

# I. FONDAMENTS

## A NEW HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE ON THE EUROPEAN CONSTRUCTION: CHARLES-IRÉNÉE CASTEL DE SAINT PIERRE, A NAIVE IDEALIST AND/OR A HUGE VISIONARY

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### **Abstract:**

The European idea is the result of reflections of enlightened minds that have guided and shaped the evolution of deep thinking on this subject over the centuries. To believe that only in recent decades has such a topic been widely discussed in public would not only be unjust but also insufficient for the scientific documentation needed on this subject. The oscillation between idealism and visionary thinking of these enlightened minds, including Charles-Irénée Castel, abbé de Saint-Pierre, was the major challenge of their reflections.

At the same time, without the substantial contributions of beautiful minds such as those of Voltaire, Rousseau (names we find in the present analysis), we believe that the current European construction would not have been possible. We deem their names, including that of Charles-Irénée Castel, Abbot of Saint-Pierre, should be included in the list of the ‘founding fathers’ of the Europe envisioned by intellectuals of the time, both visionaries and idealists.

### **Key words:**

European construction, European idea, European project, European utopia.

### **Rezumat:**

Ideea europeană este rezultatul reflecțiilor unor minți luminate care au ghidat și orientat evoluția gândirii profunde pe tema acestui subiect de-a lungul secolelor. Să credem că numai de câteva decenii s-a pus, în discuție publică largă un asemenea subiect ar fi nu numai nedrept, dar și insuficient pentru documentarea științifică necesară de realizat pe acest subiect. Pendularea între idealism și vizionarism a unor

minți luminate, printre care și Abatele de Saint Pierre a fost provocarea majoră a reflecțiilor acestora.

În același timp, fără contribuțiile unora ca ei, alături de Voltaire, Rousseau (nume pe care le regăsim în prezenta analiza), credem că actuala construcție europeană nu s-ar fi putut realiza. Apreciem că și numele acestora, inclusiv a lui Charles-Irénée Castel de Saint Pierre, trebuie să figureze pe lista „părinților fondatori” ai Europei mult visate de intelectualii vremurilor, deopotrivă vizionari și idealști.

At the outset of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, a project concerning the “European Idea” was meticulously developed. This project gained prominence even during that century, receiving more rigorous analysis and commentary than its predecessors. It also left indelible marks for future generations. The architect of this project was the Abbot Charles-Irénée Castel de Saint Pierre (1658-1743), who later came to be regarded by critics as one of the precursors of the European Union. In the preface to his project, he advocated for the immediate establishment of a “European Union” comprising 18 Christian states.<sup>1</sup>

The Abbot Charles-Irénée Castel de Saint Pierre was born in 1658 in northern France, in Cotentin. His education followed a Jesuit ethos, as recommended by his father. His career unfolded in Paris under the patronage of Fontenelle, the Duchess of Orléans and Marshal Villars. Actively participating in the literary salons hosted by Madame La Fayette and the Marquise de Lambert, he eventually ascended to membership in the French Academy in 1695. As secretary to Abbot de Polignac, he participated in the peace congress at Utrecht (1713). However, due to his critique of Louis XIV in his work *Discours sur la polysynodie*, he faced exclusion from the Academy in 1716. Undeterred, he established a club for free debates, which brought its own set of challenges. The Abbot Charles-Irénée Castel de Saint Pierre passed away in Paris on 29 April 1743.<sup>2</sup> Saint-Simon characterised him

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<sup>1</sup> Académie Française (2020). Charles – Irénée Castel de Saint Pierre. <http://www.academie-francaise.fr/les-immortels/charles-irenee-castel-de-saint-pierre> (consulted at 22.10.2023) Retrieved October 22, 2023, from <http://www.academie-francaise.fr/les-immortels/charles-irenee-castel-de-saint-pierre>

<sup>2</sup> Note 1: all data concerning the biography of Charles – Irénée Castel de Saint Pierre were taken from the website of the Académie Française (2020). Charles – Irénée Castel de Saint Pierre. <http://www.academie-francaise.fr/les-immortels/charles-irenee-castel-de-saint-pierre> (consulted at 22.10.2023).

succinctly in his memoirs: “*He possessed intellect, culture and chimeras. It is said that his final word was ‘hope’.*”<sup>3</sup>

The political and military context of the time in Europe was marked by wars with the Ottoman Empire, following the siege of Vienna in 1683, as well as the War of the Spanish Succession. Treaties such as the Peace of Karlowitz (1699) and the Treaty of Utrecht (1713), in which the author actively participated, shaped significant historical milestones. Culturally, the 18<sup>th</sup> century was not only an era of enlightenment and spiritual exploration, as it has been described, but also a period of intellectual camaraderie between philosophers and rulers. Reading became a habit, erudition flourished and personal reflections were cultivated. Notably, it was also the century of influential figures like Voltaire, Rousseau and Montesquieu.

Saint-Pierre seized the opportunity to publish the project he had been contemplating for several years during the Peace Congress in Utrecht. In 1712, an unsigned work titled *Memoirs to Make Eternal Peace in Europe* emerged in Cologne. The subsequent year, 1713, witnessed the publication of an estimated two-volume edition in Utrecht, titled *Project to Make Eternal Peace in Europe*, with a third volume added in 1717, entitled *Project to Make Eternal Peace among Christian Sovereigns*. Over time, the work had grown extensive, prompting the author to release a summary in Rotterdam in 1729, which he finally signed. This latter version was dedicated to Louis XV. Saint-Pierre also referred to the “Grand Plan of Henry IV”<sup>4</sup> as a source of inspiration.

The pacifism inherent in the abbot’s project extended even to non-Christian states. The first article of the draft explicitly stated that “to make peace unalterable in Europe (...), the union will strive to create neighbourly relations through an offensive and defensive league, ensuring that each state remained at peace within its borders, offering and receiving mutual

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<sup>3</sup> Saint-Simon, 1990, *Memorii*, București: Editura Univers, p. 448.

<sup>4</sup> Note 2: all data concerning the scientific activity of Charles – Irénée Castel de Saint Pierre were taken from the website of the Académie Française. *Charles – Irénée Castel de Saint Pierre*. <http://www.academie-francaise.fr/les-immortels/charles-irenee-castel-de-saint-pierre>, (consulted at 22.10.2023). <http://www.academie-francaise.fr/les-immortels/charles-irenee-castel-de-saint-pierre> (consulted at 24.10.2023).

assurances.”<sup>5</sup> The concept of perpetual peace within the Union, conceived by the Abbot of Saint-Pierre, encompassed not only the territories within the Union’s frontiers but also those in immediate proximity. It was envisioned as an “*eternal covenant*” that would endure for centuries to come.<sup>6</sup>

*The third article* of the Project established a definitive renunciation of armed conflict as a means of resolution. In case of disputes, a *perpetual General Assembly or European Diet* (which could be considered a contemporary version of the European Parliament) would serve as a venue for mediation by other allies. *The fourth article* stipulated that if a power refused arbitration, “*the Great Alliance will take up arms and launch offensive action against it,*”<sup>7</sup> compelling the state to comply with the joint decision. Implicit in this article was the assumption that “*sovereign signatories of peace*” recognised the interdependence between their individual interests and the public good, acting from a federal perspective while maintaining their sovereignty under the watchful eye of allied states<sup>8</sup>.

In the second volume of his book, the author had already revised the principles outlined in the first one. Turkey, Morocco and Algeria were also expected to be accepted into the European Union as partner states. The same Union pledged to establish “a society akin to the European one in Asia,” promoting peace and ensuring that no Asian sovereign posed a threat – both for their own peace and for trade in Asia<sup>9</sup>.

The third volume of the Abbot Saint-Pierre’s work appeared in 1717, and twelve years later, in 1729, an “*Abregé du Projet du paix perpetuelle*” was published in Rotterdam, summarising the three previous volumes. Its

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<sup>5</sup> Abbé de Saint-Pierre, 1713, *Projet pour rendre la Paix perpétuelle en Europe*, Utrecht, Chez Antoine Schouten, Marchand Libraire, MDCCXIII (S. Goyard Fabre pour Garnier, Paris 1981) / available online at <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k105087z/f6.item>, consulted at 14.10.2023

<sup>6</sup> Abbé de Saint-Pierre, *op. cit.*, consulted at 14.10.2023.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>8</sup> D. Frey, 2012, “La guerre et la paix perpétuelle de l’abbé de Saint-Pierre à Rousseau.” *Revue des sciences religieuses*, nr. 4- 86, aprilie 2012, pp. 458. doi: 10.4000/rsr.1380, available at <https://journals.openedition.org/rsr/1380>, consulted at 7.11.2023.

<sup>9</sup> A. Mattelart, 1999, *Histoire de l’utopie planétaire : de la cité prophétique à la société globale*, Paris, La Découverte, 416 p. (bibliogr., index)

vision rested on two premises: first, that *the organisation of Europe in its time would perpetually provoke wars*, and second, that *the balance of power between the House of France and the House of Austria would fail to provide adequate safeguards against external conflicts or civil wars*<sup>10</sup>, necessitating further reflection.

For the author of the plan, the solution would be straightforward and the benefits of eternal peace and trade between states could be easily obtained. According to this perspective, it would suffice for the main sovereign states in Europe “*to express a desire to conclude a treaty of union and establish a Permanent Congress.*”<sup>11</sup> To bolster his argument, the author provided examples such as *the union of the thirteen Sovereignities of Switzerland or the Sovereignities of Germany*. Examining the situation in Germany, Saint-Pierre confidently asserted, “*I see no more difficulty in forming the European Corps today than there was before the German Corps was established, achieving on a larger scale what has already been accomplished on a smaller one.*”<sup>12</sup>

The actual project proposed by Saint-Pierre exhibited both originality and common elements. It entailed the *signing of a treaty to establish a permanent Society or Union among sovereigns*. States would have permanent representation in the Congress or Senate of the Union, which would be based in a free city. Saint-Pierre’s focus was primarily on Christian states within Europe, but he also envisioned the possibility of Asian and African states forming alliances and signing treaties with the European Society. Congress would refrain from interfering in the internal governance of each country but would actively draft trade laws to ensure “*equality and reciprocity for all nations.*”<sup>13</sup>

The concept of *Perpetual peace* within the Union, conceived by the Abbot of Saint-Pierre, extended beyond the territories within the Union’s borders. It was intended as an ‘*eternal covenant*’ that would endure ‘*for*

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<sup>10</sup> Abbé de Saint-Pierre, *op. cit.*, consulted at 14.10.2023.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>12</sup> Abbé de Saint-Pierre (1713) *Projet pour rendre la Paix perpétuelle en Europe*, Utrecht, Chez Antoine Schouten, Marchand Libraire, MDCCXIII. (S. Goyard Fabre pour Garnier, Paris 1981) / available online at <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k105087z/f6.item>, consulted at 14.10.2023.

<sup>13</sup> Abbé de Saint-Pierre, *op. cit.*, consulted at 14.10.2023.

centuries to come.’<sup>14</sup> *The Sovereigns* committed to refraining from making or accepting any territorial changes and could only resort to armed conflict against those declared enemies of the European Society. Disputes among Member States would be settled through arbitration, and if not accepted, by a decision of Congress with a three-quarters majority vote. Trade disputes would be resolved by the ‘*Chambers of Commerce Maintenance*’ established in various cities.

Regarding the Structure of the European Society, Saint-Pierre considered either 18 or 24 states. Although he hesitated about including Russia, he ultimately accepted it in the 24-state formula. This forward-thinking approach positioned him as a *precursor to the idea of Europe spanning from the Atlantic to the Urals* – a concept that gained intense development during the complex historical periods of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Each state seeking membership had to have at least 1,200,000 inhabitants. If a state fell short of this population, it could associate with other smaller states. Each state would be entitled to one delegate in Congress, with financial contributions to the Society’s budget proportionate to the state’s revenue. The company would maintain an ambassador in each member state and a representative in each province.

The institutional functionality and decision-making process were meticulously designed by the author. Saint-Pierre stipulated that the most critical provisions of his ‘fundamental articles’ plan could only be altered through unanimous votes, while other ‘important articles’ or ‘useful articles’ could be amended by a three-quarters majority. This three-quarters rule applied to most contested decisions within the Company and in managing relations among the component states.

The project also had some limitations. As evident from the previous analysis, Saint-Pierre’s project exhibited several ambiguities, but its most significant limitations were related to:

- absolute maintenance of the status quo, true geo-political immobility,
- equal representation of states and

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<sup>14</sup> *Ibidem.*

- exclusive focus on sovereigns' interests and friendship.

Generally speaking, naivety, simplicity, idealism (as seen in Rousseau) and utopian aspirations (as exemplified by Voltaire) could also be considered as inherent limitations. These two influential figures of the European Enlightenment provided substantial critical assessments of Saint-Pierre's proposals.

- *Voltaire*: Voltaire, a prominent representative, offered sceptical and ironic comments on the Abbot of Saint-Pierre's Project. He even mockingly referred to the author as "*Saint Pierre de l'Utopia*." Despite Voltaire's sarcasm, the project's value judgments extended beyond mere ridicule. Saint-Pierre's perspective on state conflicts left a lasting impact on Enlightenment thought and political discourse.<sup>15</sup>

- *J.J. Rousseau*: Rousseau significantly contributed to the fame of the Abbot of Saint-Pierre and his project for eternal peace. In contemporary discussions on the European Idea, "Saint-Pierre's project" is often followed by "Rousseau's critique." Rousseau's well-systematised work (of only 40 pages), *Extrait du projet de paix perpétuelle de M. l'abbé de Saint-Pierre*, published in 1761 (with a supplement, *Jugement sur la paix perpétuelle*, released in 1782 after the author's death), reflects his divided opinion. While he criticises the project's naivety, simplicity and idealism, he also admires the underlying idea: "*If the project cannot be put into practice, it is not because it is chimerical. In reality, people are reckless and it is kind of crazy to be wise in the midst of crazy people.*"<sup>16</sup> Rousseau argues that relying solely on the goodwill of princes is misguided, as their self-interest often prevails and sovereignty is by its nature greedy for power. He therefore emphasises the need for a new organisational structure and the establishment of peace.

Rousseau's reflections ultimately lead to a plan that shares similarities with Saint-Pierre's, albeit with different starting premises and conclusions. Rousseau provocatively questions whether a revolution might be necessary to

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<sup>15</sup> A. Mattelart, 1999, *Histoire de l'utopie planétaire : de la cité prophétique à la société globale*, Paris, La Découverte, 416 p. (bibliogr., index).

<sup>16</sup> J.J. Rousseau, 1761 / 2016, *Extrait du projet de paix perpétuelle de M. l'abbé de Saint-Pierre* (Sciences sociales) (French Edition) HACHETTE BNF (November 1, 2016).

create a European federation and his pacifist ideals prompt him to consider whether such a radical transformation is desirable (*But is a revolution desirable?*).

### **The European echo of the Plan over the centuries**

Saint-Pierre's project has been widely discussed, elevating the author to indisputable celebrity, even though evaluations of his project often lean toward distrust and irony. From contemporary philosophers like Leibnitz (who also grappled with the issue of European unity in several works) to Voltaire (caustic and critical, despite having drawn up his own peace plan) and even the enlightened King of Prussia, Frederick II, the texts of Saint-Pierre ignited debates about the possibilities and opportunities for unprecedented European cooperation.

Historical recognition and significant contributions of the Project

Saint-Pierre earned the moniker "*the first great propagandist for peace*" due to the resonance of his ideas. His celebrity owes much to both his work and the context of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. This century witnessed a flourishing cultural era, fostering friendships between philosophers and princes. Erudition became a prerequisite, and luminaries like Voltaire, Rousseau and Montesquieu thrived.

In Saint-Pierre's work, we encounter, for the first time, the insistent use of the attribute "*European...*": European Society, European Body, European Court and European Congress. These terms attest to a genuine European consciousness. Was Saint-Pierre an idealist or an incurable naïve? In response to criticism, he stated: "*I agree that European arbitration should probably be formulated gradually, imperceptibly in two hundred years.*"<sup>17</sup> Indeed, within that timeframe, the League of Nations emerged – an intricate institution dedicated to peace defence, cooperation and arbitration. Saint-Pierre defended his position, stating, "*At present, the focus should be on initiating the league through a congress, whether in The Hague or*

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<sup>17</sup> Abbé de Saint-Pierre, 1713, *Projet pour rendre la Paix perpétuelle en Europe*, Utrecht, Chez Antoine Schouten, Marchand Libraire, MDCCXIII (S. Goyard Fabre pour Garnier, Paris 1981) / available online at <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k105087z/f6.item>, consulted at 14.10.2023.



elsewhere.”<sup>18</sup> In 1948, European federalists convened a significant congress in The Hague, playing a pivotal role in launching the construction of Europe. The choice of location likely paid homage to this great forerunner. Given the judgments thus far, we can pose a cross-sectional question: *Was Saint-Pierre a naïve idealist or a visionary?*

Bennet (2015) suggests that Saint-Pierre fits into a unique category – a paradoxical form of modern idealism:

*“In its attempt to overcome the state of nature in international relations by establishing a sort of civil state among states, [Saint-Pierre’s Project] bears the characteristic mark of modern idealism. The modern idealists accepted the modern realists’ characterization of the international situation as a state of nature but denied that it must forever remain so. In this way, they followed the progressive path that their modern realist predecessors such as Hobbes and Montesquieu only pointed to in their more hopeful moments.”*<sup>19</sup>

Saint-Pierre’s universalist temptation to draft his Project led him to propose, in his initial sketch, a System of the General Union of Europe, exclusively composed of European members. Whether utopian or not, his work stimulated well-founded socio-political and philosophical reflections on peace, well-being and progress, with emphasis on pursuing them with non-military means. During the Age of Enlightenment, at least twenty projects related to pacification gained notoriety, with publications in English, French, German and Italian.

### **In lieu of a conclusion ...**

The spirit of European and global peace and understanding, championed by the “utopia” of the Abbot of Saint-Pierre, may still yield fruit in a *Europe stretching from the Atlantic to the Urals*. We believe this

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<sup>18</sup> Abbé de Saint-Pierre, *op. cit.*, consulted at 14.10.2023.

<sup>19</sup> Z. Bennet, 2015, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau, “Abstract” and “Judgment” of Saint-Pierre’s Project for Perpetual Peace in Europe (1761, 1782)*, august,04, 2015, University of Texas at Austin, available at <https://www.classicsofstrategy.com/2015/08/abstract-and-judgment-rousseau.html> (consultat la 12.11.2023).

constitutes his most significant contribution to the evolution of pro-European political thought throughout history.

The first realised project for union between States was presented by Virginia delegate **Richard Henry Lee** at the Continental Congress of 1776. His proposal advocated for the formation of a Federation of American States.

*“That it is expedient forthwith to take the most effectual measures for forming foreign Alliances. That a plan of confederation be prepared and transmitted to the respective Colonies for their consideration and approbation. (...) Why do we longer delay? Why still deliberate? Let this most happy day give birth to the American Republic. Let her arise not to devastate and conquer but to re-establish the reign of peace and the laws. The eyes of Europe are fixed upon us; she demands of us a living example of freedom that may contrast by the felicity of her citizens with the ever-increasing tyranny which desolates her polluted shores.”<sup>20</sup>*

The vein of political thought sparked by the “utopia” of the Abbot of Saint-Pierre resonates in the objectives of the ephemeral League of Nations (1920-1946), which was later succeeded, albeit on a grander scale, by the United Nations (established after June 1945). Notably, Nicolae Titulescu (1882-1941), a Romanian diplomat, served as the League of Nations’ first President.

This vein of thought also harks back to the foundational concept underlying the European Union. To truly be “European” cannot be a “conventio ad excludendum”. We deem that this major ambiguity lies at the heart of the current “European construction.” It contributes to the weakening of cohesion and impedes the ability of member states to speak with a unified voice on the global stage.

General Charles de Gaulle, a statesman credited with France’s postwar resurgence and repositioning in the world system by leaving the colonial system inherited from prewar history, eloquently expressed the idea of unity of culture, civilisation and shared interests – a concept that had captured the attention of the pre-Enlightenment thinker Charles-Irénée Castel de Saint-Pierre. In a powerful statement before the European Parliamentary Assembly in Strasbourg on 23 November 1959, he declared, “*Oui, c’est*

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<sup>20</sup> Richard Henry Lee, 1776, Available at, <https://www.battlefields.org/learn/primary-sources/lee-resolution>, consulted at 19.11.2023.

*l'Europe, depuis l'Atlantique jusqu'à l'Oural, c'est toute l'Europe, qui décidera du destin du monde [Yes, it is Europe – from the Atlantic to the Urals – that will decide the fate of the world.]”<sup>21</sup>*

The unity of Europe “from the Atlantic to the Urals” is not a mere historical fiction; it is a cultural reality. I daresay that it is indeed effective, spanning from the Atlantic coast to the Ural Mountains.

However, this unity did not necessarily mark the decisive step toward fulfilling the “utopian” project of the Abbot of Saint-Pierre (following Voltaire) or General de Gaulle’s vision of an enlarged Europe. Instead, it unfolded against the backdrop of a new Cold War, destruction, mutual tensions and uncertainty.

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<sup>21</sup> Charle de Gaulle, Oxford Essential Quotations. Available at <https://www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/acref/9780191826719.001.0001/q-oro-ed4-00003521>, consulted at 28.11.2023.

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