

Franck Biancheri



THE EMERGENCE OF EUROCITIZENS

A brief history of
AEGEE-Europe,
from its creation to April 1988



THE EMERGENCE

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[AEGEE-Europe](#),
from its creation to April 1988
by

Franck Biancheri

Founder of AEGEE-EUROPE
President of AEGEE-EUROPE 1985-88
Honorary President of AEGEE-EUROPE

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THE EMERGENCE OF EUROCITIZENS

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This book offers a novel point of view on the recent history of the European construction process by taking close look at the creation and development of the first large-scale European student network. It describes the “complex and sometimes incredible mixture of will, strategy and luck which allowed AEGEE-Europe to exist and develop”.

The students who were making this happen were occasionally helped, and often observed, with a mixture of suspicion and disbelief by the great men of that era of the European construction process, whose paths they crossed repeatedly: Mitterand, Helmut Köhl, Michaël Gorbatchev, Jacques Delors, Wilfried Martens, Ruud Lubbers, ...

The pages of the book also illuminate the meandering Community decision-making process by telling the true story of the complicated adoption of [ERASMUS](#), the first large scale European programme addressing young people, in which AEGEE-Europe played a decisive role.

The book is also an original testimony on the real impact European citizens can have on the European construction process... when they know how to organise themselves as Eurocitizens. The book tells also how, even at a very young age, and without building barricades, we can hope to influence the world in which we live.

The book is a message of hope, helpful and reviving, in this era in which the sentiments of powerlessness and disappointment have a tendency to rule without limits; it should be read by those interested in Europe, the evolution of our civil societies, the student world or recent history!

Franck Biancheri (edition 1996)

Precisely 30 years ago, in 1985, in a Europe that was wrapping up its economic union and was beginning to put its political integration into perspective, Franck Biancheri contributed significantly to the challenge of forming new generations of Euro-citizens by creating AEGEE-EUROPE. And two years later, to prove that Europe indeed had a huge need of Euro-Citizens, AEGEE, still under Franck's leadership, permitted the adoption of the [Erasmus](#) program, today's undisputed flagship of the European construction... at the time blocked by national administrations. Keeping that in mind, Franck Biancheri then on relentlessly fought for the democratization of the EU... not for moral reasons, but for very practical ones: just like Erasmus would never have seen the day without the AEGEE students, Europe would get nowhere without the European citizens.

Today, with the European project engaged in a process of reinvention of its meaning, efficiency and connection to its citizens, it was logical to re-edit this "Little Blue Book", written in 1996 by Franck Biancheri in order to clarify the initial ambition of the project of AEGEE.

Europe, partly devastated by the global systemic crisis, needs more than ever these AEGEE-EUROPE Euro-Citizens. Franck, who passed away in 2012 at the age of 51, is no longer there to convince us about this point, but he left us such a heritage ... Let's read his words again ... now!

Marie-Hélène Caillol

President of the Associations of Franck Biancheri's Friends (AAFB)

We are thankful to the [Anticipolis Editions](#) for the reissue of the "Little Blue Book" in several languages and in several formats

The Emergence of Eurocitizens:

A brief history of [AEGEE-EUROPE](#)

From its creation to April 1988

Biancheri, Franck

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de la crearea sa și până în Aprilie 1988

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Preface

Edition 2015

AEGEE-EUROPE turned the Erasmus generations into generations of Euro-citizens

Franck Biancheri ignited the spark and inspired thousands of students around the continent by founding one of our continent's first European student movements and the first trans-European one, going beyond conventions, transcending existing structures of nation-state boundaries, and opening a new way of thought for a new generation to grow as true Europeans.

By creating the unique Association des Etats Généraux des Etudiants d'Europe, he was able to channel the energy, dreams and visions of European students, turning them into the highest-level European decision makers and influencing the political agenda.

His success in influencing the EU Council's negotiations on the Erasmus programme, ensuring its approval, has radically transformed more than 3 million students' lives on our continent and remains a living legend of how a student challenged a whole Union and thrived.

"The father of the Erasmus programme", as the Spanish President of the Council of the UE named him in 2010, in his vision of Europe, knew very well that only a new generation better qualified, better trained, brought up in a different setting... would be able to deliver what was needed for the European project to succeed.

Different names have been used to describe this generation such as "the Fall of the Berlin Wall generation". But the term which best describes them, is "the Erasmus generation" one that it is important to be aware of when addressing the European and global challenges ahead of us.

Indeed the world has changed. We now live in the most globalized, interconnected and interdependent society in our history. Actions on one side of the globe affect us citizens wherever we are.

Rising powers are challenging the current international status quo too long

dominated by the United States' post-Second World War regime. Increasing activity especially from the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) threatens to unbalance Western hegemony in the international arena.

With the nation state model in decline, and a drift towards regionalism in the world, Europe risks being left out of global talks due to its internal fragmentation and lack of consensus.

Its lack of capacity to speak with one single, strong voice abroad undermines the credibility and effectiveness of the European project.

In order to survive and remain a relevant and influential actor [player] in today's changing global order, Europe must find the commitment and go deeper in its integration process, strengthening itself, unifying itself, becoming the credible global power it was aimed to be in its creation.

This cannot be achieved by today's political elite, who lack the vision, the training, the intercultural sensitivity and awareness, the capacity or even the drive to achieve this dream.

Having been brought up and educated in the framework of the Cold War, civil wars and conflicts between European countries, this generation is not able to take the final leap of trusting their European neighbours, needed to let go of their self-centered national interests and build the real, strong and common Europe we all need.

Only the new generation can do this; the generation for which Europe was always an everyday reality; the only pro-European-born generation; the Erasmus generation which Franck Biancheri fought so hard to create; those who have grown up with Europe as their playground, who have no mental artificial barriers; those who do not know what war is; those willing to expand their mental frontiers, developing a real vision to complement Robert Schuman and Jean Monnet's visions; and those who dare to make the right decisions for the benefit of the continent, and not only based on their own national interest.

While all these things might seem statements of today Franck Biancheri, a young leader who emerged 30 years ago, predicted these same threats and put forward his vision for Europe louder than ever.

This year we celebrate the 30th anniversary of AEGEE-EUROPE / European Students' Forum. 30 years ago, around 1985, a young, brilliant man decided to no longer play by the existing rules of the game, but rather set his own, showing the

way of how a new Europe was possible, through trans-European cooperation, dialogue and regenerating and revitalizing the stagnated European project from its base, its young people.

I still remember how, on reading the first edition of this book, the commonly known “Blue book”, inspired me to dream and aim higher, to instruct me and prepare for the task that would lie in front of me as President of AEGEE-EUROPE.

I had the honour of meeting Franck Biancheri and debating with him regularly one-to-one during the last year of his life, when he would provoke me, force me to think out of the box and of the existing structures, and to always look back to the origin whenever lost, while preparing my candidature as President.

I also had the honour of being in the front row during his last speech to AEGEE in 2012 in AGORA Enschede, the same one which trusted me to become the 50th President of AEGEE-EUROPE / European Students’Forum. A provoking, challenging but eye-opening speech without a doubt, which would lay the foundations and influence my programme and the work which my Comité Directeur and I devoted to transform AEGEE.

Without a doubt, Europe has lost one of its most visionary and brilliant advocates and minds. But Franck’s legacy is much bigger than a person, than a mind. Franck’s legacy is a whole generation, the very generation which is now starting to and will succeed in reforming Europe.

It is the Erasmus generation, the best educated and trained individuals in our history. The ones who no longer feel satisfied with the status quo inherited from their parents and who have the desiring need of contributing with their work to a better reality around them. The generation wanting to get in the game to revolutionize the system and radically amend all the mistakes made by the previous generation; it’s our turn; our move; our time to show you how, with our political will, idealism, drive and training, we will change Europe.

I hope that the new edition of this book will keep inspiring generations of Euro-citizens and empower them to keep adding to and changing the pieces of this puzzle which Europe has become.

Dear reader, enjoy the journey which this book provides, taking you back to 1985 and showing you how one student was able to originate a whole movement and its legacy. Imagine what you could do today in 2015...

Luis Alvarado Martínez

50th President of AEGEE-EUROPE/European Students' Forum
Young European of the Year 2014 - Schwarzkopf Foundation

Foreword

*N'oublier pas que l'histoire
n'est qu'une utopie qui prend forme¹!*

Albert Camus

A united Europe has always been a utopia.

It certainly was a utopia, when, in August and November 1950, in a symbolic act, European students demolished the border poles at the Franco-German frontier near Wissembourg, entered into Strasbourg without visas and there gathered 5,000 students from all over Europe in order to demonstrate their desire for living in a united Europe: They demanded a European constitutional assembly established by free elections.

Today, this story is history, sometimes told in schools and text books. The utopia of the Strasbourg generation had become, to a large extent, reality, when AEGEE²-Europe came into existence in 1984-85. Nevertheless, we, too, felt the clear conviction that the future of Europe also depended on our utopia. The result of transforming this conviction into action during the first years of [AEGEE-EUROPE](#) is told in this book.

AEGEE-EUROPE caught on and gained recognition as the only large European student association with a totally integrated functional structure – and it still is today. AEGEE-EUROPE continues to function without any national levels, a principle that has made AEGEE a large-scale laboratory for developing and testing ideas about democracy and a European civil society.

After April 1988, the end of the era covered by this book, AEGEE-EUROPE continued its growth, particularly in Eastern Europe. In going beyond the borders of the European Union (EU), AEGEE again displayed its capacity to be ahead of the developments of the EU. Since its creation, AEGEE-EUROPE has never hesitated to make use of the most modern technologies; it comes as no surprise then that AEGEE has been developing European democracy by Internet for several years now³.

Due to all of these initiatives, AEGEE-EUROPE placed at the disposal of our societies an experience that will help us meet the great challenges that await Europe at the end of this century: the building of social and political structures that will finally establish a common citizenship and permit the good functioning of a European democracy that embraces many languages and a growing number of national cultures. Today, the basis thus laid must be enlarged in order to gradually integrate other social groups, because the EU must not remain a concern merely of intellectuals and of those with university education. We need an ensemble of new ideas and of modern instruments so that Europeans can better organise themselves politically.

This enormous task ahead of us takes on an even greater importance when we consider that the European experience in this respect can be stimulating for other regions of the world – and even for the entire planet, which, too, has an increasing need for an increasingly more integrated framework of international relations.

It is not certain today that the AEGEE generation will succeed, on the political level, in transforming Europe into our common home country. It is for this reason, and in order to remind us of the path that Europe has already accomplished, that I wish to appeal to AEGEE-EUROPE to organise, together with the Strasbourg generation of 1950, a great event in the year 2000 in order to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the demolition of the borders and of the march of 5,000 European students to Strasbourg – and also, of course, to welcome the next century during which Europe must accomplish its true integration.

Franck Biancheri, Brussels, July 1996

1 Never forget that history is but a utopia that has taken on shape

2 Association des Etats Généraux des Etudiants d'Europe. AEGEE was called EGEE until 1987.

3 You may get into contact with AEGEE-EUROPE in the WorldWideWeb (<http://www.aegEE.org>), by email (headoffice@aegEE.org), or in traditional ways: [AEGEE-EUROPE](#), Rue du Noyer/Notelaarsstraat 55 1000 Brussels, Belgium, Tel.: [+32 483 675 625](tel:+32483675625)

Preface

Edition 1996

The idea of writing this brief history of [AEGEE-EUROPE](#)'s first years came to my mind when I was answering Michael Merker's questions for the brochure marking AEGEE's tenth anniversary.

The complex and sometimes incredible mixture of will power, strategy and good luck that allowed AEGEE-EUROPE to exist and develop cannot really be summarized by answering a few questions.

I believe I owe it to myself to write this history, not only for present and future members of AEGEE-EUROPE, but also for all AEGEE-EUROPE members over the last ten years (and in particular over the first three years), as well as for all those on the outside who gave us their help⁴.

I make no claims to impartiality or objectivity, which would necessarily be illusory since I have never been impartial as to AEGEE's role and nature, and I am not going to start now. I would, however, like to try to provide two essential elements for those who are interested in AEGEE's development: as precise a description as possible of the obstacles and difficulties that we encountered; detailed information on the protagonists (both inside and outside AEGEE) in each situation.

The first element will provide a guideline for those who might later wish to write a history of AEGEE-EUROPE. It will make them familiar both with the schedule of events of the first three years and with the issues at stake behind the main events. I have decided to mention only those in which the European Board of Directors (Comité Directeur européen, CD) was involved or of which it was informed, since AEGEE's organisational structure during that period meant that, in any case, any other events were of little significance, as they remained unheard of both within the network and outside it.

Although the schedule of events can eventually be identified by outsiders (provided a lot of time is spent on it), the real issues at stake cannot. Since I am the only member of the AEGEE-EUROPE executive to have been in office throughout those years, I believe that no one else can contribute as much to identifying them.

Whatever the case, this contribution will provide a basis for future discussion.

The second element consists, then, in identifying the people who played important roles during those three founding years of AEGEE-EUROPE, and in describing those roles. From my point of view these may have been extremely negative, and so I shall present them as such, with justification of my judgment. In any case, for those interested in AEGEE-EUROPE's story, this book will tell them who those protagonists were and give them the possibility of contacting them if they wish to have points of view other than my own.

I would, however, like to mention that most of AEGEE-EUROPE's principal leaders during those years have been kind enough to read this text before publication. They have pointed out factual inexactitudes, which I have corrected, and some of them have expressed differing views on various specific explanations I have given, although without convincing me. Yet, they all confirmed that they recognized their vision of the history of those AEGEE-EUROPE years in this text. It was crucially important for me that all those people, all those friends (even if I have not seen some of them for four or five years) from Germany, the Netherlands, Spain, Belgium, France, Italy... recognize themselves in this book. This to me is proof that my account is faithful to the impressions that many of the actors in these events have retained, and therefore of a certain reality.

I hope my contribution will bring some transparency to AEGEE-EUROPE's history. I have chosen to recount this story as an adventure full of hopes, struggles, deceptions, successes and learning..., because that is how we lived it, but all the same, throughout my account the reader will be able to identify the facts about major events (those which played a part in AEGEE's evolution) and actors (those who made AEGEE history, even those who were opposed to my leaning), for AEGEE's history is partly the story of confrontation between different visions of the student role in society, of the construction of Europe and of evaluating our societies' future needs.

I could not, of course, mention all the events organised by AEGEE-EUROPE and itsbranch antennae over those three years, even if each one remains a sparkling and important memory for those who were involved in it. Neither could I enumerate the vast number of individual experiences lived through by the 100,000-odd students who have played a part in AEGEE history since 1985: all those life stories, discoveries, debates, friendships... which are the heart of AEGEE-EUROPE and have diffused its influence throughout European society. I shall leave

this to the sociologists who tomorrow will analyze its impact.

Before embarking on the primary portion of my account, I would like to emphasize to readers that the founding and development of AEGEE-EUROPE constituted (and this text proves it) the emergence of the first Eurocitizens onto the European stage. By that I mean European citizens capable of organising themselves on a European scale without having recourse to national structures, and able to influence the EC decision-making process in a decisive way. The years that followed (with IDE⁵ and Prometheus-Europe) have confirmed this assertion. It is reasonable to believe that the two decades to come will make this obvious to everyone.

In this sense the history of AEGEE-EUROPE's beginnings constitutes, over and above AEGEE and the student world, an interesting example of the "unofficial democratization" of the EC system. But isn't true democratization always unofficial?

Franck Biancheri

⁴ This book may also interest those who are curious to learn about the nature of this new, very special experience that since 1985 has been shared by tens of thousands of European students, many of whom will occupy important positions in our society in the future.

⁵ Initiative for Democracy in Europe, p. 26

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A chronology of the most important events organised by [AEGEE-EUROPE](#) during the period covered can be found in the appendix to this book.

*To my parents, without whose support
none of this would have taken place.*

*To my daughter Carla, so that when she is twenty,
citizenship and Europe will at last have become compatible*

*To Marie-Helene, for her encouragement
and her work of rereading,*

To all my friends, Europe builders

EGEE I

(January '84 – June '85)

“Either Europeans will be capable of unifying and will therefore continue to make a major contribution to humanity’s progress, or they will not, and Europe will become a region of secondary zone countries whose civilizations will decorate the museums of the rest of the planet. We must build the European Community, otherwise Europe will soon be culturally Americanised, politically Finlandised and technologically Japanised”. This is what I had already been thinking for a number of years when the opportunity of creating [AEGEE-EUROPE](#) presented itself.

My attraction to politics therefore sprang from this conviction that we had to make European integration succeed. I was convinced, both by character and by the toughening experience of a recent serious illness – which made me realize, at 23 years old, that I was mortal – that the more important a thing is, and the longer it takes to achieve it, the more rapidly it should be begun. My ambition was therefore clearly established: to contribute actively to the construction of Europe.

Some ambitions are like demands, imposing themselves as duties to be fulfilled or work to be completed. Others are likely desires, offering themselves as opportunities to be seized or positions to be occupied. I believe it is that first kind of ambition which I nourished... for ten years later I am still nourishing it and can henceforth point to its furrow, ten years long and, despite coming up against a multitude of obstacles, as straight as an arrow .

The idea of creating AEGEE-EUROPE was not then just to create a new European student movement, but rather to initiate an entirely new approach to the construction of Europe by starting off with young people and citizens, skirting around the nation states, and thus completing the EC process that had begun in 1957.

As we contemplated the decrepit splendours of our nation states, impervious to the perverse charms of the two dominant empires, we were convinced that we had to create a new path to the future by organising Europeans in a different way, so as to be able to face up to the problems awaiting our generation with improved

chances of success.

This path, combining the principles of action (voluntary work and efficiency) with ideal values (democracy, independence, transparency), would only lead us somewhere if we planned it out ourselves.

We were deeply convinced of the path to be followed: a narrow passage thrusting forward into that space where individual and community counterbalance each other, a Via Europea by excellence.

So, without fixing our sights on any ideal heights, aware that henceforth, in a changing world, to follow your own path is more important than attempting (always in vain) to reach a “brighter tomorrow”, we set off.

As everybody can see, it was indeed a political project from the very start, and a very ambitious one; political in the noblest sense of the word.

The AEGEE-EUROPE idea was therefore of a complexity far superior to that of a simple European student movement in the making. It did indeed possess some additional characteristics:

- A powerful feeling of assuming a collective responsibility for the future of Europe
- The certainty of being pioneers in a new type of European integration
- A specific approach, that from the beginning we named “pragmatic utopianism”, which pushes you to create means to serve your objectives and not to define your objectives according to the means in your possession.

These characteristics are rooted in the first three years of AEGEE-EUROPE and shaped the collective behavior of several hundred of us (more particularly those who were involved at the European level). Later on this was also what placed AEGEE-EUROPE in serious dilemmas as to its identity; AEGEE was indeed genetically programmed to be anything but “a simple European student movement”. But let me start at the beginning.

From a project for a student “megarave” in Paris to the launching of the first “Etats Généraux des Etudiants Européens”⁶

In January '84 a very rare opportunity presented itself of setting up a six-month

collaboration between the *Bureaux des Elèves* (BDE: student offices) of five French *grandes écoles* (prestigious professional graduate schools): [the Institut d'Etudes Politiques de Paris](#) (politics), the [Ecole Polytechnique](#) (science and technology), the [Ecole Centrale](#) (engineering), the [HEC](#) (Business) and the [ESSEC](#) (economics and business). This co-operation had nothing to do with Europe, since it consisted of organising, well before they became the fashion, a sort of student mega rave in Paris on the theme of “Industrial Decadence”. At one of the weekly dinners during which we took stock of the project’s progress, I proposed that the following year an identical event should be organised in Venice, but this time bringing together 50,000 European students. The idea, helped by a meal generously washed down with wine, seduced my colleagues from the other BDEs.

In June ’84 we were obliged to cancel our project as we could not find a sufficiently “oversized” venue in Paris (we were looking for unused factories able to hold 10,000 students). This marked the failure of a cooperation between Parisian *grandes écoles*, which was extremely rare at that time, and it was a failure all the more bitter since the potential for action constituted by those five *grandes écoles* is phenomenal in France. Their Old Boys do, in fact, make up a significant proportion of the country’s economic, political, administrative and media leaders.

I therefore suggested to my colleagues that we get together again after the summer of ’84 to decide whether to launch another project, such as... a European student congress (a “sensible” version of the idea of a European party in Venice). From September to October ’84 all the *Bureaux des Elèves* (except that of the [Ecole Centrale](#), convinced that its European Week was the height of pro-European action) agreed to join in the congress project.

To maintain a balance between technicians and administrators, we brought in the [Paris Ecole Supérieure de Télécommunications](#) (telecommunications). A few months later the [ENA](#) (public management) and [Sorbonne University](#) joined the team, and the EGEE I congress entered its preparatory stage. Its “headquarters” was in the premises of the *Bureau des Elèves* of the [Institut d'Etudes Politiques de Paris](#) (“*Sciences-Po*”) in the heart of Ministerial Paris. Mr Michel Gentot, the Director of *Science-Po* at that time, gave us very strong support by helping us to contact political leaders and allowing telephone costs to be covered by *Sciences-Po*. He is, without doubt, one of those who helped EGEE to take off.

Around January ’85, about fifteen people were actively working on the

preparation of EGEE I ⁷. Most of us knew nothing about the European Community and almost nothing about Europe. The team was composed of:

Marie-Pierre Gutmann, Stéphanie Paix, Michèle Marin, Yvan Schouker, Illann Girard ([Sciences-Po](#)), Frédéric Duverger and Olivier Lemarrois ([Polytechnique](#)), Maxime Boniteau, Emilie Delattre, Anaïk Gody, Alec de Brosses ([ESSEC](#)), Guillaume Pietruschi, Thibaud Viala ([Sup-Télécom](#)), Hugues Lecharny ([Sorbonne](#)), Marie-Noëlle Imbert ([Assas](#)) and Bertrand de La Chapelle ([ENA](#)).

As president of the team, I was more particularly involved in problems of coordination and finding political patronage and subsidies, as well as in one crucial problem: how to find European students?

We should remember that intra-European university level exchanges or contacts were very weak at that time. Most students wanted to go to the United States, while few went to another European country. The previous year I had hoped myself to leave for John Hopkins in Washington, but a broken leg which immobilized me for three months prevented me... luckily, I must admit! For this reason, we had to go through the European embassies in Paris and the French Cultural Centres in Europe to try to make contact with European students (a step which is no longer necessary today, thanks to AEGEE-EUROPE's activity).

The rest of the team dealt mainly with the enormous logistical problems, the sponsoring and the conference speakers. I should point out that AEGEE I, which started on the 16th of April 1985 and lasted a week, brought together about 350 students to take part in two big parties (at the *Conciergerie* and the *Château Maison-Laffite*), two receptions (at the *Assemblée Nationale* and the *Mairie de Paris*) and conferences given by over sixty speakers from amongst the most prestigious in France. These conferences took place daily in seven different venues ([Sciences-Po](#), [Polytechniques](#), [EDDEC](#), [HEC](#), [Sup-Télécom](#), [ENA](#), [La Sorbonne University](#)), for all partners had to be kept happy. Since some of these schools were situated more than twenty kilometers from Paris, I leave you to imagine the feats of organisation that had to be achieved by the students preparing the congress.

To give our project credibility, we had decided to obtain the highest political patronage, balancing it between right and left. In February we had achieved our goal by obtaining the patronage of President François Mitterrand (thanks to the confidence the education adviser at that time, Ms Michèle Gendreau-Massaloux, had placed in us), of ex-President Valérie Giscard d'Estaing (thanks to the

intervention of Mr Alain Lamassoure, one of his close collaborators), of the Mayor of Paris, Mr Jacques Chirac, and of the ex-Prime Minister, Mr Raymond Barre.

As far as I know, this was the first time during that period preceding the first governmental cohabitation that all of those public figures had given their support to the same event.

We had succeeded in obtaining prestigious patronage, as well as some of the best French specialists in many fields as speakers. Wide media coverage was ensured, more particularly through a partnership with *Le Monde* (press) and RTL (radio and television). Thanks to the active support of Mr Jean-Marie Dupont, *Le Monde* gave us editorial support, as well as material help by printing the brochure and posters for the congress. At RTL Mr Jacques Rigaud, Managing Director of RTL at the time, gave us important editorial help as well as advertising flashes announcing our event.

And, finally, prestigious receptions at the National Assembly and the Paris Town Hall were planned.

Yet, the money was not coming in, despite a small grant from the Ministry of Universities and advertising in the congress brochure.

This situation provoked a crisis meeting in March '85, during which the majority of BDEs expressed their desire to cancel the project because of the financial risk. Contrary to this dominant tendency, I defended the idea that we should not cancel for the following two reasons:

- We would in any case, at this stage in the proceedings, be in deficit, given the expenses already undertaken.

- If the congress was a great success we would find the money after the event, for it was not a question of just stopping there, but of setting up a permanent association.

The fact that most of the team preparing the congress was not interested in going further than that first event (seen as a sort of formative challenge), did give legitimate cause for worry, but the argument of an after-the-event “rescue” as a result of the operation’s success succeeded in seducing enough people for the project to be maintained without significant cut-backs (which would have reduced the costs slightly, but our impact capacity enormously... and therefore our capacity for finding financing afterwards). We had to demonstrate in a striking way that our congress introduced a new parameter into the construction of Europe at that time:

the widespread involvement of students.

How a Prime Minister almost nipped EGEE I in the bud

Yet, before getting to that stage, we still had a multitude of obstacles to overcome, such as that particularly piercing day when *Le Monde* printed the page announcing our event (a free page forming part of our partnership with the paper). This full page appeared at the beginning of April '85 and announced, in particular, the names of the four “great” speakers who would take part in EGEE I's four plenary sessions. These were to be Mr Rocard (at [Sciences-Po](#)), Mr Barre (at [Sciences-Po](#)), Mr Giscard d'Estaing (at the [Ecole Polytechnique](#)) and Mr Fabius (Prime Minister at the time, at the [ENA](#)).

This right-left balance was essential, since it constituted one of the two conditions imposed by President Mitterrand for his patronage of EGEE I (I shall come back later to his second condition).

Hence, I had been trying for several months to obtain written confirmation of Mr Fabius' presence at the [ENA](#) conference. His advisers had assured me he would be there, given “*his pro-European convictions and his commitment to youth*”; but since then it had proved impossible to obtain the slightest confirmation, so two days before the publication of the page in *Le Monde*, I wrote a last letter to the Prime Minister saying that if we did not receive written confirmation we would consider that the answer was yes! Still, there was no reply.

Therefore, the page was published in *Le Monde* (to whom I had not really explained our little problem with Mr Fabius). At one o'clock in the afternoon the Prime Minister's chief private secretary telephoned me at [Sciences-Po](#), absolutely furious and threatening me with the direst of horrors for having used the Prime Minister's name without his authorization, explaining also that we would be taken to court, that EGEE was just hot air and that they were going to reduce us to dust by asking all our partners to withdraw their support (partners who, of course, were listed in that page in *Le Monde*). I turned deathly pale, as the members of the congress team present in the office at the time can confirm. I tried in vain to explain to him why we had been obliged to act like that, but he would not listen. In the middle of his systematic denigration of what we were doing, he suddenly added that furthermore, he knew we did not have Mr Mitterrand's patronage either. This

was the one word too much that allowed me to set the record straight: we did indeed have a letter from the President's chief private secretary granting us this patronage. I offered to send him a copy of this immediately, and suddenly, as if by a miracle, his attitude changed completely! There was no further question of legal action, nor of boycott, but on the contrary, an assurance of the depth of "*Mr Fabius' pro-European sentiments and his commitment to youth...*". In addition, I was invited to send another request to the Prime Minister.

Mr .Fabius did not come to the [ENA](#) conference, which was indeed his right. Even worse though, his advisers contacted our various partners (Le Monde, the Ministry of Universities, and the Chancellery of Universities...) behind the scenes to try to discredit our congress.

Le Monde politely sent them packing, while at the same time asking me not to announce any more prime ministers in the future without written confirmation. Ms Hélène Ahrweiller, Chancellor of Universities and Rector of the Paris Academy, who supported us most enthusiastically, put through a direct call, in the presence of a colleague (Hugues Lecharny) and myself, to the Prime Minister's office to explain that she would get extremely angry if they continued to act in that way (for those acquainted with Ms Ahrweiller this was a very serious threat, for that remarkable person was also a formidable opponent). At the same time, Mr .Francis Gutmann, Secretary General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and father of one of the members of the EGEE I, who had agreed to speak during the great debate planned at the [Sorbonne University](#), also intervened most efficiently to put a halt to this "stifling" operation.

After a week everything had fallen back into place... but EGEE I had once again just missed annihilation.

Four phrases headed that famous page in Le Monde. One of them, "*Eastern Europe is Europe as well!*" held a particular significance, for I had to argue for a long time to convince the team of the necessity of inserting it into our publicity. We should indeed remember that in that period to most young people, and to even the not-so-young, Eastern Europe, first of all, seemed almost further away than India or China, and secondly, references to Eastern Europe might make us appear to be a pro-Soviet organisation (for the Soviets were constantly promoting the idea of Pan-European friendship – see below). Yet, I insisted on that phrase, inspired by a recent personal experience involving a young Czech I had met during a visit to Prague organised by the [Sciences-Po](#) BDE in February '84. In discovering her

country and living with her and her family on several occasions during 1984 and 1985, I had understood that this part of our continent was entirely European, and its destiny was to become so again in the fullest sense of the word in the near future... as long as the West made no compromise with the Soviet system, which was in the process of internal decomposition.

It was this same conviction that would make me include identical items in the IDE programme in 1988⁸.

This clear statement would also play a crucial role during EGEE's expansion in Germany from '85 to '88 (see below).

How to survive a 500,000-FF deficit

In addition, while all this was going on, our deficit was increasing without us realizing it. As each of the five BDEs had insisted on having its own cheque-book, this was generating spending of which the treasurer, Frédéric Duverger of the [Ecole Polytechnique](#), was unaware. Certainly not “dishonest” spending, but each BDE was getting on with its conference or workshop or reception, including this service or those facilities in their plans, without the rest of the team necessarily being informed. The end result was that, right in the middle of the congress, a demoralized Frédéric Duverger came to find me and informed me that our deficit was going to reach 500,000 FF (until then our worst estimations had been of 200,000 FF). I was overwhelmed, too.

Yet, the congress was carrying on, proving to be an enormous success with participants, speakers, patrons and the media. We obtained TV and radio interviews, full page spreads in *Le Monde*, articles in all the major French newspapers... and 400 big posters, put up by the City of Paris on its official billboards, announced our major public conferences.

Then, once the amount of the deficit was made known, two different phenomena took place: most of the organisers left us in the days following the end of the congress; of a team of about forty during the congress, only ten or so remained; a group of forty to sixty European students agreed to help us financially (in particular, by offering to forego reimbursement of their travel costs).

Never did so many (European students) owe so much to so few

In the following weeks, the remaining core of Parisian students that fought to keep EGEE alive (that is, to cover its enormous deficit), developed an uncommon amount of energy. In three weeks we had managed to gather about 180,000 FF from student associations, students who did or did not belong to the team, and team members' families. It was this incredible effort that allowed EGEE to survive and AEGEE-EUROPE to exist. Directly after birth we had to battle for survival. Without those people nothing would have remained of the months of effort and the intense days of the congress.

You have perhaps noticed that I have made no mention of any form of EC support. This is because there wasn't any! We had indeed sent in a request, but it had been mislaid by the adviser to Mr. Delors to whom we had sent it. This is a good example of our initial problem: nobody really believed that the congress would take place as we had planned it... and we knew absolutely nothing about the EC system.

Luckily, thanks to the presence of Commissioner Sutherland (in charge of education in 1985) and his adviser, Mr. Michel Richonnier, at the great debate-conference at the [Sorbonne University](#), the European Commission became aware that we were in fact "a gift from the gods" in that period when political desire to revitalize the EC was coming up against general indifference and a feeling of "Eurosclerosis". Right there in Paris, hundreds of European students had gathered together, spontaneously, to talk about Europe!

Mr Richonnier explained our case to Mr Domenico Lenarduzzi (in charge of preparing "[Erasmus](#)"), and on the grounds of our letter which had lain unanswered for months, they decided to give us an after-the-event grant of 20,000 ECU. The intervention of both these men was a determining factor in our survival. By June we knew we were going to survive, since our bank, the CCF, accorded us unlimited time to make up the remainder of the deficit.

The fact that I knew the Managing Director of the [CCF](#), Mr Michel Pebereau, who was, just like me (as student representative), on the [Sciences-Po](#) Board of Directors, helped me to convince the bank. It was Mr. Mr Pebereau in person who granted us this extension, and thus it led to the development of a true partnership with our bank over the following years. The way we had fought to save EGEE had,

I think, convinced them of our reliability (which is not generally a bank's first sentiments toward a student association owing 500,000 FF). Yet, before reaching this point we had had to go through a really terrible period.

In practical and intellectual terms, that is how AEGEE-EUROPE began.

The immense difficulties that we successfully managed to overcome since the founding congress established four characteristics of AEGEE-EUROPE for its first three years:

- we were: an extremely voluntary movement which first identified its objectives and then mobilized its energies to find (or create) the means to reach them (as with the satellite video link-up the following year, for example).

- an organisation which undertook long-term action and proved to those around it (potential members, banks, sponsors, institutions...) that, contrary to the widespread image, young people and associations could be reliable.

- a student movement that wished to speak in the name of youth, not because we were young, but because as students lucky enough to be benefiting from advanced education, access to universities, and therefore, to a certain form of influence in our societies, we could act as spokesmen to young people on European questions (provided we did not, of course, retreat back into the restricted student world, but remained open to other young people and in constant dialogue with the rest of our society – institutions, media, business...)

- a pioneer movement which was prepared to take important risks to achieve its objectives.

On this last point I would like to emphasize that as long as one behaves intelligently, the risks are limited. We did indeed succeed in pursuing the organisation of a “complete” EGEE I congress which was extremely visible and, although it most certainly led to a large deficit, on the other hand, it allowed us to create sufficiently strong interest for some people to wish to give us a chance to develop. You are what you give to others; this should, I believe, be the motto of a movement such as AEGEE-EUROPE.

All these difficulties were part of a context in which everybody thought that we were mad to continue, that it would lead us nowhere and that we were wasting our time and money. For young people 20 to 25 years old that means intense pressure (in addition to the practical and financial pressures already mentioned). Also, I must admit that I am proud to have belonged to a group of people generous enough

and perceptive enough to have understood that what they were trying to achieve bore important promises for the future (even if at that precise moment it all seemed illusory).

To conclude this part, I would like to mention the second condition laid down by President Mitterand for his patronage. For reasons of simplicity, our original project had been to bring together students from only four countries: Germany, France, Italy, and the United Kingdom, but President Mitterand informed us, through Ms Gendreau-Massaloux, that he would only accord us his patronage if we invited students from the ten EC countries. This seemed a heavy constraint to us, since we already had enough problems with four countries, but we also knew that the patronage of the President of the Republic would be a crucial factor in the success of the congress, so we looked for students from the ten. In hindsight I believe that this constraint was very beneficial to EGEE. Indeed, without it we would not, for example, have invited any of the Dutch who went on to play key roles in the movement's development over the months and years to come. The virtual impossibility of developing outside of London, and the weakness of the Italian contribution (because of the immobility of their political and administrative machinery at that time) would therefore rapidly have transformed EGEE into a one-to-one Franco-German debate (which is rarely a way to heaven but more surely a ticket to hell).

It is perhaps not unhelpful for those who are today discussing future models for European integration to think over these elements which reflect the teachings of an "in vivo" experience of the European integration of young European citizens conducted on a large scale. In politics, the shortest and easiest routes are often the worst.

[6](#) European student forum

[7](#) Until 1987 AEGEE was called EGEE, but the threat of court action by an association of French executives also named EGEE forced us to add an A.

[8](#) IDE (Initiative for a European Democracy), created in 1988 by the principal members in charge of [AEGEE-EUROPE](#) during its first three years, is a movement which presented lists in the 1989 European elections in three countries (Spain, France and the Netherlands) simultaneously. One of the five main points our programme set out in 1988 was entitled "For a European policy in the EC" and called for the development of a specific EC policy toward Eastern Europe. This idea was developed from the affirmation that in the ten years to come the EC would have to deal with the

“return to Europe” of these countries and that phenomenon had to be anticipated, particularly if we wished to avoid Germany being obliged to follow an autonomous path. At that time, journalists and other observers of the European utopianism were disconnected from reality!

Creating the statutes

(July – November '85)

Making Europe on the 14th of July in Paris

A few weeks after EGEE I, we received invitations to attend the 14th of July 1985 celebrations as President François Mitterrand's guests. The Elysée had originally wished to invite about 200 European students and had asked us to find them. A week later this had been accomplished at the cost to Philippe Micaelli of a sleepless night spent keyboarding the list into the computer. In the end, only a score of students were invited, but it was thanks to this we were able to watch the classic 14th of July procession from the places of honor and attend the party in the gardens of the Presidential Palace.

This invitation gave us the opportunity of organising a meeting over the following two days to adopt the European statutes of the association and create the first European Board of Directors. As we could not pay travel expenses, only those who were really motivated made the journey. About a dozen people came, from Paris of course, Leiden, Milan, Brussels, Munich and Strasbourg (Giacomo Neri, Tania Zwaan, Beatrice Anacker, Ann-Katrin Lehr and two young men from Munich, Jean-François Monteil, Philippe Micaelli, Frédéric Duverger, Bernard Establie, Ilyena Drutskoy, Bernard Raispaut,).

These were two days of intense discussions about the project I was proposing. Even then, some people defended the idea that the CD (Comité Directeur: Board of Directors) should be elected member by member and should be a coordination rather than a management committee (these two closely-linked proposals resurfaced repeatedly during the seven Agoras in which I participated, where each time they were rejected by a large majority). Fortunately, most of those present in Paris in July of '85 believed, as I did, that such a proposal would, by encouraging the development of branchesantennae with nothing in common but the name, make it impossible for EGEE to develop as a unifying and original movement.

A European organisation with no national level

As for the project I had presented, it was based on the concept of local organisations assembled in a European structure run by a general assembly (Agora) and an executive power (CD), both European. The gamble was that we could bypass the national level, but to be able to ensure the unity and cohesion of such a structure, it was vital for the European levels (Agora and CD) to have real decision-making power: a strong Agora making decisions on major issues and a powerful CD elected by list so as to be really able to implement policies decided on by the Agora. Any other solution would, in my opinion, have led our new movement into a proliferation of the “cancerous”, or perhaps less macabre “franchising” type, developing a large number of branchesantennae, but without necessarily acquiring the four characteristics mentioned above, allowing it to influence its epoch. It was not a question of creating yet another European movement, but rather of initiating an innovative process at the confluence of the European idea and democracy. We therefore needed a powerful and efficient organisation, not a vague net stretched over incoherent realities.

Bringing Europeans into contact, rather than talking about Europe

With the same logic in mind, I proposed that the branchesantennae, in order to become or remain EGEE branchesantennae, be obliged to organise a symposium each year bringing at least one hundred students together, fifty of which were to come from other European countries and be provided with accommodation and food free of charge. In exchange, the EGEE-Europe network would participate in the organisation of this type of symposium, more particularly by guaranteeing the presence of those fifty European students (who were not simply to be tourists). Each level (local and European) thus imposed an ambitious objective on the other one. We shall see that this technique was one of the reasons for EGEE-Europe’s extremely rapid success⁹. It was no great surprise that those in favor of the idea of a CD elected member by member and strictly limited to a coordination role, were no longer favorable to this proposition.

As more animated discussion took place around the idea I defended that the classic pro-European topics such as “[European institutions](#)” or “The Role of the

[European parliament](#)” or “Europe and Young People”... should not be dealt with within our symposia but that, on the contrary, we should concentrate on topics of interest to European students as students, and as young people. By dealing with these topics and by bringing in European students and participants, we would integrate the European dimension. While the first approach is immediately limited to those with a strong interest in Europe, the second encourages those who do not really feel concerned to take an interest in Europe. In European terms, and over the past 40 years, only [AEGEE-EUROPE](#) has succeeded in evolving from a sect to a mass movement.

The most important thing was to make European students want to work together and to give them an instrument, EGEE-Europe, which would allow them to implement their joint projects.

The last crucially important element concerning the symposia was that the majority declared itself in favor of unofficial “drinks” and discussions and the systematic organisation of “European Nights” at the end of symposia. A minority (always the same) opposed this on the grounds that “it wasn’t serious”. The future proved that these unofficial moments were a strategic element enabling us to attract an increasing number of students (we mustn’t forget that three years later there were almost 10,000 of us). Thus, this was when the traditional “European Night” closing AEGEE symposia was decided upon.

Non translated French-English: EGEE-speak

There was at least one point on which agreement was almost unanimous, and it was not the least surprising one since it concerned the crucial question of working languages. I personally proposed that French and English be the two official [AEGEE-EUROPE](#) languages, requiring no internal translation (which obliged all those in charge to speak at least one and understand both). On the other hand, for external needs in symposia, systematic French-English translation would be necessary as well as translation into the host country’s language if the organising branchantenna so wished. My argument was as follows (and it is still valid today): for an organisation such as ours, with very minimal funds available and therefore obliged to reduce functioning costs to a minimum, but with the objective of supporting the construction of a Europe respecting cultural diversity, the solution to the language problem was to be found at the intersection of three constraints:

- What costs the least (feasibility)
- What permits us to attain our objectives (efficiency)
- What does not involve us in practices contrary to our position (coherence)

The first constraint leads to the use of only one language, in this case English.

As for the second constraint, the two-fold problem of financial efficiency and recruiting efficiency again calls into question the simplicity linked to the use of a single language. With English, communication can indeed be established with about 70% of EC students speaking a foreign language; if French is added, the figure goes up to more than 95%. On the other hand, several languages must be added to cover the remaining 5%. What is more, communication is possible in English and French with almost 100% of EC political and administrative leaders, while with only English the figure drops to about 50%. There is then an extremely pragmatic element that cannot be ignored.

As for the last constraint, how could we be credible defending a Europe that preserves its cultural diversity within its integration process, if we ourselves were incapable of facing up to the difficulties created by the use of two working languages? It was certainly not our style to practice the opposite of what we preached!

On the other hand, and this was lengthily discussed at the time, the Germans and Italians maintained that in the use of a single language they saw confirmation of increased long-term marginalization of their own languages (since French would be the last to become marginalized).

The decision was therefore made that non-translated French and English would be our working languages. This also had the advantage of obliging both French and English to understand the other language, an aspect that was not negligible for other Europeans.

A new organisation founded on three innovations

To sum up, AEGEE's founding was based, in intellectual terms, on three determining elements:

- A powerful European level balanced by a large number of local branchantennas (with no national level). Initially this European level was composed of two entities, the Agora and the CD; the Agora was to be capable of making strategic and general decisions, while the CD was to be able to implement

these decisions efficiently and ensure the network's coherence; "constructive suspicion" inspired procedures allowing the Agora (composed of delegates from the various branches/antennae) to change CDs when it wished, on condition that it was capable of effecting a new one, so as to avoid instability and "negative" majorities.

– A responsible CD, elected by list and so proving to the Agora its ability to act as a coherent team (as is the case in governments, sports teams or enterprise management teams). For me, this choice has always been based on the conviction that democracy cannot exist without responsibility, in particular the responsibility of the decision-makers; if citizens do not give those they elect the means to implement their policies, they cannot then hold them responsible if nothing is done; and in concrete terms in AEGEE's case, isn't the ability to form a coherent team of twenty members plus ten substitutes (as was the case up until 1990) the best indication that this group of people is capable of preserving the unity and coherence of the movement in the face of its immense natural diversity?

A linguistic practice both internal (with non-translated 50%-50% French-English) and external (with the language of the country, as well as French and English, being integrated into each symposium) that represents a dynamic compromise between practical constraints and European cultural necessities. No one language should be sufficient for acting in and completely understanding EGEE, and everyone must make an effort to integrate; this is how EGEE moved toward resemblance with Europe, when a single language model would have differentiated it by artificially eliminating one of Europe's basic characteristics: its linguistic diversity.

All these points finally received a majority vote, with only three of the four people from Munich opposing them. The statutes were almost ready and were to be adopted by about thirty members at a meeting in Munich in October 1985. Up until then the structure of the CD was still officially founded on the original association of five BDEs, although in reality only the Parisians who had agreed to fight for the movement's survival after April '85 remained. It was therefore becoming urgent to modify the statutes, particularly as the CD needed to be "Europeanised".

Yet, this itself created a thorny problem for me: How to convince a group of twenty Parisians who had fought like lions for several months to save EGEE, that two thirds of them were going to have to stand down in favor of other Europeans?

This was very difficult for me, for although on the one hand they were all my

friends (and happily still are), they had, above all, given their time, their energy and their money to allow EGEE to survive after EGEE I. They were competent, intelligent and motivated, but I was nevertheless going to have to ask most of them to leave the CD because they were French. Fortunately, and precisely because they were competent, intelligent and motivated, they understood that this was a sine qua non condition for EGEE's development in Europe. Thus, in October '85, the first European Board of Directors (CD) was elected on a provisional basis to hold office until the first Agora, planned for April '86 in Munich.

⁹ Some ten years later, the methodological approach of the transnational human networks I developed in a professional context have allowed me to better understand the crucial importance that this constraint (and our determination to apply it strictly up until 1988) played in the prodigious development of [AEGEE-EUROPE](#) over those three years. Indeed, analysis of transnational human networks has shown that their "strength" (power, efficiency, operational capacity) depends for the most part on that of their weakest components. As in a chain, the weakest link determines the strength of the whole. In [AEGEE-EUROPE](#), this constraint allowed the strength of each new component, and therefore of the entire network, to increase rapidly and systematically over three years.

EGEE takes off

(December '85 – April '86)

Three major problems and an enormous piece of good luck still awaited us before this Agora took place. Two of these problems were linked to the challenges we had set for ourselves in “opening up” this new path to the construction of Europe. The third arose from the first major internal conflicts which almost blew EGEE apart; the piece of good luck was named .Mr Bernard Rossmann, who was to become a major sponsor of our movement.

EGEE confronted with the three plagues of Europe

After the summer of '85, EGEE's development again found itself at a decisive turning point.

The situation was as follows: we still had a considerable deficit; we could not remain much longer in the [Sciences-Po](#) BDE (so we had to find an office... preferably a free one!) and the twenty to forty people interested in EGEE in various European cities were losing their motivation and/or wondering how to start something up locally. Small as we were, we were on the point of disappearing by being diluted into a too large European Community. Despite the creation of new branchesantennae, as in London (the English students had ignored EGEE I) with Andrew Oldland and Tim Rogmans, we lacked the money and credibility to reach a critically important size and hence set off self-perpetuating development.

Existing – in the eyes of European students, institutions and media

I therefore proposed that we organise a particular kind of event to help us attain our two strategic objectives:

- Demonstrate our ability to act in diverse EC countries
- Demonstrate our ability to carry out projects that no one else could succeed with.

Once we had demonstrated these, we would at last be taken for what we were: an

entirely new and innovative organisation resembling no other European organisation.

Why this desire? Because European movements had the very bad reputation of being long-winded organisations composed mainly of old bores (sometimes young ones), whereas we wanted to attract young people full of energy. Plus, on the other hand, it was because European movements were all organised on a national basis, discussing Europe among nationals, while we wanted to prove that our structure, devoid of national levels, allowed 100% utilization of the European dimension and made joint work between Europeans possible.

To attain these objectives we were going to have to give a demonstration of an impressive capacity for action, so as to convince students, instructors, press and sponsors.

The “show” was a double billing: a series of eight symposia held simultaneously in eight European cities in January ’86, and a satellite video link-up between those same eight cities in March ’86.

Originally these two operations were to take place simultaneously in January ’86 (we had furthermore obtained a grant from the Commission allowing us to give financial help to our emerging branch antennae for the occasion). Alas, despite the fantastic work carried out by Philippe Micaelli and his team, the satellite link-up had to be postponed until March, a delay that Philippe Micaelli and myself had to conceal for a few weeks and only announce once we were certain that all the symposia would definitely take place in January. Indeed, although everyone was in favor of the idea of simultaneous symposia, everyone also wanted to organise theirs on the date that best suited them, and only the existence of the satellite link-up had allowed us to propose one single date. As we could not change the symposia date, they would take place even without the satellite link-up. At first there were, of course, a few people who reproached us for our lack of transparency, but the simultaneous symposia proved such a success that we were quickly forgiven. With them, we really had succeeded in an exceptional and unprecedented operation which made hundreds of students from Milan (Giacomo Neri) to London (Andrew Oldland and Tim Rogmans) via Munich (Beatrice Anacker and Ann-Katrin Lehr), Leiden (Tania Zwaan), Paris (Stéphanie Paix), Strasbourg (Jean-François Monteil), Nice (Guillaume Pietruschi and Stéphane Garnaud) and Brussels (Ilyena Drutskoy), live all in the same rhythm.

In addition, around each of these organisers was a group of fifty to a hundred

participants (in each city, half the participants came from other organising cities – the first application of the principle of 50% of students coming from other EC countries and being fed and lodged by the host city). It is not necessary to point out that such organisation multiplied the number of members in an impressive fashion. We were now over 500 in six countries. Remember that nine months previous we had been just fifty Parisians! We had considerably widened our circle of official contacts everywhere, as in Leiden where the eleven Member States' ambassadors to the Netherlands attended the symposium opening. One of them, the German Ambassador .Mr Otto Von der Gablentz, henceforth gave us regular support.

The video satellite link-up in March '86 was characteristic of the spirit of AEGEE at that time; without money or any particular outside recognition or experience in the television or video field, an embryo network had decided to organise four hours of video link-up by satellite between eight cities. Each of those cities was to broadcast a thirty-minute programme composed of a combination of political speeches, “happenings”, songs and computer generated images (the very first European images). Philippe Micaelli succeeded in coordinating and making possible an operation that we would never have undertaken if we had had the slightest knowledge of the realities of the European broadcasting system!

Developing – or: when modern technology needs innocence to be useful

We naively thought that somewhere there existed a “Mr European Satellite” who could say, “Bravo, children, I'll give you four free hours of satellite!”. We were a long way from reality; at no point prior to our operation had a telecommunications operator exchanged satellites and connections free of charge with European counterparts. Yet, it was precisely that innocence, as well as our persistence, bolstered by the ability we had to tackle each ministry and national organism from inside its country, that made the impossible possible. The French public telephone company agreed to pay for the “link-up” for all countries and to cover the cost of hiring the main stage of Bercy in Paris. Andrew Oldland soon succeeded in convincing the British public telephone company, as did Bram van Heel and Rikstus Oosterhuis in the Netherlands. Germany posed a problem by only agreeing to pay half an hour of “link-down”. Milan was unable to participate because the Italian government refused financial support. Madrid (a branch antenna created in

January '86) almost managed to join in the operation but in the end the Spanish government refused despite the efforts of Richard Lopez Aranda. To have Brussels, through which the images had to be transmitted to Amsterdam, we were obliged to tell the Belgian public telephone company, who did not want to support the event, that we would pay for their services later. In the end, seven cities took part in the operation: Paris, Munich, London, Strasbourg, Amsterdam, Brussels and Nice. The re-transmission lasted four hours and twenty minutes. Several thousand students over the whole of Europe attended it live, and some of Europe's most important public figures took part: .Mr Pierre Pflimlin, President of the [European parliament](#), .Mr Manuel Marin, European Commissioner for Education, .Mr Clinton Davies, European Commissioner for Transport, .Mr van Ekelen, Dutch Minister for European Affairs, Ms Helene Ahrweiler, Chancellor of French Universities, and numerous other leaders in political, administrative, cultural and other fields.

Out of those four hours twenty minutes, Philippe Micaelli made a twelve-minute video cassette of which the European Commission, thanks to Ms Jocelyne Motoulle of DG X, made us a hundred copies (fifty SECAM, fifty PAL). Correctly used, those one hundred cassettes allowed us to considerably accelerate EGEE-EUROPE'S development. Over the next two years, in fact, as soon as a group of students asked us to come and present EGEE with a view to eventually creating a new branch antenna, we first asked them to prepare a video cassette recorder and began with the twelve-minute cassette. Only after showing it did we enter into real discussions!

This video showed what EGEE was better than any speeches – something unimaginable carrying out incredible projects. By showing the visible, and easiest to understand, part of the iceberg, this video was an ideal introduction to the most innovative part: the objectives and the organisation.

Taking care not to implode

I cannot deny that from that time on we began to display a certain amount of arrogance, and this was both justifiable, given the astonishing nature of our achievements, and necessary because it allowed EGEE, as an extremely young movement, to avoid being “dragged down” by its environment. Our arrogance allowed us to politely decline all offers of co-operation from other European organisations: “Our lack of a national level means that EGEE is far ahead of other

organisations and incompatible with them; in a word, get rid of your national levels and then we can talk!” This was indeed a bit disagreeable, but it had the advantage of leaving the field free for us to perfect our new method of organisation and concentrate all our energies on our projects instead of dispersing them by spending hours in discussion with organisations that had achieved less in ten years than we had in one!

Results were not long in coming; apart from the inevitable cash flow problems (which any entirely voluntary student organisation must experience to remain dynamic and efficient), we had grown from eightbranch antennae in January ‘86 to thirty a year later, we had greatly increased the number of congresses and symposia and we had a growing membership. And so we began preparing ourselves to be able to play a key role in the “Great [Erasmus](#) Game” of 1986-87 (see below).

A problem arose toward the end of ‘85 when I suddenly realised there was something strange about the Munich branchantenna; most of those who had participated in EGEE I had left the branchantenna, and new members had joined whose ideas about EGEE seemed very different from the decisions made during the two European meetings. At first I put these problems down to cultural differences and my imperfect knowledge of other Europeans, but the increasing gravity of the problems, from a refusal of the statutes to a redefinition of the aims and including the use of a specific name for Germany (Forum. Europaischer Studenten) and a demand for the creation of national levels, made me understand that this was something more than a simple intercultural problem. The other members of the CD also began finding it strange that the EGEE-Munich representatives always presented their positions as reflecting the desires of their members as a whole (there seemed to be no disagreement) and claimed they were expressing a “German position” on Europe, democracy and community life!

One day, thanks to some members of EGEE-Munich who had taken part in EGEE I, including Beatrice Anacker and Sepp Schnoll, I learnt that the branchantenna’s local Board of Directors was in fact systematically misrepresenting the decisions and intentions of the European CD to its members. More specifically, I was being presented as a sort of “Napoleon” (sic) who “hated the Germans” (sic). Those who did not wish to believe such nonsense found themselves ousted from the branchantenna!

I decided at once to change my strategy radically and undertake strict application of European decisions on our statutes and objectives. A very important meeting of

the European CD took place in Leiden in February '86, to which I also invited students from the newly created branchantennas of Heidelberg and Kiel. For two whole days discussions took place with the people from Munich (who, we must not forget, were members of the CD). As we had imagined, none of the Heidelberg or Kiel students supported the so-called "German approach" defended by the leaders of EGEE-Munich, so the European CD adopted a very firm position, reaffirming that its decisions were made through an entirely European approach, not made by just a few solitary individuals, but the result of European consensus.

First experiences of European democracy in a Bavarian tavern

Since EGEE II was to take place in Munich itself, I decided to spend the three weeks preceding the congress on the spot, both to participate in the organisation and to talk with the branchantenna members. This was the course of action that I systematically took whenever problems arose in an branchantenna – go there and talk to the members, whatever the atmosphere. The local CD was of course fiercely opposed to this idea. Fortunately, Beatrice Anacker, Sepp Schnoll (who put me up during those three weeks and showed me around Munich) and Alexandra von Kalnein (all of whom had taken part in EGEE I) offered me their friendship and support, for the first week in particular was very difficult. Many of those who, like Katharina Borchardt, for example, were actively organising EGEE II, were convinced that I was indeed the anti-German monster that had been described to them. Knowing that, I understood their distrustful reaction to me and patiently tried to create the conditions for real, frank discussion with the whole branchantenna. I did not arrive in "French President" style, but on the contrary, as a partner looking to engage in dialogue with people – explaining the position and clarifying the situation at the local level.

On this occasion I learnt that, within integrated European movements such as [AEGEE-EUROPE](#), the president's legitimacy, while based upon election, must be constantly re-established when there are potential sources of conflict between the European dimension and the local level. The president of such a structure is always, of course, of a given nationality and a native of a specific country; for his European legitimacy to be recognised, everywhere, he must constantly prove it to

be an operational legitimacy, capable of resolving the inevitable conflicts between unity and diversity without fundamentally frustrating any party. This is a difficult and exhausting exercise, but also an infinitely enriching one that is in any case unavoidable as long as this type of structure intends to prevent any internal contradictions from paralysing it instead of stimulating it. In passing, it is essential to note that although the president embodies that legitimacy, it is above all a team legitimacy which alone can truly embody the European identity and make efficient action possible in situations of conflict between the European and the local levels.

Thanks to the remarkable work of the EGEE-Munich team and the support of the entire network (despite internal political tensions, proof of the movement's vitality), EGEE II was a success and was honoured by the patronage of the German President, Richard von Weizsacker. Thanks to the efforts of Andrew Oldland, the British Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, also granted us her patronage as did the president of the European Commission, Jacques Delors. President Francois Mitterrand sent us a letter of support.

The European Commissioner for Education, Manuel Marin, also gave us his patronage as well as financial support (as he did for many other projects in the course of those three years). He was even to have spoken at EGEE II, but was, alas, prevented from attending when he broke his leg a few days before the congress. This missed appointment with us did not, fortunately, prevent him from systematically supporting our actions throughout the years he was responsible for education.

Our European institutional legitimacy was therefore spreading considerably, as was the active core of our movement.

At the Agora following the EGEE II Congress, discussion was less tense than had been feared. The Munich delegates found themselves extremely isolated (no otherbranch antenna, in particular not even German, rallied round them) and voices from inside thebranch antenna itself (such as Beatrice Anacker) very clearly voiced their disagreement with the "delegates". The questions of objectives and name were settled once and for all.

Discovering an organisation amnesic from birth

The debates for which this first Agora was the theatre were to present the same characteristics as those of the following six Agorae in which I was to participate.

Since at each Agora most of the delegates were new (a problem inherent to student movements with their constant changeover of leaders), the Munich Agora could never, in terms of content, have been anything more than the first of a long series. The more recurrent issues raised included:

Why don't we elect the CD member by member instead of electing it by blocked list? Why don't we cooperate with other movements that wish to? Why don't we move into Eastern Europe, the USSR and further afield immediately?

In this first Agora, as in the following ones, after long and fastidious debate the majority of delegates voted in favour of the list system in order to maintain an efficient, responsible CD capable of running the movement. The delegates also voted for the principle of non-cooperation with national level movements, being convinced that the inverse principle ran the risk of making us regress. They accepted without voting (for that we would have to wait for the Heidelberg Agora) that, while reaffirming that Eastern Europe was indeed a part of Europe, we should not launch into the irresponsible and suicidal act of developing in the direction of the Communist bloc.

Another decisive result was the work of EGEE II; it was here that the first totally legitimate election of a Board of Directors winning by an overwhelming majority took place.

It should also be remembered that for this Agora the EGEE-Paris branchantenna had agreed to reduce its voting weight to a level comparable with that of the other branchantennas (despite the fact that it still represented almost 40% of members at that time). Vacating democratic space for others is another lesson learnt from this period of EGEE. An unbalanced AEGEE is like an unbalanced Europe: a non-viable project.

An essential lesson in European politics and democracy

Another lesson I learnt from this period was that claims by a few individuals of the same nationality of the type: "In our country we think like this" or "That is unacceptable to the mentality of our country", when they are neither soundly argued nor carefully checked out, are one of the biggest snares in the construction of Europe. Most of the time these individuals, short on arguments or by pure intellectual dishonesty, are really trying to reduce you to silence by disguising their

personal convictions as national arguments and telling you in an underhanded way that “You are a foreigner, so you can’t know; and in any case, on this subject, you are necessarily wrong as opposed to me, since I am a native of the country”.

This method of “discussion” is very widespread and develops rapidly within a European movement as soon as it claims to introduce a minimum of unity. It can easily fool people. For those of the nationality concerned it invokes invisible risks, reassures those who listen to it and gives him who uses it the aura of a “defender”; for other Europeans this approach, by playing on their desire not to appear “bad Europeans”, prevents any calling into question of the principle that any native of the country knows the expectations, desires and habits of its people better than any foreigner.

Yet this principle, although probably true, is not necessarily so. Quality of analytical thinking, psychological sense etc., all play essential roles in the matter. And, on the other hand, a foreigner’s objectivity can often offer a clearer picture of things (European literature has been proving this for centuries).

Lastly, nothing can make proof, argumentation and explanation redundant. If anyone tells me, “Any Frenchman is in a better position to know what the French want concerning this or that European problem than a German or an Italian who is familiar with our country!”, I burst out laughing, because it is totally absurd, and since 1985 I have also learnt to burst out laughing when the same absurd claim is flung at me by an Englishman, a Dutchman, a German or any other European about his own country.

Yet, you need to have experienced this situation in assemblies composed of 200 to 300 Europeans to understand that, despite appearances, not allowing yourself to be “trapped” by this type of declaration requires real training.

To conclude on this point – which constitutes a fundamental element of all first steps in European politics – the claim outlined above is all the more false in that it engages in an illegitimate perversion of meaning, while containing a total negation of its so-called finality.

The perversion of meaning consists in making people forget that problems under discussion only ever concern ways of carrying out European operations. There is no question of Europeans imposing different ways of being French on the French. It is a question of finding new joint methods of teaching the French, the Germans, the Spanish, etc., to become Europeans in the sense of working together with a common

aim¹⁰.

This is linked to the fundamental negation also contained in this claim, which in fact denies any possibility of building Europe.

The claim that knowledge of a country by any non-native national is unthinkable does indeed carry all the nationalist ideology against which the European Community has been built.

Thus, we can see that at the heart of our student debates, of our Agorae and of the constitution of our network of European local branchantennae, lies the very essence of the issues at stake in the construction of Europe.

This is why AEGEE represented for us a European school of politics beyond comparison, and how by nature it contributes to training those who will make up the core of the future European political and administrative classes in the next few decades.

The arrival of a providential man

As I have already mentioned, the very pleasant surprise of this period came from meeting .Mr Bernard Rossmann. One morning in October '85 I received a telephone call at home from the vice president of an industrial group announcing that its chairman, .Mr Rossmann, a Europe enthusiast, wished to meet me. A few years previously he had created a European organisation called the OPCE (Organisation pour la Creation des Etats-Unis d'Europe: Organisation for the Creation of a United States of Europe) and wished to discuss possible cooperation.

A meeting took place a few days later during which .Mr Bernard Rossmann explained to me that on reading the articles about us in *Le Monde* in April, he had been strongly impressed by our success and hoped we could work together. Furthermore, he ran an important packaging firm, CHARFA, and could offer us substantial logistic and financial support.

After presenting our on-going projects to him (satellite video, simultaneous symposia, EGEE II ...), I explained very clearly my opinion on cooperation. As he himself had evoked notions of efficiency, I explained to him that on principle we cooperated with no one, and given that our efficiency was superior to that of his organisation, he was welcome to support us, but it would be the OPCE members who would be integrated into EGEE-EUROPE.

As he was a most efficient businessman, .Mr Rossmann's extremely pragmatic

attitude allowed business to be concluded after a brief discussion; the operation was to be presented to the OPCE, voted on and implemented in December in Strasbourg. Its dissolution was voted; some members refused to join EGEE but among the new recruits we were lucky enough to gain Bart Kruitwagen and Johannes Heister, who were both to play important roles in [AEGEE-EUROPE](#)'s development.

From then on .Mr Bernard Rossmann placed extraordinary logistic support at our disposal in the context of sponsorship: a central office (Rue d' Amsterdam in Paris) and free telephone, fax, photocopying and mailing facilities. His help thus played a decisive role in AEGEE-EUROPE's capacity to develop as rapidly as it did from '86 onward.

From a practical point of view, it made it possible for us to provide the network with information and an efficient centre of operations.

The other remarkable characteristic of the help given by .Mr Bernard Rossmann was that, in exchange, he never asked us for anything more than to be efficient and faithful to our commitment. This attitude is rare enough, it seems to me, to be worthy of emphasis here.

[10](#) And in this field no one can claim to have inherited the truth from their ancestors, since the main solution implemented up until now has been war

Rapid growth and the Erasmus affair (May '86 - May '87)

A movement spreading everywhere without anyone (except the students) really knowing what it is...

EGEE-EUROPE then entered a new stage of development. The increasing number of branchantennae, together with the launching of new long-term projects, were to lead us to become a major actor in the Erasmus affair.

Indeed, the creation of new branchantennae actively organising local symposia (in particular, a new series of simultaneous symposia) had begun to weave a vast EGEE-EUROPE web. Because of its dynamism, and thanks to visible actions such as the satellite video, the network was attracting the attention of European and national institutions. At first no one would believe in our independence, and this aspect seemed to be the most surprising thing in the world to all outside observers. Because of our French origins we were suspected of being, in fact, the instrument of Francois Mitterrand, or of Raymond Barre, or Valery Giscard d'Estaing. Nobody, or almost nobody, would believe that there was nothing more behind us than this conviction: Europe is part of our future and our future is our business!

Yet, although they did not believe in this independence, people could at least understand its meaning, which was not the case for our lack of national levels, of which no one understood the significance. You only have to read the extremely numerous press articles of the period to realise that almost all of them were trying to identify the leaders for France, Germany, Spain or the Netherlands. It seemed to be beyond the imaginative capacities of those with whom we spoke to conceive of an organisation without national structures.

From Nijmegen to Koln and from Delft to Seville, without forgetting the Heidelberg Agora, the network was spreading. The CD members were constantly traveling around the EC. We generally squeezed 3 or 4 into a car in order to spend ten days or so going from existing brancesantennae to branchantennae being

created. One of the most productive trips of this period was the one undertaken with Andrew Oldland, Rikstus Oosterhuis, Philippe Micaelli and Bernard Establie, during which we visited the majority of the Dutch, Belgian and German branchantennas. This tour allowed us, in particular, to negotiate financial support from the Commission for several of our 1987 operations, among which was the first Euro managers symposium in Koln with Christophe Leclercq, Dorothea Heister, Heike Hofmann, Marc Dietrich, Ulrike von Lonski, etc., and another round of simultaneous symposia in March '87. Although all these operations were partially financed by EC funds unearthed by the CD, each branchantenna found an important part of the financing by itself; the network was perpetuating itself.

There was also the first Euro Space Weekend, organised by AEGEE-Toulouse, Frederic Faurenes and Marc Doncieux, a fantastic communications success which managed to obtain the permission of Editions Casterman to use a drawing from the Tintin book "Destination Moon" as a logo for the congress. This symposium was also the first to welcome all our recently joined Spanish members from Madrid. It also saw the launch of the first issue of Europolis with Bernard Establie. As early as 1986-87, then, trends that have survived in AEGEE until today were already being established.

...but a movement to which everyone is starting to give their support

The amount of patronage and support was growing throughout this period. The European Commission and in particular the Task Force Education, where we were regularly in contact with Mr Lenarduzzi (who gave us constant support and contributed in a decisive way to our development), were taking us increasingly seriously and realising that we were becoming essential in everything that concerned higher education in Europe. We began to meet with officials in charge of other sectors, such as Ms Motoulle of D.G. X and Mr Bourges-Maunoury of the Secretariat-General. Both were to give regular support to AEGEE. Michel Bourges-Maunoury contributed most particularly to the perpetuation of [AEGEE-EUROPE](#) through a functioning subsidy granted from 1986 onwards.

During '86 we learnt that two projects for student programmes existed: [COMETT](#) and Erasmus. The first was adopted as of '86, the second was not. We therefore set out to publicise Erasmus, despite the fact that, since it had not been adopted, all

publicity should have been prohibited; and we asked the Commission to help us financially. At the same time we attempted to inform the press during our congresses, and to increase government awareness by talking about the programme to the advisers of heads of state, governments and ministers with whom we met regularly.

From 1986 onward I was making regular tours of European capitals in order to meet with representatives of institutions and private enterprises and try to increase our means. Each time I was accompanied by CD members from the country concerned. It was they, in fact, who were in charge. I was only there to help and to make our difference obvious – that absence of national levels.

In organisational terms, a new element was introduced with the creation of the Presidents' Conference. The aim of this new assembly was to avoid the Agora becoming encumbered by technical and operational discussions, so that it could concentrate more fully on its basic task of discussing and deciding on the main directions of the movement. In more technical terms, the Presidents' Conference aimed at stimulating concrete cooperation between branchantennas and improving the network's operational functioning. The first of these conferences, organised mainly by Bernard Raispaut and AEGEE-Brussels, was held in Brussels in November '86.

Within the CD the team was evolving. New members such as Johannes Heister and Bart Kruitwagen made their entry during the Heidelberg Agora (where the Delft branchantenna unveiled to a fascinated AEGEE its canary-yellow AEGEE-Delft sweatshirts, and established itself as the all categories champion of AEGEE-EUROPE-derived marketing). In my view, this CD team was the most complete and the most efficient. Each member had a strong personality, but debate, sometimes violent, within the CD was able to be concentrated on methods and decision-making thanks to our common ideas of what AEGEE should be. As for the debate on fundamentals, that had taken place long before when the team was being formed.

It was this team that involved itself in what can certainly be considered the AEGEE-EUROPE action that had the greatest impact on the process of building Europe: the adoption of Erasmus. Our strategy had led us to accept the candidacy of Leiden as the venue for EGEE III. The oldest branchantenna in the Netherlands was also the one from which most of the Dutch members of the CD came. In addition, I had been very impressed by the efficiency of their organisation of the January '86 symposium.

The unexpected charms of the Netherlands or the pitfalls of Europe

It should be noted here that Leiden played a major role in AEGEE-EUROPE's development (as much in the Netherlands as on a European level). It was the only town I had visited before EGEE I, at the request of Tania Zwaan, who, having been contacted by an ex-student of her university in a post at the Dutch Embassy in Paris, wished to obtain detailed information on EGEE I. Following that, my friendship with her, Rikstus Oosterhuis and several other students at the University of Leiden had led me to make that town, conveniently placed between Amsterdam and The Hague, my "base" in the Netherlands.

In the course of a score of visits over three years, I discovered numerous surprising (for a non-Dutch national) aspects of university life in the Netherlands. Like other Europeans, I was seduced and sometimes horrified by their student houses, where open conviviality was mixed with a positively chaotic environment.

I also discovered the "combats" between houses and, indeed, took part in a punitive expedition to recover the house symbol. As my friends' guest, I also had several opportunities to frequent the Minerva student society, as well as being initiated into its rites – surprising, to say the least. Dutch student life, extremely structured and with strong group organisations (from clubs with a few students, through houses, to societies resembling corporations), is fundamentally different from that in France or Italy, where a student faces his studies alone in a large university city.

This is an example of the intimate discoveries of other European student ways of life that AEGEE-EUROPE allowed us to make in most EC countries.

To come back to the congress, in true Dutch fashion the definition of the financial details of EGEE III's organisation imposed by Leiden created a nightmare for Andrew Oldland, Bernard Establie, Rikstus Oosterhuis and myself. Although a member of the CD, Henriette van Notten and all her team managed to obtain the best possible conditions for their branchantenna. Leiden even attempted to short-circuit AEGEE-EUROPE by having the Commission's grant paid directly into its own bank account (in total contradiction with all AEGEE's internal rules which, to avoid complete chaos, forbade branchantennas from contacting the Commission directly).

This type of behaviour, although particularly annoying, was in my opinion

inherent in relations between a European level and local branchantennaes. This team's attitude was not dictated by a desire to harm AEGEE-EUROPEurope, but rather by a desire for independence. This was, perhaps, proof of a certain irresponsibility with regard to the network, but certainly not of a desire to do harm – such as we came up against, later, on the part of other people in the branchantennaes.

Fortunately, by explaining the situation to .Mr Lenarduzzi, I was finally able to have the funds paid to AEGEE-EUROPE, who then transferred them to AEGEE-Leiden. The Commission was the first to prefer dealing with only one person and to fear an uncontrolled avalanche of demands, and it was important for the CD to show that our power was not fictitious. What is more, no other branchantenna tried this trick on us again.

European students to the rescue of Erasmus

If the Commission gave its support to the EGEE III congress, this was more particularly because part of the agenda was going to deal with Erasmus and [COMETT](#). The major Dutch newspaper, NRC, did in fact publish a long article entitled “Erasmus inspires European students” during EGEE III. Such articles were beginning to appear everywhere – Germany, Spain, France, Belgium ... – during our symposia.

The Commission began by explaining to us who was blocking Erasmus and why. To us who were living proof that thousands of students wished to study in Europe, it was indeed absurd that such a programme should not be adopted. The fact that university exchanges in European countries were mainly tuned in to the United States seemed to us in total contradiction with EC objectives and, in particular, with the very recent “Objective ‘92”, that “single European market” which all at once transformed our movement from a marginal initiative (the place Europe occupied in people's minds up until '85) into an innovative movement in step with the march of history.

Opposition was of course linked to budgetary questions: three Member States – France, Germany and the United Kingdom – were refusing to unblock the necessary funds.

At the time we had difficulty understanding how a decision made during a European summit (Erasmus had been launched on the initiative of heads of state and

of government) could be blocked by some of the states having taken part.

This was our first lesson in European politics: politicians only wield power insofar as they are in strict control of their administrations (which is rarely the case), which otherwise have a natural tendency to paralyse decisions behind the scenes.

In fact, the real reason for this opposition to Erasmus was not even budgetary. The national administrations of those three nice big countries did not want to see Europe encroaching on what they considered to be their private property: education, and the budget argument allowed inadmissible and very nationalistic motives to be disguised.

From what the Commission told us, France held the key position since Germany and the United Kingdom had declared they would follow her lead, if she finally gave the budgetary go-ahead.

So it was that in November 1986 we asked Ms Gendreau-Massaloux to try to arrange a meeting for us with President Mitterrand. Instead of a meeting, she proposed something extraordinary: that for the 30th anniversary of the EC's creation, the entire CD be invited to lunch by the President. She simply had to submit the proposal to his other chief advisers.

In the meantime, at the beginning of January '87, I was invited to accompany President Mitterrand to London for a speech he was to give to the Royal Institute. I took advantage of this trip to discuss the problem with Ms Elisabeth Guigou, President Mitterrand's adviser on European affairs at the time. On two occasions I also attempted, in vain, to attract President Mitterrand's attention to Erasmus. The first time was during the questions at the Royal Institute (which, incidentally, brought me a crushing remark from James Callaghan, who was chairing the session; since, as I was not a member of the Institute, I was not allowed to participate, but his British courtesy nevertheless obliged him to let me speak); the second was during lunch at the French Embassy in London. These fruitless attempts made me understand that although everything was blocked, the President was in fact under the impression that Erasmus was underway. Attracting the attention of a head of state to a non-urgent problem is hardly an easy task. His advisers were aware of this and, after another meeting with Ms Elisabeth Guigou, it was decided we should be invited to lunch in March 1987.

At the same time, and with a courage rarely found in the Commission, the Commissioner Manuel Marin had decided to withdraw the Erasmus proposal in

view of the totally ridiculous offers of financing made by the Council. This situation thus increased pressure on the three states concerned.

The President, the European students and the EC programme

On the morning of the great day, the entire CD (plus Gilio Fonck, President of AEGEE-Luxembourg, who had asked to be included in the list so that a Luxembourg national might take part in the lunch) met up in the Rue d' Amsterdam office for a complete briefing. Our one and only objective was to make President Mitterrand aware that Erasmus had not been adopted and might never be, so that he would intervene publicly to get things moving. Each of us worked on an argument and the team headed for the Elysée.

?Televisions, photographers, Republican Guards, ushers ..., the pomp of the Republic impressed us all. The lunch, which was to take place in two parts, started.

At first the President did not listen to us at all and used our remarks to give us lessons on the construction of Europe. He obviously thought we were there simply as young pro-Europeans invited to mark the 30th anniversary of the European Community.

There was nothing for us to do but to risk all if we wanted our cause to advance.

That is what I did near the middle of the meal when, seizing the opportunity of a lull in the conversation, I told President Mitterrand that he had not apparently understood what he had been told, that he thought Erasmus was going ahead when this was not in fact the case at all! A heavy silence fell.

And we all imagined ourselves being forcibly ejected from the Elysée.

Fortunately, the President then turned to Ms Guigou, who confirmed that Erasmus was well and truly blocked and risked remaining that way indefinitely if no significant political pressure was brought to bear. From that point on, the President's attitude toward us changed radically, and a real conversation was engaged in for the rest of the meal.

During a television interview the following day, President Mitterrand announced that as a result of lunching with young European students he had become a convinced militant for Erasmus and considered it unacceptable that the few million ECU for this programme could not be found when thousands of millions were being spent on agriculture. A few weeks later the Council of Ministers for Education

adopted Erasmus!

The decisive role we had played in this affair had three direct and positive effects on AEGEE-EUROPE:

- our conviction that we had a useful role to play in the construction of Europe was strengthened and so, therefore, was everybody's motivation
- the Commission was very impressed by our capacity for action and increased its support
- the Presidency of the French Republic became an attentive and very positive partner in our actions.

Yet, before being able to observe these effects, as soon as we had left the Elysée lunch I took the entire CD to visit the striking French students and meet their coordination committee set up in the university of Villetaneuse (an all-concrete university in a poor suburb of Paris; this was a far cry from the gilt panelling of the Elysée and it was healthy to return to another, more common, reality). Since this strike was over general conditions in higher education, it involved problems common to several countries, and we had noted sympathy for the movement in Italy, Spain, Belgium and Germany. This was why we wished to get better acquainted with them and eventually help them to organise on a European level, but the Trotskyist-Leninist-Maoist-Socialist-I-don't-know-whatist arguments that their leaders dealt out to us convinced us that they were not the ones who were going to change the world. What was more, Europe to them was only a gadget, at the very best useful for strengthening the image of their action in France. By the expressions on the faces of the other CD members (especially the non-French), I saw that we had no reason to hang around.

The lunch with President Mitterrand, backed up by the enormous success of EGEE III, at which the Dutch Prime Minister, Ruud Lubbers, who also became an attentive supporter of AEGEE-EUROPE, spoke, was to increase AEGEE-EUROPE's capacity to attract and influence even more.

One of the most important things, to my mind, that took place during EGEE III was a remark made by Professor Brugmans, the founder of Bruges College and one of the EC's "historic fathers", who declared that he found AEGEE was the most interesting thing in the field of European associations that he had seen for thirty years. Coming from him this was an immense compliment full of meaning, promise and responsibility.

EGEE III went off perfectly and the organisation was remarkable. The students of the Leiden branch antenna had put together a really impressive congress (these were the very terms used by prestigious speakers such as Viscount Davignon and the advisers to Prime Minister Lubbers). The extreme formality of the congress also marked a stage in AEGEE's functioning. In any case, it was the first time that I noticed a distance between the members (particularly the new ones) and the CD, a tendency that the formality of the congress helped to reveal. The question of the nature of this distance between new members and the CD was to appear implicitly in the violent struggles which were to take place over the following months and years.

Just like Europe, the success of an AEGEE congress can take on many different forms. Several weeks earlier, in Madrid, the first European Week had marked the entry of Spain and Portugal into the EC ... and hence into AEGEE (throughout these years the CD always held to a very specific idea of AEGEE's geographical expansion: the priority being that of intensifying and anchoring the network within the EC). Richard Lopez Aranda, Blanca De Toledo, Carmela Barcia and many others organised this event with magnificent enthusiasm. Throughout it the 200 students from all over the European Community discovered the warmth and vitality of young Spaniards, as well as their dynamism and their desire to be European. The organisation was sometimes a bit shaky, but this was compensated for by a unique atmosphere. Everybody left sick from exhaustion; in five days the 'flu brought by one member of AEGEE-Bonn had contaminated a score of European cities. That too is AEGEE!

The European Week in Madrid was also the opportunity for Bart Kruitwagen to give a large scale demonstration of the viability of his simultaneous translation system. Bart Kruitwagen, a law student at Nijmegen and additionally possessed of a gift for electronics, had proposed to the CD a homemade system of simultaneous translation, that could be transported from symposium to congress and was five times cheaper than systems on the market. It is thanks to him that we were able to increase the number of events (always bilingual French/English), supplemented by the language of the country, without spending a fortune. For him this was an enormous constraint, since he needed hours to set up the system which at first worked with wires. Yet, while his system still remained very cheap, he progressively improved the technology and perfected infra-red systems.

A European paradox: The higher you rise, the harder you fall ... even on flat ground

Yet, everything was not as rosy as it should have been in AEGEE-EUROPE at this time. All the CD's activity had been concentrated on preparing the preceding months' events, creating new branchantennas and developing contacts with European and national institutions. Only we had forgotten something important: preparation for the Agora! No information had been sent out to delegates before the Agora, nor had the CD met to prepare the presentation of its report and its proposals (as at each Agora, I presented a new list allowing some people to be replaced while still conserving some members of the preceding CD).

The result, and I was the main person responsible, was that the CD made a disastrous presentation and proved itself incapable of answering coherently to a furious Agora that quite justifiably considered itself ill-informed and neglected. Two other problems appeared on top of this which increased tension between the Agora and the CD. The first came from the geography of the venue: the entire CD was on the platform of a hall in the form of an amphitheatre with the Agora on benches, and the delegates imprisoned behind their benches had the greatest trouble in obtaining the microphone in order to speak. The delegates therefore found themselves faced with a totally disorganised CD nevertheless occupying a very "dominating" position and able to speak all it wanted, while they themselves were stuck behind their school benches, almost unable to get at the microphone. You can imagine their feelings!

Discovering a word that does not exist in French ... but is so useful to democracy

The second difficulty came from the fact that up until this Agora, I had always opposed the designation of a chairman. It was therefore I who took this part, thereby accumulating several roles with what were, in fact, disastrous results. Thus, the first day turned out to be, in terms of debate, more of a dialogue between a furious Agora and myself! Not very brilliant, I must admit.

The reason I had opposed the designation of a chairman was ridiculously simple. To my still very French mind (experiences such as this have "Europeanised" me in

the positive sense of opening up the mind and not of losing identity), a chairman was a president (in French there is no distinction between chairman and president as there is in English; furthermore the French word “president” signifies a person holding decision-making power; it in no way combines the notion of arbitrator). It therefore did not seem conceivable to me to have two presidents. Andrew, Rikstus, Johannes and a few others had indeed attempted to explain all that to me, but I persisted in finding this function very strange; if this “chairman” had no power, what use could he have as president of the Agora, and if he had any, it seemed to me a serious error.

The chaos of the EGEE III Agora served to make clear to me this point about chairmanship and the absolute necessity of this post in balancing out and arbitrating debate. The CD’s incoherent disarray in the face of a furious Agora (led by a particularly vindictive Marc Dietrich) furthermore convinced me it was time to redefine the team’s cohesion. A meeting that can only be described as stormy took place in a neighbouring bar (the rest of the Agora, who were having a drink in the bar opposite, could observe a particularly agitated CD), where a dual strategy was worked out: increase efforts to get to know the branchantennae and improve Agora preparation by a day-long meeting just beforehand (as well, of course, as the election of a chairperson, and the decision that henceforth the CD would be placed in the midst of the delegates and never again on a platform!).

All this may seem somewhat secondary to those who do not understand the importance of psychological factors within an assembly, but these factors are, however, crucial, and their effect is greatly increased in a European assembly where emotional factors find very favourable ground in the simultaneous presence of several cultures.

And if, on the contrary, this seems obvious to those who are used to this type of assembly, I would ask them to take into consideration the fact that at 20 to 25 years old we were, little by little, discovering the complexities and rules of a game we were building up through our own successes and errors.

Having only just arrived, we must already think of leaving

It was also just after this Agora that I made the decision to announce my departure from AEGEE-EUROPE at the EGEE IV congress (that is, in April ‘88); it did in

fact seem important to me to announce my departure in advance, so that my succession might be organised. As I had been telling all those who wished to listen (and the deaf were numerous) right from EGEE's beginnings, I wanted to launch, for the 1989 European elections, a movement capable of presenting lists in several European countries at once; one year would not be too long to prepare such a project. I did in fact consider that a student movement could only constitute one stage, even more so in the case of a European student movement working to promote European citizenship. Is it not votes and elections which make a citizen? Much more so than participation in symposia!

This announcement caused new tensions to appear within the CD between certain people who might perhaps have wished to present lists after my departure. This is why I proposed that all members leave the CD in two parts (a first half from October '87 onwards and the remainder in April '88), to allow an entirely new CD to appear in April '88. Both these halves also represented the only chance for creating lists for the European elections, and their remaining in AEGEE therefore had two disadvantages:

- AEGEE ran the risk of seeing the CD split up and lose efficiency as of mid-'87, with the network already subject to strong centrifugal tensions.
- IDE ran the risk of never getting off the ground, if the only people capable of developing it in the short term could not be brought together.

In hindsight, I wonder sometimes how the movement would have evolved without this departure of all CD members. I honestly believe that the CD would have been paralysed from mid-'87 onwards for obvious reasons of competition. Let AEGEE specialists judge! My parents, who had had the intelligence and generosity to support me throughout these three years (during which I was supposed to be preparing for the [ENA!](#)), which they considered as a period of training, had also made it clear that by 1989 it was all finished! Time was running out.

As a result of the Leiden Agora we decided that the next Agora would take place in Seville in October 1987 ... and that it would be perfect!

The main actors in the previous CD remained at their posts, but tremendous tensions of various origins were to render our task well-nigh impossible, and the following months threatened to see AEGEE-EUROPE explode into thousands of pieces.

AEGEE in a power upheaval (May '87 - November '87)

The arrival of the “arrivistes”

The announcement of my departure plunged [AEGEE-EUROPE](#) straight into a power upheaval which took various shapes and involved extremely diverse factors, but what power was it about?

First there was that which was now enjoyed by the movement itself. An increasing number of people, both inside and outside the network, were realising what an enormous capacity for influence AEGEE-EUROPE enjoyed. Consequently, the idea of sitting on the CD was tempting more and more people who saw it less as an office or a responsibility, and more as a prestigious mention in a CV and a means of developing numerous contacts likely to prove extremely useful in the future; in short, a good way of lunching with heads of state or meeting government leaders (as we had just done once again with the Dassonville couple when we met the Belgian Prime Minister, Wilfried Martens, to present AEGEE and its development during 1987 to him; the impact of these extraordinary facts on the minds of ambitious students should not be underestimated.

Unfortunately for them, all of these “arrivistes” came up against a simple but efficient obstacle: the list system of electing the CD. In association with the constructive suspicion vote, the list system imposed two conditions:

- the ability to form a team of twenty full members plus ten substitutes of at least seven nationalities; the “team” notion required people capable of agreeing on a common vision of AEGEE and its objectives plus member complementarity
- the ability to win more than 50% of delegate votes at the Agora; which means, more specifically, being sufficiently representative of the network’s geographical (large and small branchantennas, central and peripheral ones etc.) and sectoral (engineering, arts, management ...) diversity for a majority of members to recognise their own interests.

Combining these two conditions was the best guarantee of the network’s efficiency since it ensured that the CD, the association’s executive power, was indeed a coherent team that had integrated its European diversity, an essential

condition for maintaining unity of, and respect for, the network's diversity. On the other hand, for anybody with no other aim than their own personal interest or an interest foreign to that of AEGEE-EUROPE, this method of election represented a "barrier" to overcome.

Since students often lend to the notion of democracy a very utopian idealism (as opposed to the utopian pragmatism which we used to define AEGEE-EUROPE's spirit), a large number of members and delegates were sensitive to the following argument: "Democracy is being able to choose the CD members one by one; election by list is dictatorship, for it is too difficult to form alternative lists that require finding twenty full members plus ten substitutes". Few people wondered why it was impossible for them but not for me, and their most spontaneous reaction was to say: "Very true; choosing the CD members one by one would be more democratic, it is in fact the ideal system". Throughout six Agorae, with the help of both the outgoing and candidate CDs, I had to explain and re-explain that the list system guaranteed the second condition for exercising democracy. If the possibility of choosing is the first, the second concerns the responsibility of those elected; and only a team elected as such can be held entirely responsible for its acts. As it is the Agora's function to evaluate whether the network is functioning well or badly, it can then easily decide whether the CD is doing good work or not, and so renew or reject it.

In the case of one-by-one elections, each individual, and therefore nobody, is responsible; each individual can invoke lack of support from the others and no one has any fundamental reason to agree with anyone else on AEGEE aims and means. From that point on the Agora loses its power of orientating AEGEE-EUROPE development, for a legislative body that is served by a weak executive power is reduced to endlessly discussing all sorts of problems or making symbolic decisions that no-one can implement. As always in politics, the shortest road is the most misleading, and theory comes up against human nature.

Each time a majority of delegates confirmed the vote by list, and at each following Agora novice delegates, encouraged by the few arrivistes who wished to make a career through AEGEE-EUROPE, demanded another vote on the subject. Exhausting ... and very tedious!

Localism and tourism, the plagues of AEGEE

In parallel with this evolution (the arrival of the arrivistes) could be seen the increasing strength of two trends already well established: localism and tourism.

Although present from the beginnings of AEGEE, localism and tourism are not problems in themselves. They are unavoidable realities for a European student movement such as AEGEE-EUROPE, and are partially, in fact, powerful motivators.

It is in fact thanks to localism that no national vote ever took place during an Agora over the whole of this period. Out of hundreds of motions and proposals, not once did the branchantenna delegates of one country think of voting together. This was thanks to AEGEE-EUROPE's local base and its lack of a national level; the interests of Strasbourg or Toulouse will always be different from those of Paris, Barcelona or Madrid, Munich's interests different from Hamburg's, Nijmegen's from Amsterdam's, etc. It was also thanks to this structure, with no national levels and associated with a strong European level, that all national political parties that tried to infiltrate AEGEE during these three years failed (and there were as many of them in France as in Germany). And lastly, it was the local level that made possible that proximity to people, and consequently AEGEE's dynamism, during those years.

As for tourism, the comments are similar. It was thanks to their "festive" or even "touristic" side that AEGEE-EUROPE's congresses and symposia were well attended. From EGEE I onward we had decided to target the "average European student", only moderately interested in Europe, but definitely attracted to Paris in April; it was then up to us to make them want to get more involved in the future. Festivities and tourism were therefore means of attracting a maximum of students and are among the factors in AEGEE's incredible rise to power, which meant that, as of '88, the movement had over 8000 members in twelve countries (a realistic estimation).

Yet, as of mid-'87, a problem emerged and developed which came from the fact that these two linked forces were getting carried away and mutually reinforcing each other to the detriment of the network's efficiency. The increasing number of tourists began to weigh the network down, since the system for joining had not been conceived for such a mass of people. At no point in 1985 had we imagined such success. Everybody who paid their subscription became a member with the right to vote in their branchantenna's Agora (even if they had only joined the previous day), and each branchantenna elected three delegates to the Agora, with a voting power determined by the number of members in the branchantenna.

This caused obvious problems. First of all, it might serve the interests of some local branchantenna leaders to have a large number of “tourists” join so as to increase the voting weight of their branchantennas; even more so since tourists are not difficult members and may be perfectly happy with barely “democratised” branchantennas.

A second problem came from the fact that some of these ‘tourists’, always ready to travel, often agreed to be delegates to the Agora, exacerbated by the fact that most branchantennas could not pay delegates’ travel costs. Ill-informed, unmotivated and therefore ready to vote emotionally without worrying about the consequences, such delegates were in fact extremely dangerous elements to AEGEE’s development.

Lastly, in consisting only of delegates from local branchantennas, the Agora would swing from European level to local level. This phenomenon was increased by the “tourist delegates” who were only familiar with one aspect of AEGEE, their local branchantenna. To defend their “back yard”, branchantenna delegates were always ready to oppose any new constraint appearing to come from the CD, or European level. Furthermore, it was in 1987 that a clear distinction was seen to appear between AEGEE and AEGEE-EUROPE. Here could be seen the beginnings of a drift during which the branchantennas would gradually convince themselves it was the local level that had created and developed AEGEE, and that the European level was therefore only a by-product of that! A fine theory, apparently logical, if only it had not contradicted the reality of AEGEE-EUROPE’s development: AEGEE is the creation of a small group of people brought together on a European level who gave the branchantennas the desire, legitimacy and means to exist. Later, the development of the branchantennas led us to balance the powers so as to respect the double principle of unity/diversity (which is at the foundation of AEGEE and of the construction of Europe as we know it) to which we have added that of efficiency.

In fact, to suppress the monopoly of branchantennas over delegates, we should have modified the balance of the Agora by starting to make a place for the European working groups (thematic transversal structures) which did in fact start appearing in ‘87. Each group, such as the Defence Group (launched in Paris as of 1986 with Elisabeth Levy and Cecile Pierre and which organised several symposia in Paris, Amsterdam ..., bringing together great European defence experts), or the East-West Group which reflected on relations with Eastern Europe (and, because of

this, was a problematic structure in '87-'88) or AEGEE-Stages, should have been allowed the benefit of delegates to the Agora in the same way as the branchantennas. This also would have helped them to structure and stabilise themselves.

Today this solution seems to me to be the only way we might have lifted the Agora out of its localist drift, but I only understood the nature of the factors responsible in the course of the following years while organising PROMETHEUS-EUROPE and considering ways of avoiding the problems that AEGEE had encountered.

Ill-intentioned infiltration

Along with these internal problems, difficult to overcome for inexperienced young people, we found ourselves confronted with two other threats, this time from the outside.

The first of these threats came from the fact that some European political parties, having infiltrated AEGEE-EUROPE and having tried, unsuccessfully, to take control of it, were now attempting to destabilise the whole movement. In the course of the second half of '87, we were to have the opportunity of making the Agora see that one of the principal organisers of a vast campaign of rumours and movement destabilisation, Stefan Thiwissen, was also an activist in the German Green Party!

And there were others, but about whom we were never able to collect enough proof, whether in France, Spain (with the Opus Dei) or Italy (with the Socialist Party).

Membership of AEGEE and representation at its Agora was so totally accessible to everyone and anyone that this made it a structure practically impossible to protect from ill-intentioned interference from the outside.

The movement's voluntary character meant that anyone with time and money to travel could rapidly impose himself or herself as "someone to be reckoned with".

Yet, fortunately, these attempts were rapidly countered, since AEGEE's lack of national levels made any infiltration work very complex, and indeed as early as that time, there were already few students who preferred a national party to a movement such as AEGEE. On two occasions, in fact, students "sent" by their party to infiltrate AEGEE did an "about turn" and used their contacts to help us increase our patronage and subsidies.

On the other hand, the Soviet affair created a real problem for us, since in the course of '87 a "demand" did indeed begin to develop to extend AEGEE into Eastern Europe and the USSR.

In our eyes Eastern Europe did indeed form part of Europe (it was even one of the explanations I gave from 1986 onward for the incredible development we had experienced in Germany at a time when everyone maintained that young Germans were not interested in East Germany, not even young West Germans) and I remember having long discussions on the subject with Johannes Heister, in particular in Bonn on the day we met with President von Weizsäcker's advisers.

Yet, this political affirmation was clearly limited in operational terms. As of Heidelberg, the Agora had given its response: no branchantennas would be created in Eastern Europe until our branchantennas could function normally there. Otherwise, it meant precipitating the students in those countries into serious problems about which we would be unable to do anything (and if they did not have problems, they would not be true AEGEE branchantennas, but Young Communist off-shoots!).

The "demand" to create branchantennas in Eastern Europe became, however, the leitmotiv of several people in AEGEE, with some members sincerely believing that it was AEGEE's duty to make this symbolic gesture. Others saw it as a way that would set AEGEE off down a path to great difficulties or to a Pan-European vocation:

- the first problem came from the fact that, because of East-West tension, such an approach would have lost us all the stock of confidence we had won from EC institutions and political leaders; in their eyes we would immediately have become suspected of being manipulated by the Soviets.

- the second problem came from the fact that our vocation of supporting EC integration would have been diluted into a vast pro-European feeling of brotherhood between peoples, after the fashion of Gorbachev's common 'European house' (What is more, several of those who defended extension into Eastern Europe claimed to be partisans of this 'European house' concept).

For those who might doubt the deliberate intentions of the Communist Bloc services at that time, let me remind them of some useful facts:

- After the failure of the pacifist movements concerned with Euro missiles, the services of the Eastern Bloc countries were once again looking for movements capable of promoting their ideas. Officials from the intelligence services of two EC

countries told me that, as for any movement of even very limited importance, they had people available informing them of our intentions and function, and that it was obvious to them the Eastern Block services were doing the same thing. As a movement bringing together thousands of students from the principal universities and schools of the EC, meeting with heads of state and ministers, organising dozens of symposia and congresses and appearing regularly as the subject of press articles in major European newspapers, it was more than likely that a lot of people would indeed be interested!

– Around mid-'87 we had, as if by chance, started to receive various documents and newspapers in English and French from Moscow, sent by the Soviet government and describing Russian proposals for Europe, disarmament, etc.

– As of 1986 we had been obliged to react when we realised that representatives of Soviet embassies were attending our symposia and then inviting some of our representatives to lunch or dinner (this was most particularly the case in Brussels, where the phenomenon developed so dramatically over several months that we were obliged to break off relations with certain people).

– Finally, but I shall talk about this in more detail later, it was not by chance that Guennadi Guerassimov, Mikhail Gorbachev's spokesman, came to take part in the AEGEE-Leiden symposium in March 1988 (a small branchantenna symposium for which Leiden had simply requested a Soviet representative) and asked to be shown around Amsterdam for an entire day by three AEGEE-EUROPE representatives (as it happens Rikstus Oosterhuis, Gideon du Marchie Sarvaas and myself).

All that, and a few other details, fully clarified the situation in which we found ourselves; a delicate one since it was impossible to explain it to the Agora, who would have thought we were mad (each branchantenna only saw its little bit of AEGEE-EUROPE and could not imagine the importance of the movement as a whole and the interest it could create), and which would have allowed our opponents to accuse us of paranoia with the greatest ease. We therefore had to fight the danger without ever naming it; excellent training for politics, but exhausting!

Through our contacts I had, all the same, requested the German and French authorities to inform us if they caught wind of more dangerous operations.

PROMETHEUS, a disturbing nature

The second element that was to provoke a shock in AEGEE-EUROPE over

several months (or even years) was the launch of PROMETHEUS in June '87. We had held a meeting near Paris of the majority of the members of the previous CD to discuss what was to come after AEGEE, and in particular the launch in several member states of lists for the 1989 European elections emphasising the notions of European citizenship, the democratic deficit, language training Since the EC is a political entity, there was no question of being able to really change things without entering the arena! At the same time, we wished to define the conditions which would turn AEGEE, for us, into a "youth movement", meaning, something you do in your twenties but leave behind when you leave university. Several of us had completed our studies: numerous AEGEE members from '85-'86 were starting to ask us the question: "And after AEGEE, what do we do? Go back home, and that's it?"

We had organised this meeting in the context of a new association, PROMETHEUS-Europe, since we definitely did not wish to change either the partisan nature of AEGEE-EUROPE or its purely student aspect.

Over the summer, Philippe Portalier (who had just reorganised and developed in a masterful way the Paris branchantenna, which henceforth had over 300 members) had been given the task of mailing the report of the meeting to all participants, and to some people who had not been able to attend. We intended to present our conclusions to the October Agora so as to keep AEGEE-EUROPE informed with all transparency.

But a little grain of sand was to transform this presentation into a bomb. Philippe Portalier had the extraordinarily funny idea of stamping the entire mailing "SECRET" (without my knowledge), and some good souls, with Gilio Fonck from Luxembourg in the forefront, seized the opportunity to turn the affair into a scandal and denounce our presumed desire to harm AEGEE, to turn it into a political party, etc. The "dirty word" was out: "politics"! From then on and for nearly three months, AEGEE-EUROPE was a boiling cauldron!

All the negative individuals or forces I have already mentioned threw themselves onto that word like dogs on a bone! For some of them it was the chance to overthrow the CD, for others the means of forcing AEGEE to break apart, and for yet others, the opportunity to eliminate its European level!

So, like forest fires blazing up simultaneously in several places, AEGEE-EUROPE caught fire. From Paris to Madrid, Kiel to Bonn, Delft to Amsterdam, Milan to Louvain-la-Neuve ..., at least half the network was prey to the most

exaggerated rumours. That is a characteristic to watch out for in networks such as AEGEE-EUROPE: rumours circulate infinitely rapidly, as opposed to verified information which takes much longer to spread.

We (and in particular me) were presented as enemies of AEGEE-EUROPE (which topped it all for its creators), and of course AEGEE “defenders” sprang up everywhere, ready to devote themselves to the CD.

Our abysmal performance at the Leiden Agora convinced many “revolutionaries” that the next Agora, in Seville, would see the CD, and more particularly myself, put to death. They were right in thinking that in Seville a bullfight would be inevitable!

The problems were even more serious in that the charming Gilio Fonck (the same person who had asked to be included in the lunch with Francois Mitterrand), who was already announcing to all who would listen that he would be the next president of AEGEE-EUROPE, had been sending letters to the European Commission denouncing the political exploitation of AEGEE-EUROPE, and therefore of EC subsidies.

The return to work after the summer of ‘87 was delightful! All the more so since, while some were very busy rushing around the network spreading false rumours and creating problems wherever they could, we were preparing the ‘87-’88 programme which, more particularly, included seven very large congresses of 200 to 500 participants (plus about thirty branchantenna symposia): the Second European Space Weekend in Munich, a congress in Bonn on Youth Unemployment in Europe, the Seville Agora, the Europe-Africa Congress in Paris, the Euro managers trade fair/congress in Brussels, the European Week in London (a congress on the Future of Transport in Europe) and lastly EGEE IV in Milan.

Although the branchantennaes were the operatives for all of these events (sometimes more than one, as in the case of Munich and Toulouse for the Space Congress), the CD nevertheless had to find most of the financing and patronage, and help in localising the majority of European participants. Without mentioning that for these congresses and the branchantenna symposia, the CD was in charge of ensuring a minimum of European participation and that that participation was as “nontouristic” as possible (we did indeed threaten some branchantennaes, who were particularly keen on bringing coach loads of tourists, but whose members did not, on the other hand, attend conferences, with being barred from symposia). This role of internal “police” for the benefit of the “productive” branchantennaes (those organising events) was only possible because the CD enjoyed enough credibility to

implement sanctions (in fact threats alone were generally enough to resolve problems).

The same handful of members making up the CD, about twenty, now found themselves not only having to continue developing AEGEE-EUROPE, but also fighting the fire that had broken out over PROMETHEUS.

As for the European Commission, Mr Bourges Maunoury and Mr Lenarduzzi rapidly silenced rumours by vouching for our seriousness and honesty and as proof of the strength of our credibility on national and EC levels, the '87-'88 budget was undoubtedly the largest in the entire history of AEGEE-EUROPE (until today); according to the directory of EC subsidies (granted by DGs V, VII, VIII, X, XII, XIII and the Secretariat-General), we succeeded in obtaining about 200,000 ECU, as opposed to 20,000 ECU two and a half years earlier!

We had also decided that the Seville Agora would be exemplary, and we would present ourselves as an exemplary CD. The choice before us was clear: either we had to give an extraordinarily good performance, or we would disappear and our conception of AEGEE and of the construction of Europe with us.

The decision we had made, that all CD members would go in pairs to visit the branchantennae, was set up as of May '87. The aim was to explain what the CD and AEGEE-EUROPE was, for we had observed that communication with members was a major difficulty; not that they did not want to listen to us, nor that we did not try to talk with them, but numerous branchantenna leaders refused to transmit information from the CD or misrepresented it. We saw this clearly in the case of Europolis, the AEGEE-EUROPE magazine, which some branchantennae (such as Bonn and its president at that time, Stefan Thiwissen) refused to distribute to their members! In about half the branchantennae the local CD demonised the European CD so as to take on a role of branchantenna protector; and in about half of the branchantennae delegates to the Agora were not elected by members (as laid down by AEGEE-EUROPE's membership convention) but nominated by the local CD!

Thus, we had decided to compensate for these malfunctions by targeting members and bringing them alternative information to that circulated by some of their local leaders. We knew that if we could demonstrate to the members of an branchantenna that their leaders had been lying to them for months, the members themselves would send those leaders back to their studies.

For many reasons, fear of the word "politics" was particularly rife in the

Germanbranch antennae. Elsewhere it was just one branchantenna here or there, but in Germany, especially in the north and centre, things were close to exploding. This was why I decided to make a two week tour by car starting from Kiel and including all the main German branchantennae.

Everywhere I went, I asked to meet members. Sometimes it was in very formal local Agorae of fifty or so people; more often it was with fifteen or so people interested in listening to what I had to say, or wanting to ask me specific questions.

It was exhausting, but very instructive!

In every antenna I visited there were always one or two people who were favourable to me, having met me at a symposium or congress, a distrustful majority and four or five people completely opposed. I believe that all those hours spent discussing and explaining to each antenna our positions, Prometheus, the absurdity of the rumours, etc., made many members realise that their choice of delegates to the Seville Agora should not be left either to chance or to local leaders, but should be the subject of in-depth discussion within the antenna.

And that was one of our goals, to reduce the number of tourist delegates having joined AEGEE the day before, and to convince a maximum of antennae that it was up to the local Agora to elect its delegates and make sure, as far as possible, that delegates were given a mandate (for that I promised that the antennae would receive the agenda and relevant documents at least a fortnight before the Seville Agora).

I also tried to introduce a method of “rumour reading” so as to break up the wave of emotion being created by various people. I wanted members to understand that before believing any statement, they should measure the credibility of the person making it.

Thus, I explained, when you are told that I have become AEGEE-EUROPE’s main enemy (because of my desire to present lists in the European elections), before even thinking about the question itself, ask yourselves what, in concrete terms, the person who told you that has done for AEGEE-EUROPE in the last few months or years; if you come to the conclusion (and ask people who know him or her well for information, and if it is someone from outside the antenna, use the network) that he or she has done nothing concrete apart from presenting himself or herself as an AEGEE “defender”, then how can you honestly trust that person?

In AEGEE-EUROPE it should be acts, not just words, which determine credibility!

I believe that this is a method essential to modern democracy in general and, in particular, to transnational networks in which people do not know each other very well and can easily be deluded by fine speeches. In our case not one of the “white knights”, wherever they came from, had ever organised any symposium or congress – nothing!

At the same time, other CD members were doing the same thing in some of their countries’ antennae, like Rikstus Oosterhuis in the Netherlands, Richard Lopez Aranda in Spain, Bernard Establie, Philippe Micaelli and Jean-Francois Monteil in France, Bart Kruitwagen in Holland and Germany ...

This European tour had another aim of motivating new antennae to organise symposia. Numerous antennae were in fact still hesitating to hold important events, and we wanted to avoid it always being always the same antennae who organised everything. We had some notable successes (I remember with emotion the hours of discussion it needed to convince the Koln antenna to organise the symposium on youth unemployment for which Ulrike von Lonski finally accepted responsibility).

The Agora was being efficiently prepared, thanks to Pepe and Pepin, our two Seville leaders, who were to organise an historic Agora. Yet, But two further problems were to flare up in succession.

The secret charms of Germany or the pitfalls of Europe

All of a sudden, whilst the recently elected president of the AEGEE-Munich antenna, Christoph Vaagt, was at a month’s course in the United Kingdom, we learnt that his vice president, Norbert V. Eicheln, in close liaison with Gilio Fonck and Jose Rus (from Madrid), was going to call a local Agora to have himself elected president and inform AEGEE-EUROPE that AEGEE-Munich was breaking away because of “political drift” at the European level.

Faced with the enormity of the problem, I called Christoph Vaagt to ask him to return to Munich quickly to put an end to this parody. He assured me he was in full control of the situation and could deal with it from a distance. A few days later the local Agora met, Christoph Vaagt was deposed and AEGEE-Munich’s “secession” announced.

Similarly, Gilio Fonck announced in a letter sent to all antennae that he was disbanding AEGEE-Luxembourg (which left us cold since AEGEE-Luxembourg had never really existed, mainly because Luxembourg has no university).

I had previously telephoned Norbert Verbucheln to try to reason with him and understand his motivations (I scarcely knew him). It rapidly became clear that all discussion was futile, as his argument could be resumed as follows: “As president of AEGEE-EUROPE you are finished! You and your CD are screwed, the next CD will be us!” I quote from memory, but his pithy style made enough of an impression enough on me for me to remember the gist.

That ‘phone call at least assured me of one thing – we were not in the grip of a great intellectual debate!

Fortunately, in September of that year the second Presidents’ Conference took place. Organised in Delft by Klaas de Boer in co-operation with Johannes Heister from the CD, it brought together about a hundred people (for the most part antenna presidents). Discussion, which was much more practical than at the Agora, took place without too many difficulties. At one point the CD proposed to let Christoph Vaagt, who had come from the United Kingdom to present his case of a president deprived of his presidency, speak. At first the Presidents’ Conference remained more or less insensitive to his problem (all the more so as Christophe supported the CD’s general approach).

I had to intervene personally to make each antenna president present understand the significance of the Munich “mini coup d’état”; if they let that go today, who would stop someone else doing the same thing in their antenna tomorrow?

What with the fundamental arguments and having grasped their own personal interest, the Presidents’ Conference finally decided to send a letter to the Munich antenna stating that AEGEE-EUROPE did not recognise the legitimacy of the procedure applied by Norbert Verbucheln and wished to see a new local Agora organised in the presence of Christoph Vaagt.

The incident was then closed, Norbert V. Eicheltn resigned from his post in the AEGEE-Munich CD and the antenna was able to continue, calmly, in the organisation of the second space congress.

The almost simultaneous holding of two congresses in Germany during that month of November ‘87 (Munich and Bonn) brought us the first major support for AEGEE-EUROPE from the German government.

Paradoxically, the increasing number of German antennae (there would be a dozen by the end of ‘87) had not immediately translated into support from the German government. We had enjoyed the patronage of President von Weizsäcker for EGEE II, but nothing more since.

However, Johannes Heister, in particular, and myself, had been trying for months to obtain patronage, financial support and the presence of public figures for the two November congresses. Nothing came of it, despite several meetings in the Bonn ministries; we were told to wait, that our files were still being examined; so, we waited.

Until that day in Kiel, when Johannes Heister found in his letterbox a copy of an internal note to the Federal Government signed by an official of the Ministry for Employment and Social Affairs, to whom we had addressed ourselves to obtain the patronage of Minister Norbert Blüm – requesting him to speak during the Bonn congress on youth unemployment.

This note, which claimed to be based on “information” obtained from the Federal Chancellery and other ministries, in particular the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (with whom we had been trying in vain to establish contacts since EGEE II), was really scandalous.

It was intended for circulation throughout the various ministries, and recommended proceeding with the greatest caution with regard to AEGEE-EUROPE for, according to this note, we did not in fact enjoy either the weight or the patronage that we claimed, not even that of President von Weizsäcker for EGEE II (when we had a letter signed by him); as for the support of Francois Mitterrand and Margaret Thatcher, this was worthless, since in the countries in question patronage was given just any old way!

We were also supposed to have had serious financial problems during EGEE II (which again was entirely false), and the claim was made that moral support for our projects could eventually create financial responsibility on the part of those supporting us (since when?!).

Lastly, AEGEE-EUROPE’s leaders appeared intelligent and capable, but wanted to carry out projects way beyond their capacities by asking for patronage and support from ministers.

In conclusion, the note recommended that AEGEE-EUROPE be given no support, be granted neither ministerial patronage nor subsidy from the Ministry of Employment and Social Affairs’ budget, and that only a low-ranking official be sent to the congress.

All this was completely crazy, but at least the information put an end to our waiting. We never learnt who had been so kind as to send us that document, but we thanked them with all our heart.

This note was along the same lines as a remark made to me by Marc Dietrich (who was Treasurer of the Koln antenna) about one of the government officials with whom he was in contact to obtain support for the congress on youth unemployment, and who had confided that he was fed up of always having to make us wait without being able to give an answer.

As Johannes Heister again confirmed to me recently, several other strange incidents demonstrated that, at that time, information of this type was deliberately being circulated within German ministries.

We were therefore being held back at the intermediate level of ministerial hierarchy which did not at all like the kind of independent European politics (i.e. that national governments cannot control) that AEGEE embodied.

Yet, our approach consisted of nothing more than taking our decision-makers' pro-European political arguments at their word and systematically using them to counter the nationalist reflexes of governments and ministries!

Neither should the strong influence exercised within ministries (for want of having any over young people) by German pro-European movements, who took a dim view of our development on their territory, be underestimated in this affair.

Our reaction was simple and characteristic of the AEGEE spirit at that time: it consisted in making the Federal Ministers involved face up to their responsibilities. So Johannes Heister called the official who had signed the document to let him know we possessed a copy and considered it to be scandalous.

Johannes was furthermore instructed to tell him that if we obtained no patronage, nor high-level official presence, nor financial support for the two November congresses, then during the two press conferences planned for Bonn and Munich it would give us great pleasure to ask journalists how it was that we had such considerable patronage and financial support from France, Spain, the Netherlands, Belgium and the United Kingdom, as well as President von Weizsäcker's patronage, while from the Federal Government all we had was this strange internal note?

Our logic told us that it was unthinkable that a government as pro-European as that of Chancellor Helmut Kohl did not support an association such as ours; and it was out of the question for us to allow false information such as that note to circulate.

Johannes also sent a letter to Norbert Blüm's adviser and to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs explaining that the information circulating in German ministries

was false, and that lack of support for AEGEE-EUROPE was raising questions amongst all those supporting us as to the German government's attitude towards European integration, and spontaneous initiatives from young European citizens.

I also immediately communicated the note to Andrew Oldland for him to pass it on to Margaret Thatcher's Cabinet, and to Elisabeth Guigou for Francois Mitterrand's, and I informed the new Director of [Sciences-Po](#), Mr Alain Lancelot, who was outraged and spoke to one of his friends, President-Minister of a German Land.

In the following weeks everything was unblocked as if by magic. Apparently, many government representatives of several ministries, held up for weeks by this note, were most happy to be able to launch into collaboration with AEGEE-EUROPE.

Minister Riesenhuber spoke at the opening of the Munich conference, which was a great success since all the most important leaders in the European aerospace industry took part.

The quality of the work was emphasised by that of the organisation, of which one of the "musts" was the fleet of 12 BMW 7s (a recently-launched model) put at AEGEE's disposal for the congress, free of charge, by BMW. Several of those great business leaders remarked to me: "We would never have imagined being driven in such cars for a simple student congress".

In Bonn, after his speech, the Secretary of State for Social Affairs was presented after his speech with a bottle of the brand new "AEGEE-EUROPE Champagne" produced by the new AEGEE-Reims antenna. One thing was certain, AEGEE made itself a place in the memories of all these people, thanks to these kinds of extras.

The contrast between the Munich congress –impressive and brilliant, adapted to that futuristic, comfortable Europe of the aerospace industry – and the social content of the Bonn congress, centered around the already serious problem of youth unemployment, is to me symbolic of the strength AEGEE-EUROPE is capable of representing at its best moments: European students able to show as much interest in the brilliant ambitious part of the future as it is in its problems and patches of obscurity.

The week following the Bonn congress, Johannes Heister received a letter from Horst Teltschik, Chancellor Helmut Kohl's adviser, proposing to support a future AEGEE-EUROPE event in Germany.

Our approach continued to be seductive! A few months later, with Johannes

Heister, Marc Dietrich and Roger Kohlmann, we met Mr Joachim Bitterlich, another of Chancellor Helmut Kohl's European Affairs advisers, with whom we had a very constructive discussion; henceforth, our relations with the German government were always positive.

And this episode once again confirmed the fact that one of our strengths lay in our desire never to accept an unfounded attitude or reaction, whatever power it might come from (political, institutional or other). Citizen passiveness is also part of what creates freedomless societies. We wanted to translate into reality the principles for which our countries claimed to stand and we would not accept that administrative or political leaders serving the people who spoke with forked tongues ... or else we would help them to do so in public!

The Seville Bullfight-Agora

Whilst all this was going on, the Seville Agora was getting closer! If I am going to describe it now at some length, it is not through nostalgia, but because it was certainly the culminating point of one of the most intense periods of activity and debate that AEGEE has ever known. Also, it was because preparing this Agora and taking part in it led me to understand certain characteristics that I believe essential for the activation and management of any network (or any assembly) of European citizens. The European activity that I continued to have with IDE and PROMETHEUS has only confirmed that.

So Pepe (Jose Maria Compagni Morales) and Pepin (Jose Maria Resa) had organised the Agora superbly in accordance with the very precise constraints laid down by the CD: vast room, easy access to microphones for the delegates, narrow table on the platform reserved for the chairman and his two reporters, fixed microphone set up in a corner for contributions (from delegates or CD).

Furthermore, a complete file of information on the projects and proposals which were to be discussed at the Agora had been sent out to the antennae three weeks before. This file was, amongst other things, the end-result of a call for proposals launched two months earlier throughout the network. All proposals presented by antennae had to have been previously voted on by their local Agora. An active European democracy was in the process of emerging, juggling with its specific constraints: linguistic, cultural and geographical distances and very limited financial means.

Lastly, Andrew Oldland kept a strict watch that antenna voting weight was based on membership fees actually paid (with 20% per member having to be paid over to AEGEE-EUROPE) so as to limit cheating (eliminating it was difficult, for some antenna leaders paid for fictitious members).

To give an idea of the quality of certain protagonists during the preceding months of 1987, I will mention just two examples:

– Gilio Fonck from Luxembourg, who had dropped the PROMETHEUS “bomb” and presented himself as the future president of AEGEE-EUROPE, did not even come to the Agora. Despite our invitations to debate in public and before the 200 delegates the truth of his “affirmations” stated in various open letters to the network, he refused to come!

– Another interesting specimen of humanity was to be found in Jose Rus, who advocated elimination of the CD I headed, more particularly because I refused to accept him or people like him on my list. He had first appeared in the Madrid antenna, where he lived, but since AEGEE-Madrid had excluded him for questions of financial malpractice during the summer of ‘87, he had reappeared as a member and even Agora delegate of the Munster antenna, where some of his comrades in arms were to be found. Of course, we could have prevented him taking part in the Agora (as requested by AEGEE-Madrid, who felt its decisions were being scorned) for his behaviour was really scandalous, but we did not want to tie ourselves in procedural knots right at the beginning of the Agora, when we would rapidly have appeared as a “big bad all-powerful CD” hounding “poor little Jose”.

In fact, this was exactly what some were hoping for. But they did not know that the previous day the CD (plus the half CD that was to be integrated into the new candidate list) had held a meeting lasting several hours to define the strategy to be developed during the Agora (do not forget that for reasons previously evoked, all bets in the network were on us losing!).

After considerable discussion the strategy finally adopted was this:

To limit ourselves to our proposals; we were the CD, I was the founder of AEGEE, and we weren’t going to panic when we had already previously thoroughly discussed the quality of our proposals.

Not to back down in the slightest on our convictions about the correct functioning method for AEGEE (such as election by list); you should never give in on principals of correct functioning in exchange for a few votes. It is suicidal in the middle term and means betraying yourself.

- To limit ourselves to our already publicised proposals: the election of a chairman within a list proposed by the CD, the creation of a commission for financial control and a legal commission within the Agora, the introduction of transnational regional antenna meetings (in my view these points were enough to satisfy the majority of the Agora, by democratising the system without, however, breaking the machine).

- To maintain the restrictions preventing antennae from seeking out EC or national financing without the previous agreement of the CD (this was a question of AEGEE's unity).

- To refuse to respond to the “demands” of some people concerning PROMETHEUS (some did indeed want us to limit the context, role, etc. of PROMETHEUS-Europe); they would just have to join Prometheus if they wanted to play a role in it; what is more, we were under no obligation to justify ourselves to the network on this subject, and did so only on a voluntary basis.

- To reaffirm the political nature of AEGEE-EUROPE by explaining for the thousandth time the difference that exists between apolitical in the sense apartisan (which we were) and apolitical in the sense of having nothing to do with community life (that being contrary to the entire logic of a movement such as AEGEE).

- To defend the partial separation of Euro managers from AEGEE-EUROPE for reasons of efficiency, but to guarantee AEGEE's continuing presence in decisions and implementation, so as to prove to AEGEE that it had nothing to fear by letting some of its “children” become autonomous, on condition, of course, of receiving some advantages in return (this was unfortunately given witness in the following months when Christophe Leclercq decided unilaterally to eliminate all AEGEE-EUROPE representatives from the Euro managers Board of Directors, without even informing them first).

I remember that an almost tangible tension hung over that room in Seville University that Saturday morning. It really was a bullring!

In the Agora there were two “opposition” groups, a vast silent majority and a small group of CD supporters. The majority was convinced we were going to lose, but was not really aware of either of the issues at stake or our potential successors. We hoped to explain the first, and uncover the second.

The entire CD knew when to speak and on what subjects. We wanted to avoid a Leiden-type situation where I had found myself answering questions and attacks all

by myself. We were a fully integrated European team, and we had to show it!

Our opponents wanted to see me occupying the stage constantly so as to be able to convince the Agora that I was a “dictator” (quote), so Andrew, Rikstus and Johannes advised me to appear only at two or three crucial moments. Our opponents wanted to bog us down in procedural problems, so that we would back down on all questions of procedure. Our opponents wanted us to appear as a powerful Goliath from the beginning of the Agora, so instead we would be David ... until the end of the first day.

On the other hand, our opponents believed they could present themselves as apolitical, but we would prove that several of them belonged to national political parties. Our opponents wished to appear very honest, but we would prove that some of them had stolen money from their antennae. Our opponents wanted people to believe that they were only motivated by AEGEE interests, but we would show that they preferred to hawk their stories from antenna to antenna rather than work with us to support the organisation of all the symposia and congresses. Our opponents wanted people to believe they were sincere, but, by forcing them to speak out in front of everyone at the same time, we would prove that they told’ one story here and another over there so as to win the votes of each antenna.

And that was in fact how the Agora went off. It lasted two days. At the end of the first morning a vote would have been 70% against us. At the end of the day, after Rikstus had succeeded in making Jose Rus answer ‘yes’ in public to the question: “Did you or did you not take money from AEGEE-Madrid?”, we were at 50-50. When the following morning I forced Stefan Thiwissen to admit he was indeed a member of the German Green Party (and what is more with a post within the party), we rose to 70%. Finally, once we had explained our position on PROMETHEUS and set up the new Agora Commissions, all our proposals were adopted and the new list was re-elected by more than 80% of votes. Then a wild party began, for months of tension had finally disappeared!

It should not be forgotten that we were all volunteers, and for AEGEE to maintain top-quality CDs, their terms of office must not turn into hell!

We also had the feeling we had achieved something very fine, perhaps the first “real European campaign” by a European executive!

If the Agora had changed its mind, this was not because of our “tactics”, but because, by remaining faithful to our original strategy, we had tried to make the Agora see the issues at stake hidden behind the words and the realities behind the

appearances.

In terms of our national democracies, European peoples are now experienced; but let us not delude ourselves. They are still innocent about many of the hidden pitfalls along the road to European democracy.

To know who the person speaking really is when that person comes from far away and does not speak your language, and to know exactly what he or she does, is all infinitely difficult.

Yet that is in fact an essential condition, if democracy is not to rhyme with deceit!

If proof were needed of my analysis, it should be enough to know that all those people I have described in the role of “baddies” had sought to join the list I was presenting, and expressed their total satisfaction as to the methods we were defending!

The difficulties of preparing a sensitive succession (December '87 - April '88)

Thus, it was in a perfectly calm atmosphere that we now began organising with AEGEE-Paris the Europe-Africa Congress of December 1987. This event was intended to be an attempt at extending our network approach to university cities into Africa. Along with the Europe-Latin America Week organised by Jean-Francois Monteil and AEGEE-Strasbourg a few weeks later, we hoped to form the basis of [AEGEE-EUROPE](#)'s external relations. Unfortunately, neither attempt led to anything; as a general rule, AEGEE found it difficult to conceive of any development that is not expansion, which is however a method ill-adapted to relations outside of Europe.

The quaint charms of France or the pitfalls of Europe

The aim of Europe-Africa was to bring together 250 European students and 250 African students and try to launch a network of the same type as AEGEE-EUROPE on the African continent. The congress was a success, even though the Paris antenna's organisation did not allow us to obtain the press coverage such an event deserved.

The CD was also obliged to involve itself more than usual in the organisation; the Paris antenna had a problem in that, being too close to AEGEE-EUROPE's central office, it often saw its better elements seized on by the European level. We did not attract as many African students as we had hoped, but the event did bring together about a hundred, as well as almost 200 European students. The European Commissioner, Claude Cheysson, gave us his patronage and some financial support; Commissioner Natali spoke at the opening in the great lecture theatre of the [Sorbonne](#), along with Mr Michel Aurillac, the French Minister for Cooperation.

Despite the efforts of Alain Mathoudiakis, president of the Paris antenna, and

Ibrahima Din, the African student in charge of the congress, it suffered from a certain amount of disorganisation; but it nevertheless provided an opportunity for interesting contacts with African students.

About a hundred of us (fifty Europeans, fifty Africans) were received at the Elysée by President Francois Mitterrand for a cocktail party. This once again demonstrated the very cohabitational character of our movement. The French Ministry for Co-operation also gave us considerable help, in particular thanks to the participation of Christian Sabbe, the Minister's chief private secretary, who turned out to have been one of my senior lecturers at [Sciences-Po](#), and who had followed the launch of EGEE I.

However, to obtain this support, we had above all to get the go-ahead from Matignon. So Philippe Micaelli and I met with an adviser to Jacques Chirac, who was then Prime Minister. I must say that the lack of interest in the construction of Europe (and therefore in the logic behind our project) that we encountered at this level led us to utilise an argument which, although efficient, was perfectly foreign to the very spirit of AEGEE-EUROPE. Faced with a very nationalist attitude, I felt that my arguments were not convincing him and were even worrying him, so I decided in mid-meeting to radically change my strategy and talk of a Europe that the person I was addressing would understand, that is to say a Europe of peoples who are hereditary enemies.

I explained to him that we desperately needed this French financial support (which was true) since the role of the French language and people was being progressively threatened by a massive rush into the network of the British, supported financially by the United Kingdom (which was of course false).

Why the British in particular? Because I strongly suspect that, at the heart of French nationalism, the only "real" hereditary enemy is England. So it might work! For a long minute Philippe Micaelli and myself dared not look at each other ... thinking that it was not going to work.

The man opposite us looked at us for a long time without speaking; then he declared that it would not seem normal to him that the English take control of a pro-European structure such as AEGEE, given their attitude of constant opposition to the European Community. He would therefore send a note giving the Prime Minister's go-ahead to the financing for our congress! This story made our British members laugh uproariously a few days later. The man we had spoken to lived in a Europe of another age, and yet because of his position, he could decide whether

this original Europe-Africa experience should exist or not.

I am slightly ashamed to have had to misrepresent our argument in that way; this was one of the rare occasions when it happened, but at that particular time we really needed a means of lifting the blockade. Also, in the end, the Ministry for Co-operation was in fact delighted with the congress. The follow-up with the African students was, on the other hand, disastrous. We had suggested that they themselves organise and manage an association identical to AEGEE for the African continent, with our action being limited to helping them find financial sources in Europe. Despite the general enthusiasm that reigned during a final meeting, held in a bar, nothing productive ever came of these projects. I and many other members of the CD and I were bitterly disappointed by the “elite youth” of the Africa of our generation. But perhaps, there again, we were ten years ahead of our time¹¹.

Stepping down for youth ... whilst awaiting retirement

The CD elected by the Seville Agora was a transitional one. Indeed, contrary to the lists I had previously presented at the Agora, this one was composed of 50% renewals, in particular in all the main posts apart from the presidency. To the surprise of many people who remembered him as one of our fiercest opponents at the Leiden Agora, the new treasurer was Marc Dietrich. I had made him this proposal after a meeting Christophe Leclercq had organised between us in Koln. Christophe quite rightly thought that Marc, whom he knew well since he had worked with him in AEGEE-Koln, had been in opposition to us not because he disagreed with our conception of AEGEE, but because he considered we had not carried out our CD work correctly during the Leiden Agora (with which I could not disagree). Aside from his gifts as a “banker”, which earned him the nickname of “Deutsch Marc”, our meeting had confirmed his seriousness and competence, and so I had offered him the key post that Andrew wished to leave in order to complete his studies.

Carmela Barcia became the new Secretary General, a post that Johannes Heister wished to quit, also because of his studies. Her dynamism and human qualities made her a particularly apt candidate. Others were Sue Farrow, who was to organise a superb congress on transport in London, Roger Kohlmann, extremely motivated by defence questions (a topic around which AEGEE-EUROPE had

succeeded in developing a very active group), Vieri Bracco, in charge of organising EGEE IV in Milan (with Annalisa Occhipinti), Gideon du Marchie Sarvaas, who was very active in AEGEE in the Netherlands, Daisy Kopmels from Amsterdam, who was very actively preparing the first Summer Universities (those summer study courses organised by many antennae which offered language courses, and so provided European students with a new framework of integration, different from the symposia and congresses; they were to be a great success starting with the summer '88 first edition); in all, about ten new titular members emerged from Seville. In my eyes their task consisted more particularly in forming the core of the future CD which would be presented to the Milan Agora as a continuing CD.

It was clear to all of the outgoing team, and to me in particular, that the CD that succeeded us in April '88 should fundamentally embody the continuity of the policy we had pursued since 1985. Apart from my obvious personal convictions that this policy was the right one, the results were also there to prove it. From a few Parisian students weighed down under a 500,000-FF debt in April '85, we had become a network of several thousand students present in about sixty universities of the European Community, recognised and supported by EC heads of state and government leaders, by ministries, by European Commissioners and their services (Secretariat-General, DG I, DG V, DG VIII, DG X, DG XII, DG XIII ...), by major European industries (Renault, Commerzbank, Ibis, BMW, Philips, Telefonica ...), by a multitude of public figures (journalists, academics, company directors ...), by regions and cities, etc. In all good faith, nobody could have denied the brilliant success of those last three years.

On the other hand, and this is what I was trying to make the network understand, many of those in positions of responsibility who supported AEGEE in a significant fashion (whether within the Commission, at our main bank, with our most important sponsors or elsewhere) did so also because they considered me to be a spokesman worthy of confidence. That confidence had been built up through hard work over the course of those three years, and was due more particularly to the fact that the projects we had announced had always taken place whatever the difficulties encountered. This was also true to a lesser extent for all the members of the outgoing CD.

Given the very weak operational reliability accorded student movements by society as a whole, a CD that did not have the full support of the outgoing team would not be viable. What is more, the network did not cause any difficulties about

this.

Aside from the CD's normal work, the six months from November to April were therefore devoted to preparing the future CD. This consisted more specifically of introducing the new members to our various contacts, teaching them EC functioning and trying to make them understand the subtle balances and the functioning of the AEGEE-EUROPE machine. And we also had to find a new president. On our opponents' side there was a plethora of potential candidates, but since their K.O. at the Seville Agora they had gone very quiet! We would in fact see that most of them were preparing for the Agora following that of Milan, the Orleans Agora, by which point all the founding team would have disappeared. The fact remains that the network was very calm, concentrating on the organisation of events and the development of new activities (Summer Universities, AEGEE-Stages, working groups, etc.).

Yet I still had one problem: finding someone who wished to take on the onerous task of President of AEGEE-EUROPE. It was only in February-March that Vieri Bracco finally told me that he agreed to form a list. Despite the difficulties raised by Italian conditions (incompetent administrations, vote-catching policies and genuinely active voluntary members who could be counted on the fingers of one hand), Vieri was doing good work in Milan and succeeded in making EGEE IV take shape.

From Rome to London via Euromanagers

A good overview of the Italian situation in '88 had been offered to me when Vieri and I went to Rome for a week at the end of January to meet official representatives. This was very edifying, and I decided as of that day never more to waste time meeting Italian political or administrative leaders. Our appointments were all either postponed or took place an hour late; and most of the time the person we met knew nothing about the field he was in charge of (I remember a Managing Director of the Ministry of Education who was supposed to be the [Erasmus](#) contact in Italy, and who thought Erasmus was a language learning programme!). And in fact, the only person of quality we met at that time, the Director of European Affairs in the Italian Presidency, gave us this advice: "Flee this city! What you are doing is superb, but here you have nothing to gain, only to lose. You belong to no clan or clientele so no one will give you a lira; on the

contrary, people will try to use you without your realising it!". And the worst thing was that he was right!

But other events were to take place before EGEE IV, such as the London congress on transport. It assembled the principal European specialists in the field before over 200 students. That was how, at the beginning of '88, and thanks to the activity of Sue Farrow and the CD, we had the immense privilege of examining the very first maps of the future European high-speed train networks, presented by representatives from the SNCF and Bundesbahn preparatory study groups. We were all agape at the speed of these new journey times between major European cities; it was exactly the kind of transport we needed!

The preparation of this congress had also allowed us to establish good relations with several British ministries, including the DTI (Department of Trade and Industry), which was particularly concerned with making British business and executives aware of the future Single European Market. AEGEE's problem in the United Kingdom, even after this brilliant congress, was to get successfully beyond London and its cosmopolitan students; only about one fifth of AEGEE-London's members were, in fact, British, the others being German, French, Dutch ..., New Zealanders, Americans, Japanese! During the preparation of EGEE I, the Director of the British Council in Paris, Dr. Churchill, had indeed warned me: "Don't start in London, you'll never get out of it! Look for your students elsewhere in the United Kingdom!" It was advice I had ignored, very unwisely.

This period was also that of the Euro managers '88 congress. This time Christophe Leclercq, Christian Hunt and Spiros Nomikos had prepared a huge event: trade fair and congress. In the euphoria of the Single Market project, that as yet unknown category of Euro managers made students dream, while intriguing major European enterprises. So this project, which aimed at bringing both groups together, came at an appropriate time. As for all AEGEE-EUROPE events (other than antenna symposia) I took care of finding the funds from the European Commission. This time we also contacted sponsors. The event was a great success, with the Belgian Prime Minister, Wilfried Martens, and European Commissioner, Abel Matutes paying us the honour of a visit. Hundreds of students took part in the congress, and the trade fair, which in a concrete fashion marked the appearance of "European-scale recruitment", thanks to pressure from the students themselves, attracted major European enterprises such as Renault, Siemens, Commerzbank, ICI

....

Thanks to Euromanagers, AEGEE-EUROPE strongly confirmed its capacity for attracting the attention of the most important European enterprises (a category which was thus added to governments, universities and media). In three years we had well and truly succeeded in placing our movement at the heart of almost everything that moved in terms of the construction of Europe at the end of that decade.

As for the rest, those last months saw the definitive end of Europolis, the AEGEE-EUROPE magazine with a 50,000-copy print-run every three months. For many, this adventure inspired above all an “exhausting” memory: once printed in Belgium, we then had to go and collect (and therefore carry) the cartons and distribute them throughout Europe. Bernard Establie along with many others (including the young Dassonville couple) had done a vast amount of work to which we had convinced young journalists to contribute.

Financing difficulties and problems of unity in the editorial team finally put an end to the adventure, but Europolis’ 50,000-copy print-run over two years did indeed teach us a considerable amount about the problems linked to the creation and success of a real European magazine.

I am certain that out of the team that actively collaborated on Europolis will one day appear those behind the launching of the first European news magazine. This student experience taught us, more particularly, that the crucial issue involves the ability to create a strong European editorial identity (i.e. producing something more than an “insipid soup” of one article after another). To achieve that European editorial identity it is necessary to be able to form an editorial team capable of generating it. Those who collaborated on Europolis are capable of doing that, just as soon as they get access to the financial means we lacked.

A Dutch excursion with Mikhail Gorbachev’s spokesman

A very surprising and interesting event marked the month preceding the EGEE IV Agora. As I mentioned before, one fine day I learnt that Guennadi Guerassimov, Mikhail Gorbachev’s spokesman, was coming to the Netherlands for three days to attend the symposium organised by AEGEE-Leiden on economic relations between the EC and Japan, the United States and the USSR. For this 100 person symposium, AEGEE-Leiden had simply contacted the Soviet Embassy in The Hague to ask for a

representative. When a few days before the symposium they learnt that Guerassimov in person was coming from Moscow for three days and, what was more, wished to be shown around Amsterdam by AEGEE-EUROPE's leaders, Rikstus Oosterhuis and Gideon du Marchie Sarvaas called me immediately and I decided to go to Leiden. We agreed that all three of us would be his guides. My Renault 5 not really being up to the circumstances, Gideon borrowed a large car from his aunt, and off we went to spend a day with Mr Guerassimov.

He was somewhat acerbic throughout the beginning of our excursion. Blessed with a very great sense of humour, he attempted to set us against each other (Dutch against French) or to get us to speak badly of other Europeans (in particular of the Germans). During our visit to the Rijksmuseum his dominating attitude even started to annoy me; we had engaged the services of a very good guide, but Guerassimov rushed through the museum almost without looking. When we came out, I deliberately took my time buying postcards to make him understand that we were not at his service. As for Rikstus, he pointed out to him that he was wasting his time trying to play on nationalist feelings with us. It was only after a halt in a bar where we joined Rikstus' parents that he began to relax, and by the end of the afternoon, with a glass of Dutch gin in front of him, we were explaining to him that he had to understand that we represented a very concrete example of the construction of Europe that had begun in 1957, an example implanted amongst future EC executives; that the USSR had to understand that the European Community really was a new and lasting thing; and that, furthermore, our generation would never work with the USSR as long as it was not democratised. It was at this point in the conversation that he began to feel tired and decided to go home to bed!

At a great turning point in Soviet history we had thus the opportunity of spending several hours with someone very close to the master of the Kremlin and of showing him the reality, tangible and full of promise (a promise that we embodied), of that European Community which Gorbachev was trying to dilute in his common 'European house'. Did we perhaps help Guerassimov to understand this new EC reality better?

Still on the subject of East-West relations, we had decided to participate in the organisation of the second European culture week which was to take place in Berlin in June '88 (the first week had taken place a year earlier on the initiative of AEGEE-Amsterdam). This second week, organised by Georg von der Gablentz and in which Johannes Heister was deeply involved, was an opportunity for making

contacts in East Berlin. I took part (although I no longer held any position in AEGEE-EUROPE), and I remember in particular a very instructive walk on the other side of the Wall with Vieri Bracco and Frederic Pelard (one previous, one present and one future AEGEE-EUROPE President!)

The EGEE IV Agora and the end of my AEGEE years

Finally, the month of April arrived, and with it the EGEE IV Agora. In one sense I was relieved; those three years had indeed been extraordinary, but also very tiring. And then I had other projects in mind. At 27 years old the student world interested me less and less, and I was impatient to try out my project for the '89 European elections.

The congress went off correctly. Mr van Ekelén, the Dutch Minister of Defence, had agreed to come from The Hague for the day (he was a faithful supporter of AEGEE, and this was the third time he participated in one of our events). On the other hand, two rectors of Milan universities caused us problems by canceling on the very morning of the opening, one because he was tired after a journey, the other because of illness. As for a third rector, he did in fact come to the congress, but fell asleep on the platform. When you see the Dutch Minister of Defence taking the trouble to come, especially (like other European speakers) to spend a day at a congress of several hundred European students, and the rectors of the very city in which that congress is taking place unable to find the time to attend, you better understand some of Italy's problems!

The Agora itself was being prepared calmly. A new candidate list had been formed around Vieri Bracco. The opponents of the Seville Agora, still groggy, were holding back for later.

The Agora had become a machine in which the committees made their reports, and the groups and antennae presented their projects. As usual, the same things were repeated: no, member by member election of the CD was not a good idea; no, AEGEE was not apolitical but apartisan...! My parents, who had come from neighbouring La Turbie to be present at my "goodbye to arms", found the discussions violent and the Agora's remarks to the CD aggressive. I reassured them by telling them that in comparison to other Agorae, this one was remarkably calm.

More than 300 people came to Milan (if we total the seven large events organised

by AEGEE-EUROPE, a total of almost 2,000 European students had met together in less than six months ... without taking into account the dozens of antenna symposia). The members of the previous CD had also come to Milan so that everyone could celebrate together on the last evening. When the new CD was elected I was treated to long applause. I felt as if I was a 100 years old; it was very moving. One page had been definitively turned.

However, an incident hurtful for me occurred during the Agora. Jose Maria Compagni Morales (Pepe from Seville) proposed that the Agora elect me President of Honour of AEGEE-EUROPE (a purely honorary title, but a nice thought). I had to leave the room because what seemed to be only a formality at the start suddenly began to turn into the issue of a political struggle. A vice president of AEGEE-Paris, Vincent Delivet, opposed this vote, arguing that it would give me too much influence over AEGEE (as if my future influence depended on a title!). The debate finally broke down in chaos, and the proposition was withdrawn and postponed to a later Agora. It was not until a year later, during the Salamanca Agora (at which I was not present), that Alberto Camino introduced the motion again, and it was passed.

This episode revealed to me that our opponents were not far away and were no doubt counting on bringing the new CD team down rapidly. Proof of this was also provided by all the problems, to which Vieri Bracco's irresponsibility greatly contributed (he in particular took three months holiday in Brazil!) and with which the following President, Frederic Pelard from AEGEE-Toulouse, member of the new CD, was going to have to deal with.

It was on leaving AEGEE-EUROPE that I discovered how immensely difficult it is to organise a correct succession. Perhaps that is indeed the most difficult thing in politics, but that is another story!

At the end of this account of those three years, how can I sum up my AEGEE years?

For me, as for thousands of students yesterday, today and tomorrow, AEGEE was first and foremost an opportunity for accumulating wonderful memories of cities, people and new, unknown atmospheres. Thanks to AEGEE I made friends (and they still are, ten years later) all over Europe. Thanks to AEGEE, and like many of its members, I completed my sentimental education on a European scale. Thanks to AEGEE and to others' opinions, I learnt to understand better what in me comes from my nationality (and consequently what is specific to Franck Biancheri). I have

also come to understand better how my country is seen by other Europeans. By discovering, for example, in a chapel in Leiden University, a stained glass window depicting, in the same way, a Nazi soldier and a Napoleonic soldier both cutting the throat of a Dutchman, I understood, that my vision, as a Frenchman, of Napoleon was far from being shared by everyone.

Thanks to AEGEE, and because I worked with them and struggled with them against others, I learnt a lot about Europeans, and that comprehension is less complete when you are a tourist or even a simple friend. It is the difficulties we went through that have allowed me to realise that a European team, if it is formed correctly, constitutes an extraordinary force because of the complementarity of its members' mentalities.

It is also thanks to AEGEE that I began to be able to decipher the obscure functioning of EC construction and of its institutions (which today allows me to attempt to bring more transparency and efficiency to them). For it should not be imagined that our relations with the European Commission, in particular, were simple. I have explained that the Commission only gave AEGEE its support after the first congress. We were therefore an independent organisation, coming from the "roots"; a dream for getting Erasmus adopted, but elsewhere a nightmare, for we were critical and uncontrollable, two characteristics closer to flaws than to qualities from the point of view of an administration. On the other hand, the European Commission was not used to dealing with organisations such as ours. As for our lack of national levels, it continually caused us problems as soon as we tried to gain access to EC subsidies, and people tried systematically to affiliate us to one country or another, if only because the spaces on the forms were not designed for organisations that did not depend on a specific country!

Our uncontrollable character caused us strong tension with that institution, which did not understand that we decided on our programme by ourselves, and only afterwards came to see them to discuss support and subsidies. I know that in 1987 there were numerous internal discussions aimed at finding a means of "controlling" AEGEE-EUROPE. Some recommended the various services co-ordinate so that we would have only one contact and would no longer be wandering from Directorate-General to Directorate-General (the diversity of our centres of interest also surprised the Commission). As we were not in favour of this, and insofar as the Commission at that time was certainly incapable of organising such co-ordination without us, since they never knew in advance who we were going to contact, the

attempt soon came to nothing. Others wished to create rival student movements, which is how a few associations saw the light of day very artificially.... but without causing us the slightest problem since they lacked any anchorage in reality and credibility. A play on words that was made about us at the time sums up nicely the concern that reigned within some services: “AEGEE-mony”. We were systematically kept away from congresses dealing with topics concerning our actions, which was not difficult either, since those events did not interest us; organised by movements we believed existed only thanks to EC finance injections and/or made up entirely of totally out-of-date old fogies, what could we expect of them? On the other hand, on the rare occasions we saw an interest in participating in one of those events, as was the case of the large congress on Erasmus held in Paris in 1988, we successfully put all our weight in the balance so as to occupy an advantageous position.

It is also thanks to AEGEE that I learnt to become a responsible European citizen; that is to say, not only a citizen able to understand, choose and act on a European scale, but above all a person capable of trusting other people who live far away, speak a different language and have a different culture.

And lastly, it was with AEGEE that I realised that in our modern democracies confronted with complex problems, the worst opponent is not he who is against you because he does not like you, but he who is against you because he does not understand the situation. With a bit of political sense one can always deal with the first, whilst the second is a mortal enemy because he is unaware! This is why it is essential to circulate the information (all the information) in one’s possession to avoid lack of awareness, and to associate it with explanation so as to avoid incomprehension. This problem, which was noticeable in AEGEE, is getting greater in our increasingly complex societies in which the trans-national dimension intervenes increasingly often. If, previously, power went hand in hand with detention of information, today and tomorrow it will go with the most widespread and comprehensible transmission of it possible. It goes without saying that here I am talking about the power of doing, the one we used in AEGEE-EUROPE, and not the power of having!

Now that I have answered the question “What did AEGEE-EUROPE teach me?”, it remains for me to ask what I learnt about AEGEE-EUROPE. I understood that some problems cropped up time and again and would be veritable snares as long as AEGEE-EUROPE depended on oral memory. It is for that reason that, in particular

through this book, I am trying to contribute to making AEGEE-EUROPE enter the era of written tradition so that it may capitalise on its past, acquire elements for comparison and avoid repeating the same errors indefinitely. The rest figures in the previous pages, not as a theoretical whole, but as commentaries made on very real acts. I hope that these pages will have revived happy memories in many former members of AEGEE-EUROPE, and I hope they may be useful to those who make up AEGEE today, and to those who will form it in the future. They will also perhaps have brought some useful ideas to those who are interested in collective action and European-level citizenship.

A movement's dynamism comes from a few people who set off a snowball effect in the vast majority. To do this, those individuals must set for themselves strict constraints, in particular, that of doing (instead of having done), that of knowing what they want (instead of asking others what objectives to pursue), that of constantly checking that results conform to objectives fixed, that of frequently putting themselves to member vote (once or twice a year), that of always making an effort to explain to as many as possible the real issues at stake in the choices offered (instead of giving in to the suicidal temptation of cynicism).

To provoke in AEGEE-EUROPE a dynamism as fantastic as that of those first three years, its leaders at all levels (CD, antennae, working groups) must not play at being either pure or cynical, but must be content to act as young European citizens, aware that their future is also their business! And they should bear in mind that the difficulties they will encounter are most unlikely to be greater than those described in this text, and that there is therefore no reason why they will be unable to overcome them. No system is so powerful that motivated and perceptive individuals cannot modify it (radically or progressively). And that was the main lesson of the year 1989!

In order to measure the success of their actions, they should establish criteria that are clear to them, their members and outside observers. For AEGEE-EUROPE, my experience leads me to retain the following four criteria:

- train future actors in European integration (desirous of prolonging European-scale action after AEGEE)

- train future European citizens (capable of understanding European issues)

- make the European dimension of education and the educational dimension of Europe progress (to "democratise" experience and knowledge in European affairs)

- relay the preoccupations of European youth to the decision-makers (to contribute

to pushing the European Union down the paths of the future).

Provoking and mobilising student motivation today is certainly no more difficult than yesterday, and I observe this every day with the success of PROMETHEUS-Europe, which also attracts numerous students (even if they are not its main target).

Since “to know where we should be going, it is useful to know where we have come from”, I hope that this book will be useful to new AEGEEs, as well as to all those who aspire to playing an active role on a European scale!

[11](#) This Europe-Africa experience was useful in the long run, particularly for PROMETHEUS-Europe, for it influenced the way we conceived our external networks

Chronology

The principal [AEGEE-EUROPE](#) events up until 1988

1985

April	EGEE I Congress	Paris
July	Creation of the statutes	Paris
November	Election of the 1st provisional European Board of Directors (Comite Directeur, CD)	Munich

1986

January	Eight simultaneous symposia:	
	The European Student: Utopia or Reality?	Brussels
	Industrial Europe	Leiden
	European Space Technology	London
	European Defence Policy:	Paris
	Towards a European Financial System	Milan
	Integration of Southern Europe	Munich
	Data Processing in Europe	Nice
	Media in Europe	Strasbourg
March	The Great European Nights Amsterdam (by satellite video link-up Brussels between 7 cities)	Amsterdam Brussels London Paris

		Munich Nice Strasbourg
April	EGEE II	Munich
July	Seminar	Nice
October	Cross-borderline Development	Nijmegen
November	Europe and the Middle East	Heidelberg
	Agora	Heidelberg
	Presidents' Conference	Brussels
	The European Monetary System	Munich
	1st European Space Congress	Toulouse
	The Pharmaceutical Industry in Europe	Paris

1987

January	First European Week	Madrid
	European Environmental	Heidelberg
February	New Electronic Technology	Brest
	EGEE III	Leiden
March	2nd Series of Simultaneous Symposia	
	Which Defence for Europe?	Amsterdam
	European Culture	Barcelona
	The Future for the European Community	Brussels
	Genetic Engineering in Europe	Delft
	Europe's Position in the Concert of Nations	Luxembourg
	Euro managers '87	Koln
	Europe between East and West	Kiel

	Mediterranean Environment	Madrid Milan
	A Technology Strategy for Europe	
	Sports in Europe	Nice
	Political Marketing in Europe	Paris
	Business: Which Approach for Europe?	Strasbourg
	Media in Europe	Lyons
April	Between Europe and the Middle East	Athens
July	European Literature	Heidelberg
August	Seminar	Madrid
September	Presidents' Conference	Delft
October	Europe beyond Reykjavik	Nuremberg
	Completing the Internal Market	Hamburg
	Europe of the Technology Parks	Nice
November	The European Currency Unit	Louvain-la Neuve
	Agora	Seville
	Youth Employment in Europe	Bonn/Koln
	2nd European Space Congress	Munich
December	Europe-Africa Congress	Paris

1988

January	Multilingualism in Europe	Kiel
February	Euro managers '88	Brussels
	Presidents' Conference	Louvain-la-Neuve

March	European Technology	Mainz
	The EC and Eastern Europe	Lyons
	The External Economic Relations of the EC	Leiden
	Europe-Latin America Congress	Strasbourg
	The European Week	London
April	EGEE IV	Milan
May	Euro-Defence '88	Mainz
	The Utilisation of EC Law	Reims
	Who builds Europe?	Lille
June	The European Cultural Week	Berlin
	Common Agricultural Policy	Hamburg
July/August	Summer Universities (language courses)	all over the network

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