

Robert Grunert, Der Europagedanke westeuropäischer faschistischer Bewegungen 1940–1945, Paderborn, München, Wien, Zürich (Ferdinand Schöningh) 2012, 318 S., ISBN 978-3-506-77413-2, EUR 44,90.

rezensiert von/compte rendu rédigé par
Laura Fahnenbruck, Groningen

Studies on anti-liberal understandings of the European idea are an important addition to the current European self-concept and the perception of a liberal and democratic process of European integration as the only possible narrative. It is crucial to uncover that there also have been different ideas, and to research fascist and authoritarian concepts of a European federation as an integral part of shaping the European project. Much work has been done in this field in recent years. But of course, there is still a lot of research to be done, whether one wants to focus on the cruel roots of the process of Europeanization through war and violence, or whether one wants to focus on transnational cooperation and transfer on different levels or between different subjects. The dissertation discussed here, submitted to the University of Bremen in 2010, is part of this latter strand of research.

Robert Grunert's biggest achievement is that he has brought to our attention fascist ideas on the federation of European states, and that he has done so for those fascist parties that are not the first to spring to mind when one thinks of the fascist »making of Europe« in the first half of the 20th century. More specifically, the author has compared the European ideas of three West European movements, namely the Dutch NSB (Nationaal-Socialistische Beweging), the Belgian Rex and the French PPF (Parti populaire français) and RNP (Rassemblement national populaire). Those who now expect answers to questions such as how these parties created meaningful and possibly even attractive concepts of an anti-liberal Europe, what these concepts contained, or how they were propagated among their (prospective) supporters, will however be disappointed.

Grunert's goal is rather to present Dutch, Belgian and French fascist plans for Europe as an alternative to the hegemonic ideas of the German National Socialists (p. 16, 294). He views their plans both as dependent of and as in contrast to the German occupier, since all of these countries in the period under investigation (1940–1945) were occupied and either received the status of a *Zivilverwaltung* or a *Militärverwaltung* under the German regime (with France as a somewhat exceptional case).

While positioning his study as part of the research on fascism, the author claims to connect a national point of view when it comes to the different images of a future Europe with a transnational point of view when it comes to contrast these images with the National Socialist New Order of Europe (p. 20). As points of comparison he mentions the status that the specific country under investigation had in the German order, the contribution of the supporters of that country's fascist party to the »European war« against the Soviet-Union, and the expression of the specific party's own goals for (colonial) expansion (p. 21). Even though all these points are investigated for all parties, it is not easy to see this in the structure of the book. While he states that his method is that of a comparison, his book rather reads like three studies next to each other. The only chapter in which a comparison really takes place is the

conclusion. Since Grunert also wants pay attention to moments of transfer, one may wonder why he didn't choose *Histoire croisée* as his method. This would have helped to avoid an imbalance in favour of the German concepts, thoughts, decisions or practices and may have shown asymmetries as well as an interaction (of ideas) among all four parties and not only two (sometimes three) of them at once.

The book is structured as follows: Chapters 1–3 cover the descriptions of the investigated parties, the National Socialist ideas of Europe before 1940, as well as the German policy in the three West European countries after 1940. Chapter 4 covers the case of the NSB by first showing the Dutch specifics in the occupiers' view and then discussing Mussert's concept of a »Germanic Confederation of Sovereign Fascist Regimes«. This concept was based on völkisch-cultural principles, which Grunert sees in contrast to the rather racial concept of the SS and of some of Mussert's rivals within the NSB. Mussert's concept is presented as a strategy of political survival and the effort of remaining a sovereign nation state under the new regime. In Chapter 5, the Belgian Rex' concept of Europe as – in the words of Degrelle – »the Internationale of the Healthy Forces« (p. 174) is interpreted as a form of a common European market which is later being transformed into a more SS-focused and racist idea of Europe. As such, this concept rivals the more pan-European, anti-communist, but culturally autonomous views of Streel and Daye. Chapter 6 covers the two French movements Grunert investigates. Here, he identifies the most supra-national fascist ideas of a European integration. For example, the RNP was willing to collaborate with the National Socialists to a large extent even when it came to its European concepts. These in turn were mainly based on the vision of an economic, neo-socialist, but also anti-Semitic federation.

In sum, all fascist concepts for a European federation Grunert looks at were concepts of their own and not follow-ups of the German propaganda for the New order (p. 296). But this could have been made more clearly if the study had not been based on resources that mainly cover the political struggles of the collaborators (and which thus are directly related to the National Socialists), but on resources showing the parties' autonomous concepts of Europe such as they were presented in the parties' newspapers, pamphlets or posters used to win supporters for the European idea. While Grunert does use some party newspapers, this only seems to happen incidentally and it remains unclear whether such sources were used as a serial source.

The author reached his goal in the sense that he is able to bring to light the dynamics that contributed to the dilemma that was a consequence of the occupations in the West: on the one hand, the fascist parties wanted to show solidarity with their ideological partners, on the other hand however, they constantly fought for their own political status during and in the course of the occupation. Claiming a specific idea of a fascist European community was their strategy to show solidarity with a universalistic idea of fascism and at the same time to keep room for manoeuvre as a sovereign state in the nearby future and particularly as the political actors therein. However, there are also some limitations to the study. All too often the focus on the parties' European ideas is pushed aside by highlighting the dissents between the local fascists and the Germans or other rivals within the parties. Every now and then the study even runs the danger of losing touch to the European topic.

It is remarkable that there is no discussion of the term »Europe« either, even though the study itself of course makes clear that there were different interpretations of where and what Europe was – and even more what it was not and who was not included. Concerning readability, as a reader I really miss provisional results and a guiding structure as chapter titles don't seem to function as such, occasionally even mixing up perspectives (or: whose perception is that of »Romanisierte Germanen«). But, to the author's credit, it is not at all easy to bring to the reader's attention all the different research discourses, national histories, party backgrounds and the amount of unpublished sources of three different investigated topics, as this study has done. To conclude, the book is a relevant contribution to a relevant field.