

ABSTRACT

This study deals with ideas and activities of the French politician Michel Debré in the area of the European integration. Analyzing the evolution of Debré's stance in a period of almost twenty years (1943–1962), the study aims to show that Debré was neither a pure “French nationalist” following obediently the wishes of General de Gaulle, neither a man who denied his own projects after a sudden U-turn in his opinion. We rather argue that Debré had remained true to three basic axes of his action since the Second World War: fidelity to General de Gaulle, readiness to reform French institutions together with a wish to assure to his country a privileged position in the system of international relations and, finally, vision of a huge community of countries bordering the Atlantic Ocean.

In the late 1940's, Debré joined the European Movement and became one of the leading figures of its French branch. Promoting a union of European states, Debré was ready to accept a concession of some national prerogatives to “supra political” institutions but only if there had been a supreme European political authority composed of democratically elected representatives. On this basis he refused the Jean Monnet's sectoral method of integration and its accomplishments from the ECSC to the Treaties of Rome. Nevertheless, Debré was a member of the Assembly of the ECSC and even of the Assembly “ad hoc” in 1952-53. As his passionate calls for a return of General de Gaulle to the government were fulfilled in 1958, he became soon after the first Prime minister of the Fifth Republic. Hence he had to revise his opposition to the European integration and he even praised its economic benefits for France. Moreover, Debré pushed President de Gaulle to put forward a bold initiative to create an inter-governmental European political organisation and largely contributed to the articulation of the French position in the negotiations of the so-called Fouchet Plan. On the other hand, he did not succeed in convincing de Gaulle to let the United Kingdom join the EEC. In 1962 Debré left Matignon and would return to the government on several occasions. But the main chapters of the story *Debré and Europe* had already been written at that moment.