

MAECENATA FOUNDATION EUROPA BOTTOM-UP

Report on the Online book presentation

**HITLER'S 'COSMOPOLITAN BASTARD' Count Richard Coudenhove- Kalergi
and His Vision of Europe by Martyn Bond**

5 May 2021, 6.00pm - 7.00pm

Guests and moderation

- **Martyn Bond**
Author of the book, Advisory Board of the Jean Monnet Centre of Excellence for Britain and Europe at the University of Surrey
- **Claudia Hamill**
Researched and edited the book, previously Council Member of The Royal Institute of International Affairs and Visiting Fellow at the University of Maastricht
- **Dr. Rupert Graf Strachwitz**
CEO, Maecenata Foundation

On 5 May 2021, Maecenata hosted the book presentation of Martyn Bond's latest publication: Hitler's 'Cosmopolitan Bastard', a biography about the life of Richard Coudenhove-Kalergi and his vision of Europe, a truly underestimated figure in the development of the European Union who very nearly changed Europe's future for the better and who laid the foundation of the EU.

The event was divided in three blocks: A presentation of the book by Martyn Bond with an overview of the achievements and aims of Coudenhove-Kalergi. The part focused on Coudenhove-Kalergi's political work in order to pressurise the nation states of Europe into a union. The second part of the presentation by Claudia Hamill consisted of a brief introduction of Coudenhove-Kalergi's colourful private life, further political insights into his civil society initiatives and his several dramatic escapes from attacks by opponents. The online event ended in a Q&A session with the participants.

With regard to Maecenata's program **Europa Bottom-Up**, the book gives important insights on how civil society organisations and individuals got involved in the process of creating the EU as opposed to governments and politicians. Bond calls Coudenhove-Kalergi, born of Japanese and Austro-Hungarian parents during the late 19th century, the "Grandfather of the European Union".

Coudenhove-Kalergi was the founder of Pan-Europa, the first private initiative and civil society organization which aimed for a strong, united Europe. In order to take the idea of his envisioned utopia of Europe to governments, the Count reached out to several high-profile politicians to take up his programme, before he decided to take the action himself and establish the Pan-Europa organization in 1924. Pan-Europa was a lobby-organization for European union which also proposed a strong Europe that projected European values around the world. The idea of a new Europe found approval amongst important personalities of that time, who collaborated and supported Coudenhove-Kalergi's vision.

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The first Pan-Europa Congress of the newly established organization took place in 1926 supported by figures of the social and intellectual elite such as Thomas Mann, Sigmund Freud and Albert Einstein, as well as politicians in leading positions from UK, Russia and continental Europe. Later the Count managed to persuade politicians such as Gustav Stresemann and Aristide Briand to support him and his ideas.

It needs only one man to persuade a handful, that handful to persuade a hundred, a hundred to persuade a thousand, and a thousand to turn utopia into reality.

(Coudenhove-Kalergi)

In 1930 the Great Depression harmed the movement of Pan-Europa, as nation states turned inwards, and the Nazis came to power. Hitler called Coudenhove-Kalergi a "cosmopolitan bastard" at that time. Although Coudenhove-Kalergi fled from Austria first to Switzerland and then to the US in 1938, he continued to activate his networks in order to organise resistance against the Nazis among other democratically ruled nation states. On return to Europe after the war in 1946 he contacted close to 4,000 MPs of these states in order to set up the European Parliamentary Union (EPU). He was the key speaker after Churchill at the first Congress of Europe held in 1948 in the Hague, attended by many key political actors, among them Konrad Adenauer. The EPU and the Hague Congress laid the foundations of the Council of Europe, which was established in 1949.

Claudia Hamill added how Coudenhove-Kalergi was the first to have several ideas later adopted by the EU, in particular for a common passport and a common currency. His charismatic personality as well as his networking skills had a popular impact which helped turn his aspirations into political reality.

With a brief conclusion and comments on the correspondence between Churchill and Coudenhove-Kalergi on their understanding of how the future of Europe should be formed, Graf Strachwitz opened the session for questions and discussion. The first question revolved around how Coudenhove-Kalergi, financed his activities. This cannot be answered clearly, but it was suggested that, aside from the initial support of his high earning actress wife, by membership fees, donations by foundations and governments such as Romania and Czechoslovakia as well as by American sponsors, including possibly the CIA, and latterly by President de Gaulle. In response to another question, there was confirmation that no trace could be found of any connection between Altiero Spinelli and Coudenhove-Kalergi. Another question which came up was how Coudenhove-Kalergi would judge the European Union of today and how well it would match with his vision. The response indicated that his vision of a Europe which would act as a united continent to balance as a political and economic force with the other world powers had yet to be fully realized.

This event showed us how civil society and its organizations always are and were the driving forces for great changes and how Coudenhove-Kalergi also nowadays can be an example for new and working initiatives relating to the EU.