

## HITLER'S COSMOPOLITAN BASTARD

Count Richard Coudenhove Kalergi wrote a political bestseller *Pan-Europa* in 1923 and set up a pro-European political movement to rival the Nazis. The intellectual elite of the continent attended his congresses in Vienna, Berlin and Basel in the 1920s and '30s. Einstein rubbed shoulders with Richard Strauss, Leo Amery with Sigmund Freud, Thomas Mann with Tomas Masaryk. The Count was the first to create a European flag and choose an anthem – Beethoven's *Ode to Joy* - and to call for a European passport, a European stamp and a common European currency.

In *Mein Kampf*, Hitler dammed the Count as a "cosmopolitan bastard", a reference to his Jewish wife, Ida Roland, the Viennese theatre's answer to Sarah Bernhardt, and to his Japanese mother, a geisha who married his diplomat father after his birth in Tokyo to secure an inheritance back in Europe.

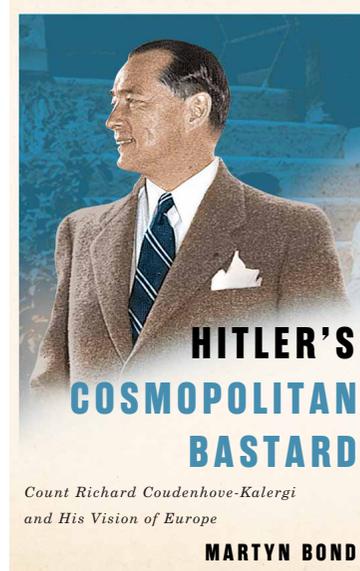
The young and charismatic Count twice escaped assassination, once through the quick-witted action of his wife in a Munich hotel during the Communist Putsch in 1919, and later when Austrian Chancellor Schuschnigg was targeted at a private dinner in their Viennese apartment in 1936.

And twice he evaded the Gestapo. First in March 1938, after last minute tip-off, the night the Nazis marched in. He and his wife were driven to the border (with their pet dogs) by the Swiss ambassador's chauffeur and then sweet-talked their way into Czechoslovakia with the former Chancellor's widow and her children in the next car. The second time, in June 1940, his daughter drove the Count and Ida (again with their dogs) across France just ahead of the German tanks to neutral Spain and from there to Lisbon. Unknown sources then spirited him with his family to New York in a luxury flying boat, the *Yankee Clipper*.

The Count's offices in the Hofburg, the seat of government in Vienna, were next to the Chancellor's and the Gestapo raided them in 1938, taking all his papers to Berlin to be filleted for names of anti-Nazis across the continent. The Red Army rescued them from a salt mine where they had been hidden at the end of the war and took them to Moscow for the KGB. They are there still there, held as war booty.

In *Casablanca* Viktor Laszlo, the leader of the anti-Nazi Resistance, is modelled on the Count who also escapes to freedom via Lisbon in 1940. Paul Henreid, a family friend who had been at school with the Count's youngest brother, plays the character in the film. Many of the film extras were European refugees in Hollywood, and the scriptwriters knew about Coudenhove-Kalergi from mutual contacts in Vienna.

In New York the Count rallied fellow Europeans in exile and held another Pan-Europa Congress in 1943 to plan for a united Europe after the war. He worked for a continent that could be an equal partner for the United States, but he had an uphill struggle to convince the American Administration under Roosevelt that Soviet Russia would become as serious an enemy as Nazi Germany when the Second World War was over. Truman was open to his ideas, however, and the Count gained face-to-face interviews both with the President and with Secretary of State George Marshall. The Marshall Plan clearly reflected his demand for coordination among European states, and the creation of NATO embodied his lasting concern to contain the threat of Soviet aggression.



Back in Europe, Coudenhove-Kalergi met Churchill on Lake Geneva to brief him just days before his Zurich speech in September 1946. Acknowledging his debt to the Count, Churchill called for a United States of Europe, as peaceful as Switzerland and as prosperous as America. The Count canvassed over 4,000 MPs from a dozen countries across Europe on their views about the future of the continent, and in 1947 several hundred of them came to his Swiss country retreat near Gstaad to set up the European Parliamentary Union (EPU) and press for a parliament for the continent.

Coudenhove-Kalergi visited Churchill at Chartwell both before and after the war, lunched with him in his flat in Hyde Park Gate, and was the first speaker after the great war leader at the opening of the 1948 Congress of Europe in the Hague. The Count's influence spread through the EPU to every government in Western Europe, and the creation of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe in 1949 was largely credited to his lobbying. In 1950 he was the first recipient of the prestigious Charlemagne Prize, awarded for his contribution to European unity, five years before Churchill received the same honour.

Growing disenchanted with only lukewarm support for European integration in British political circles, Coudenhove-Kalergi developed a special relationship with de Gaulle. He became his confidant and go-between with Adenauer, arranged the first networking meetings between French and German MPs in 1948 and 1949, and later encouraged de Gaulle to broadcast in German to the 'youth of Germany'. He took his seat directly behind the two leaders in Rheims Cathedral in 1961, celebrating the spirit of Franco-German friendship, and was awarded both the *Légion d'honneur* and the *Bundesverdienstkreuz*.

The Count's private life was equally colourful. He married three times. First, at just eighteen, against his family's wishes, to Ida Roland, divorced, twelve years older than him, and with a five-year-old daughter. She shaped her young husband and they were devoted to each other until her death in 1951. Then he married the widow of a rich Silesian landowner, whose promised inheritance never materialised. His third wife was the widow of Ralph Benatzky, the hugely successful composer of the musical *White Horse Inn*, a former dancer who enlivened his final years and very much enjoyed the status of Countess.

Coudenhove Kalergi lived an itinerant later life in grand hotels and elegant rented apartments, flitting between Paris, Vienna, London, Berlin and Zurich. He networked annually with the great and good at a fashionable clinic in the Austrian Vorarlberg where he died unexpectedly in 1972, just as the United Kingdom joined the Common Market.

In August the same year, outside a small Swiss village near Gstaad, Hitler's 'cosmopolitan bastard', the model for *Casablanca*'s Viktor Laszlo, was finally laid to rest near the graves of both his first wife and his second. Only his widow, family members and close friends were at his graveside, but letters of condolence flowed in from Europe's political elite, with prime ministers and presidents prominent among them. Streets, squares and parks are named after him in Vienna, Prague, Berlin and Paris. French President Macron and Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov have both quoted him in recent speeches, and his ideas of continental unity still make waves and underlie debate today. The Count and his ideas outlive Hitler.

### HITLER'S COSMOPOLITAN BASTARD: COUNT RICHARD COUDENHOVE-KALERGI AND HIS VISION OF EUROPE

This first English biography of the Count is to be published in the UK by McGill-Queen's University Press on 15 April 2021