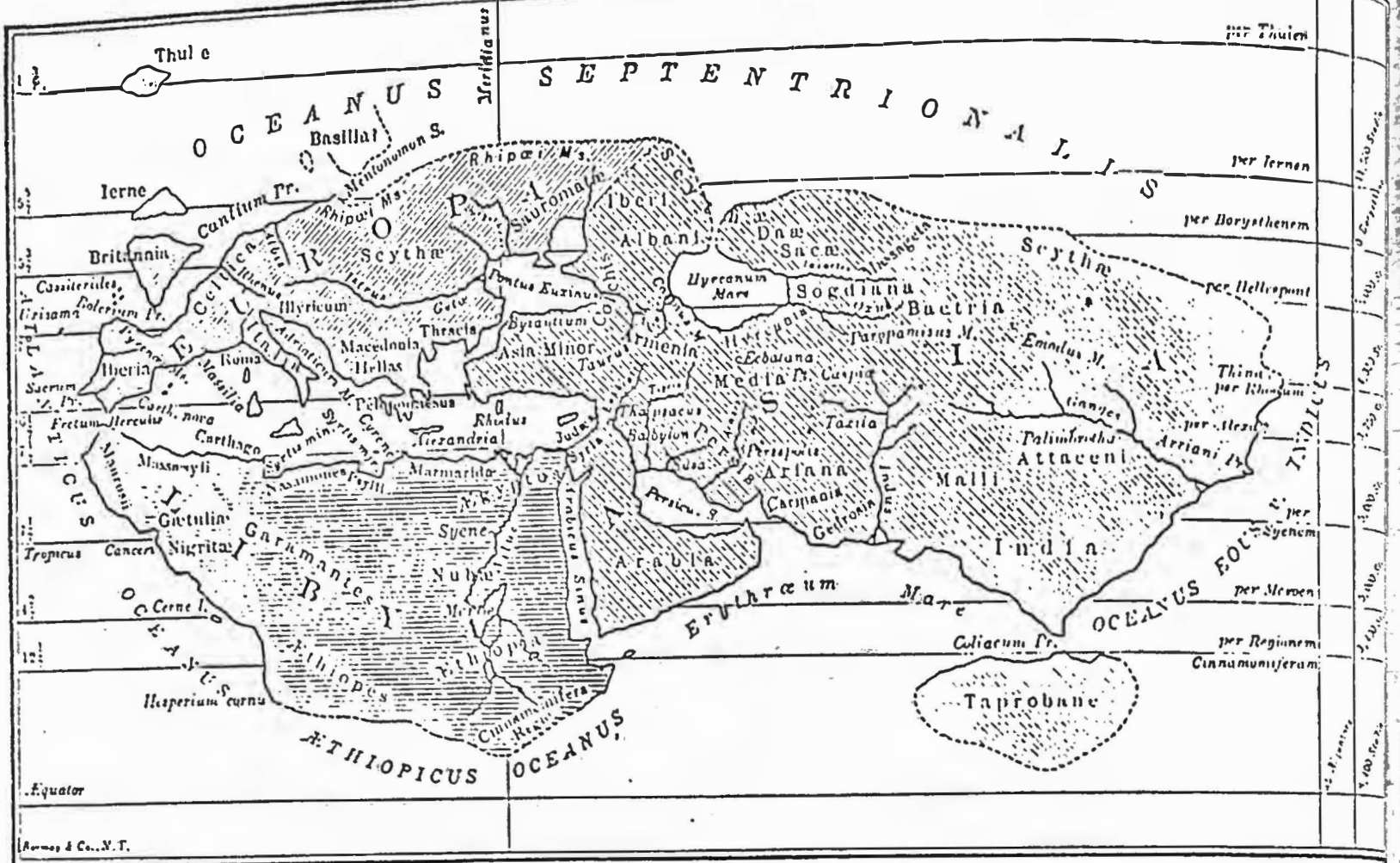
While it is true that there is a real European society and that European unity has existed in one form or another during much of its history, it is also true that Europeans have not been aware of it and have not seen the unity in terms of a European political union. In other words, a European consciousness has not always existed.

The history of Europe as a distinct geographical area is commonly considered to have begun with the Greeks in the ancient Hellenic civilization. The intellectual, commercial and political domination of this people produced the Macedonian Empire which straddled the three continents of Europe, Asia and Africa. (Hay, 1957). It was not, therefore, a European* empire and was not seen as such (Fig.1). However, the Greeks did contribute towards the creation of a European consciousness. The word 'Europe' has its origins in Greek mythology. Europa was the daughter of Agenor, the king of Tyre. She was a symbol of passion rather than politics (Hay, 1957). (Perhaps this reflects the way in which the Greeks viewed the Europeans). After the time of Alexander the Great, Greeks no longer thought in terms of merely the city-state, but rather of the inhabited world. This meant that they could distinguish between their own continent which they called Europe and identified with Greece and Asia which they identified with Persia. According to Dawson, it was with the Greeks that there first arose a distinct sense of the differences between European and Asiatic ideals.

The Romans brought this one step further. They conquered the Greek East and Western Europe, including Spain, Gaul and Britain, so that by the first century B.C., Rome was supreme throughout the Greek world and the Western Mediterranean (Fig.2). The Romans' knowledge of the continent of Europe was far superior to that of the Greeks so that unity under the Roman Empire was far more European than that of the Hellenic world, and was symbolised by the extensive infrastructure and social hierarchy that connected the whole Empire.

* Europe is taken to mean the subcontinent which includes the countries of the present day EEC as well as those of Scandinavia and Central and Eastern Europe.

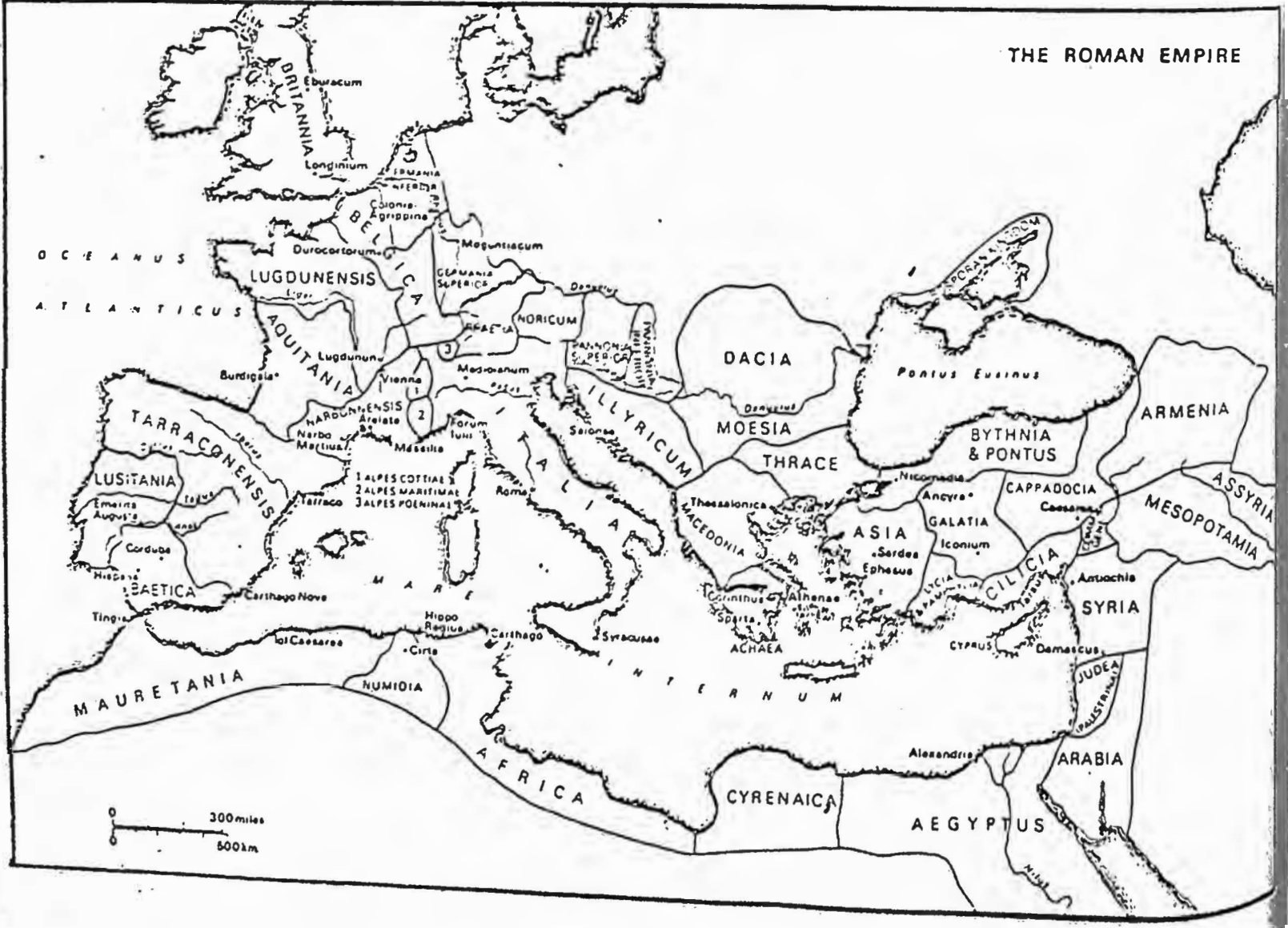
FIGURE 1



THE WORLD AS KNOWN TO ERATOSTHENES AND STRABO, FROM ABOUT 200 B.C. TO 20 A.D.

Source G. B. Adams

FIGURE 2



Source J. Bowle

It was, however, a unity that was European only in the geographical sense of the word. According to Barraclough (1963), the Empire was not European, but Mediterranean, comprising parts of Europe, Asia and Africa, and becoming increasingly less European as time passed. Roman citizens thought not in European terms but in Roman terms. Also, for many people, Romanization was a development that was imposed from above and was never completely assimilated by them.

In the fifth century A.D., the Roman Empire collapsed and Europe entered the Dark Ages. "All through the Dark Ages, civilization was being built up again and the shattered world of the West was being welded into a new kind of unity and cohesion as a result of the Christian Church and the Frankish kingdom" (Baynes & Power, 1929 p.40). Men harked back to the unity of the Roman Empire and the legacy of a desire for unity was probably the most important influence the Roman Empire had on European consciousness. The Dark Ages were the age of the barbarian (Fig.3). Germanic barbarians swept across Europe and the Franks (one such tribe) established a kingdom in Gaul. In the eighth century A.D. Charlemagne became the Frankish ruler and succeeded in bringing most of western continental Europe under one rule, thereby establishing a kind of European unity. But, as Barraclough states (1963) the Frankish kingdom was not Europe, while the Roman Empire still existed in the East.

The real source of unity and the most important force in Europe during these centuries was, however, the Christian Church, which, many agree, became the heir of the Roman Empire. Even the barbarian tribes were converted to Christianity. Christianization was a slow process which culminated in the thirteenth century when the cross was "a universal symbol from the Black Sea to the Atlantic and from the Mediterranean to the Arctic Circle" (Hay, 1957 p.20). The Moslem attacks between 632AD and the tenth century strengthened this feeling of Christian unity because of the danger of engulfment which made Christians forget their minor differences (such as those between the Roman, Celtic and Greek churches). There was a growing sense in Europe that the final division in the world was "Christians versus the rest" (Hay, 1957, p.21). Despite this religious unity, Dawson (1946) states that western culture was a "chaotic mixture of barbarian and Roman elements which as yet possessed no spiritual unity and no internal principle of social order" (p.149). It is possible, however, to find some proof of a growing European consciousness: an eighth century

chronicler - Isidore Pacensis - called the composite forces which defeated the Moslems in 732, 'Europeans' - Europeanses (Hay,1957,p.25). Even Dawson has to admit that the fall of the Frankish kingdom involved the disappearance of the 'scarcely achieved unity of Western Europe' (p.211).

Although European unity did disappear with the emergence of Europe from the poverty and disease of the Dark Ages to the improving civilization of the Middle Ages, Christian, cultural and social unity continued.

While the Greeks tried to find the dream of unity in a civilization and the Romans in an empire, the Middle Ages sought it in a Church (Baynes & Power,1929,p.48). The medieval Christian Church became even stronger than it had been in the Dark Ages. It developed great economic, political and intellectual power, and bound all of Europe together in one faith from the eleventh century onwards. Until at least the thirteenth century, Christianity was what primarily occupied the minds of Europeans. Also, during the Middle Ages, nations began to take shape, a development which (although it would not be influential until the later Middle Ages) seemed to be against the principle of European unity. The Church recognised this and introduced a series of measures to ensure the protection of national rights while at the same time linking all nations together in the common unity of the Church. Among these was a law enabling French, Germans, English, Italians and Greeks to become pope; also universities were made European institutions (those in Bologna and Paris brought together students from all over Europe to partake of a knowledge which was a common European inheritance). This meant that many states, especially France, were prepared to partake in this new kind of unity, rather than in the older imperial notions of unity. But what is important is that this Christian unity was seen primarily as Christian and not as "The name of the continent was more or less devoid of content during the centuries when men thought primarily in terms of Christendom" (Hay,1957,p.37).

The early Middle Ages seem, therefore, to be the low point in the history of the development of a European consciousness. It did have some important consequences for it, however. They were the years when feudalism was the basic social structure. This was a common European institution which existed in "Italy and Spain, England and Scotland and Ireland, Poland and Hungary" (Barracough,1963,p.10). As well as social

homogeneity, the middle ages also left a legacy of cultural unity based on a common intellectual tradition and a common allegiance to the classical tradition, a culture which had become more autonomous and self-sufficient than ever before (Dawson,1946).

The thirteenth century marked the turning point in the development of European consciousness (Fig.4). As Christian and Imperial unity were breaking down, other factors were contributing towards the huge growth in European consciousness.

The Church's power was weakening as it separated into Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy. For some time the Asian areas of Christendom had been dwindling away, and consequently Christianity was being confined to Europe. It extended to cover the whole continent and thus continued the sense of spiritual unity that had previously existed, but it was now being associated more and more with Europe, and contributed to a common sense of identification with the continent.

As the power of feudal lords declined in the late Middle Ages, the kings became stronger, and as-a-result the nation or the monarchical state came to be the most important and powerful unit in Europe. During the thirteenth century England and France each achieved new levels of unity, and later, countries such as Spain, Portugal and the Netherlands followed suit. Although these became the primary focus of allegiance for most Europeans, they did contribute to a sense of European distinctiveness because nations were a specifically European characteristic. This was consolidated by the nature of international trade which linked the nations of Europe together. Pope Pius II recognised the contribution nations had to-make towards European consciousness (he identified Europe with Christianity) when he said "the resources of the Christian people - how strong in Spain, how warlike France, how numerous are the people of Germany, how powerful Britain, how bold Poland, how vigorous Hungary, how rich, spirited and skilled in warfare Italy" (Hay,1957,p.83).

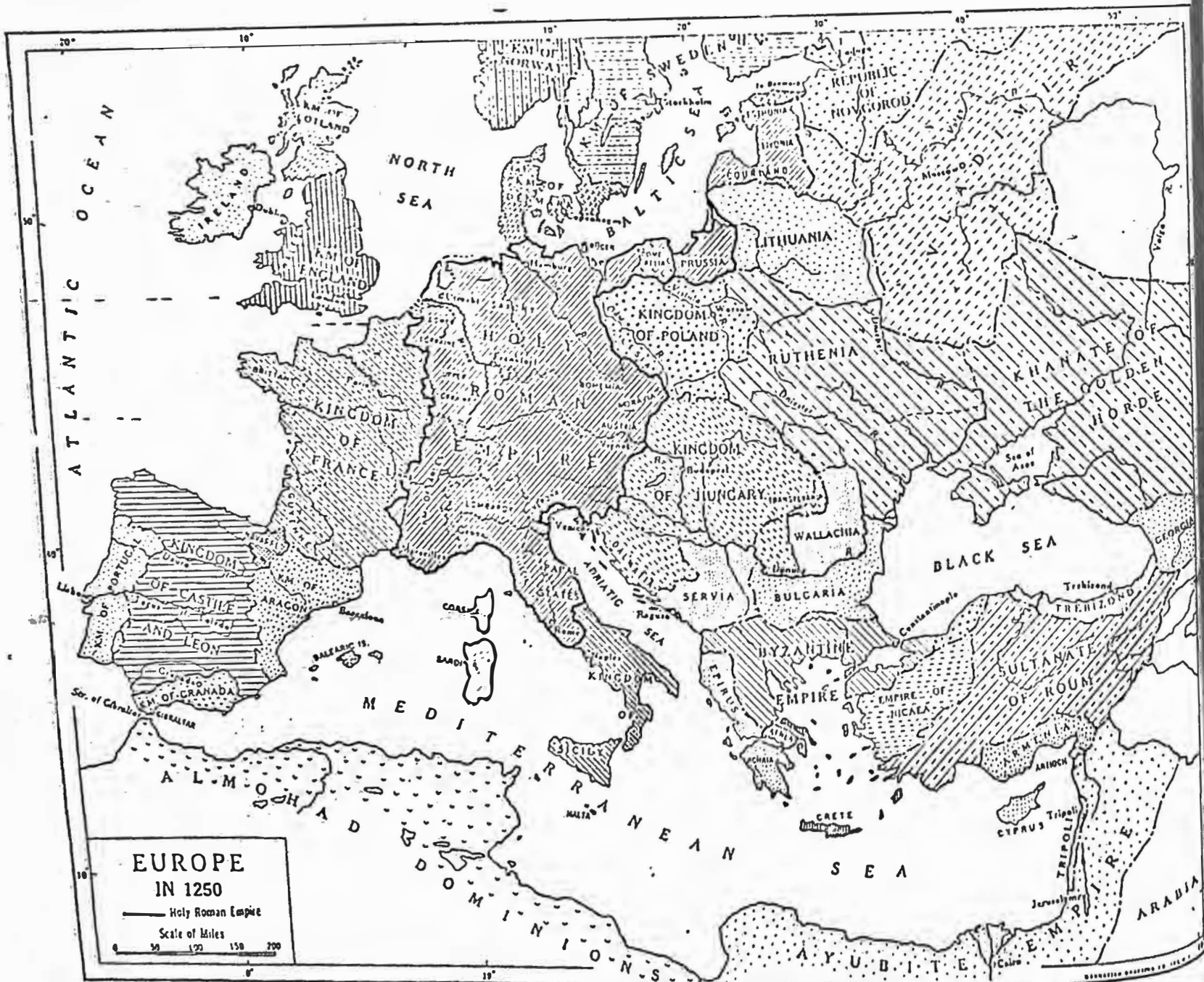
There were other factors which raised European consciousness in the later medieval years. Famine and the Black Death swept across the continent, killing, it is estimated, a quarter of its population, and binding Europeans together in common suffering, since it was essentially a European phenomenon.

About this time also there was a revolution in map-making which brought into existence maps which conformed more to reality than previously. They were also confined to Europe and were more political than previous maps, clearly displaying a sense of European



Source G. B. Adams

FIGURE 4



Source E. P. Cheyney

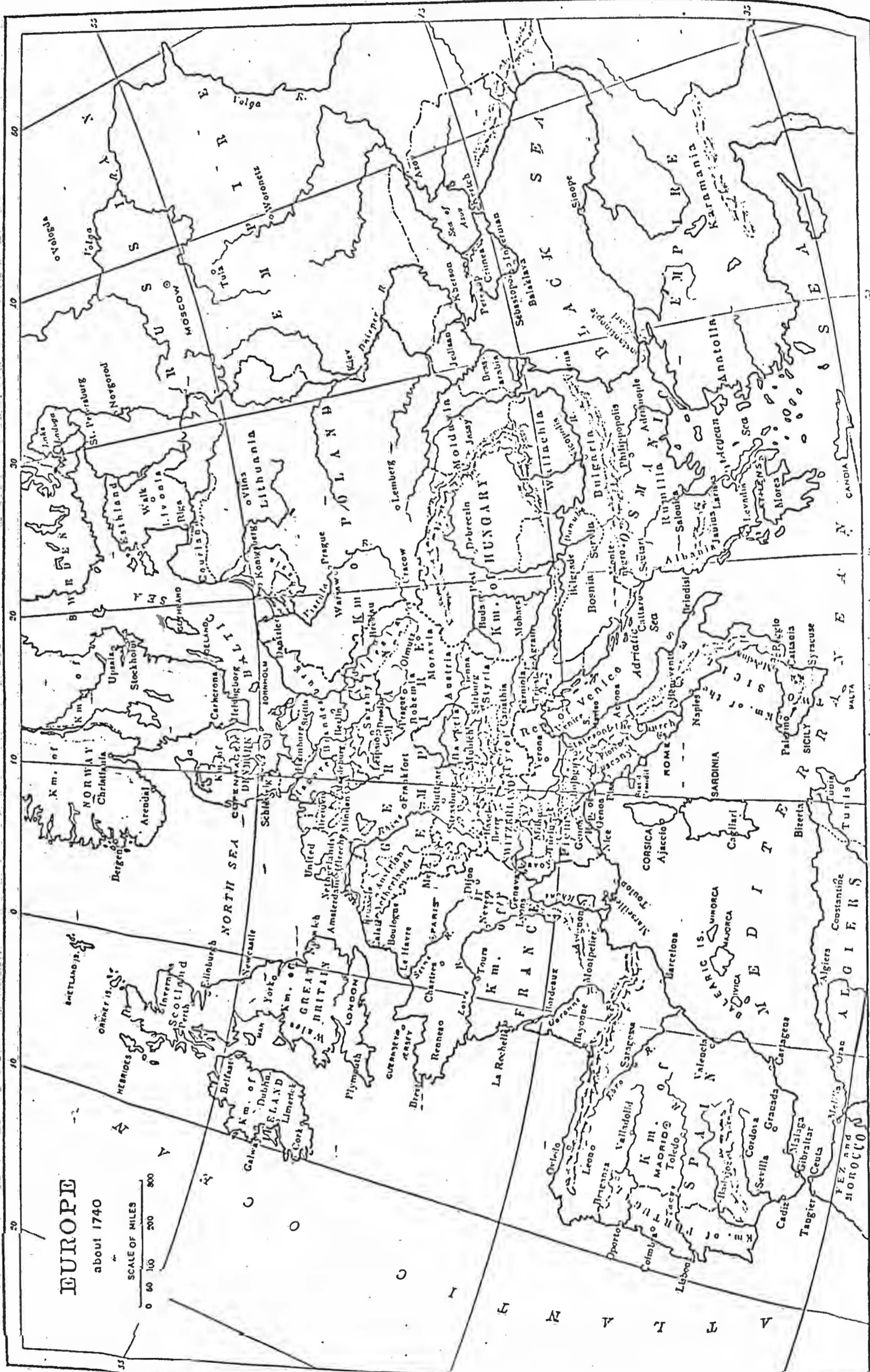
distinctiveness. New humanist literacy works [those by French historians Chastellain and Comynes being examples] were very important also, because they introduced the word 'European' to the vocabulary, making it clear at the same time that it was interchangeable with the word 'Christian'.

"Valuable as Italian experience and Italian terminology were, a consciousness of Europe was growing independently" (Hay, 1957, p.9). It was, however, a slow process. Christianity remained important for some time but the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (Fig.5) saw European consciousness reach its highest point in history.

The Church was considerably weakened with the separation of Protestantism from the main Christian Church in the sixteenth century, and by the eighteenth century enlightenment the notion of European unity was completely separated from Christendom (Hay, 1957, p.123).

The main reason, however, for the increased significance of 'Europe' in the early modern years was overseas expansion. The great age of exploration of the world by Europeans began in the late fifteenth century, with exploration and discovery by the Spanish and Portuguese of the Americas and the sea route to India. In the following centuries many Dutch, British, French and Italians were to follow in this tradition and establish colonies all over the world. The primary reason for this expansion overseas lies in Europe itself. In the later medieval years, Europeans had made important technological advances which enabled travellers to make long journeys overseas. One such important advancement was a new type of ship, which was light, manoeuvrable and carried sixty men (Clark, 1966). In the 12th century, the magnetic needle was discovered (Adams, 1899) which obviously had profound consequences for navigation. Also, better methods of map-making and surveying were developed which were used for delimiting political frontiers and surveying the resources of other countries (Clark, 1966). This technological dominance over other parts of the world was the impetus for the first overseas explorations. Once these first explorations, mainly by the Portuguese and Spanish, were seen to bring enormous wealth and opportunities, other European states were anxious not to be excluded. So it was a combination of rapidly improving technology and a desire for wealth, opportunity and knowledge which sustained the drive for overseas colonies. Within two hundred years, the European had discovered more about the world than had ever been known before. This gave rise to a much increased recognition of

FIGURE 5



the differences between Europe and the rest of the world, probably the most important reason for the development of a European consciousness. This generally took the form of - on the part of Europeans - a belief in the superiority of Europeans over other peoples. Camoens (Hay,1957,p.105) said "Proud Europe", "Christian Europe", "is more advanced and more renowned in its governance than the others". Lemaire de Belges wanted France and Germany to unite to recover their heritage, Troy. His final aim was 'nostre Europe' (Hay,1957,p.109). There was a noticeable increase in the use of the word 'European wealth', which signified what Europeans saw as their material superiority over other continents. Samuel Purchas was also important in raising the consciousness of Europe in this way. He described Europe's physical and climatic advantages, and its leading role in "Arts and Inventions" (Hay,1957,p.121). But most significant of all were comments such as "And has not the whole universe fallen before European mastery? - Asia and Africa were captivated. America has been made tributary and servant by Spanish and Portugal Discoveries and Conquests. Europe dominates the world" (Hay,1957,p.120). It was this attitude which resulted in the emergence in the seventeenth and early eighteenth century of Europe as the "unchallenged symbol of the largest human loyalty" (Hay,1957,p.116) for Europeans.

Parallel to this was a movement by some Europeans to achieve a form of European unity, as a reaction against the sovereign state and wars of religion. One form this took was an attempt to establish a code of international law (associated with Grotius). Another form was the many peace congresses which took place at Aix-La-Chapelle, Nymwegen and Utrecht (Barraclough,1963), for example. In contrast with the Middle Ages, these people aspired to a federal order, not an empire.

The European spirit which had developed rapidly in the early modern years, disappeared from view in the nineteenth century, because of the rise of nationalism and of imperialism. Nationalism became increasingly popular as it began to be associated with democracy and with the French Revolution of 1789. Colonialism rose sharply as the European powers needed more raw materials because of the Industrial Revolution. Nations became much more competitive in the race to colonise Asia and Africa, and this culminated in World War I in 1914. World War II in 1939 was a result of an attempt by one nation, Germany, to achieve European unity under the hegemony of one power. The scramble for overseas colonies was, therefore, obviously of vital significance to Europeans. It is logical then that the loss

of these in the 19th and 20th centuries had a profound influence on Europe. As M. Gilbert (1969) wrote, "possession of Empire gave the imperial nations of Europe a feeling of power and permanence...Prestige of Empire was paramount" (p.5). The first colony to gain independence was North America. Throughout the 19th century, there was a gradual transformation of Canada, South Africa, Australia and New Zealand into independent dominions (Forbath,1938). After World War I, the seemingly stable Austro-Hungarian Empire collapsed. By 1945 there were only five significant colonial powers in Europe. From 1945 to 1960, the European powers almost completely lost their colonial empires (Hughes,p.9). —

This meant a vast change for the nations of Western Europe. Even more important than losing economic benefits was the psychological importance of the loss of world mastery. This fact combined with various others to bring about political unity in Europe for the first time.

One of the most important reasons was the need to overcome the economic devastation of World War II by uniting. It was commonly believed that the unity of Europe would be in the interests of economic and social progress. Related to the loss of colonial empire was another fact which encouraged Europeans to unite. Two vast new world superpowers were emerging - the Soviet Union and the former European colony, the United States of America. The power and world influence of these giants overshadowed the tiny nation states of Europe. It became obvious that Europe would have to unite for reasons of security and also in order to boost self-confidence.

This desire for unity culminated in the establishment of the EEC in 1958: political recognition of European unity for the first time in history. By 1989, over thirty years later, EEC membership has doubled to twelve states and its power has extended beyond the economic sphere to include also the social and political domains.

The creation of a European consciousness was a gradual process which began in the ancient Hellenic civilization. It proceeded very slowly until the later Middle Ages, when it developed very rapidly, and by the early modern years it had become reality. In other words, European distinctiveness was not only a fact, but Europeans had become conscious of it. A European consciousness had been created. Although it weakened in the nineteenth century, (it also received a major setback in the early Middle Ages), it reappeared after World War II. European unity has come far since then, but if it is to proceed any

further in the future, our European consciousness must become stronger than it is at present to overcome the extremely strong nationalist feelings which exist.

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