

**LIGUE EUROPEENNE DE COOPERATION ECONOMIQUE – L.E.C.E.
EUROPEAN LEAGUE FOR ECONOMIC CO-OPERATION – E.L.E.C.**

Dr Joseph Retinger (Poland)

A great European

Cracow 1888 - London 1960

**Drs M. van der Velden
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Congress of The Hague, May 1948. Applauding Churchill's speech are, from left to right, Paul Ramadier, Retinger, Denis de Rougemont and Raoul Dautry

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 Cracow 1888 - London 1960.

- 1888 Joseph Hieronim Retinger (JHR) was born on 17 April 1888 in Cracow, the youngest of four children. Father Josef Retinger was a lawyer and legal adviser of Count Zamoyski, the family was a.o. connected with the Jagiellon University of Cracow. Mother came from a small estate near Cracow. JHR married 1. 1912 Otalia Zubrzycka, one daughter Malina
 2. 1926 Stella Morel, daughters Marya and Stasia.
- 1906 In Paris as the protégé of Count Zamoyski after the death of his father.
- 1908 Docteur ès Lettres at the Sorbonne, further studies in Munich, Italy and England.
- 1910 Publisher of a literary monthly in Cracow.
- 1911 In London as director of the Polish Bureau, an organization of various Polish political parties in the Austro-Hungarian part of Poland.
- 1914-1918 In London, Paris and the United States on behalf of the religious and political leaders of Galicia working for the independence of Poland. In 1916 JHR is making an attempt at a separate peace with Austria.
- late 1918 Exile in Spain being temporary a person non grata in France and Great Britain.
- 1919-1925 Living on and off in Mexico more or less as an adventurer being in his thirties helping the Mexicans in their struggle with the United States. Organizes in 1924 and 1926 visits to Mexico of groups of international labour leaders from the International Federation of Trade Unions.
- 1925-1927 Retinger caused the formation of a British Labour Party Parliamentary Committee for Mexico in 1926. JHR makes preparations to launch an encyclopaedia showing how much the Unity of Europe was in line with the evolution of Europe, but due to the refusal of Ernest Bevin to co-operate this plan failed.

About

1928 and the thirties.

Member of the National Executive of the Socialist Party in Poland (1924-1928) and representative of the Polish Socialist Party in Great Britain, the more after 1926 when the Socialist Party came in the opposition against the régime of General Pilsudski.

1939 Adviser to Prime Minister General Sikorski, Commander - in - Chief, and the Council of Ministers.

Retinger had met General Sikorski for the first time in Switzerland in 1916 and for the second time in Warsaw in 1923 when he had become Prime Minister of Poland for the first time. JHR was then on a mission with Edo Fimmen (NL), General Secretary of the International Federation of Trade Unions.

1940 The Polish President and some members of the government in exile embarked for England from Paris. Retinger is provided on his request with a military plane of the British Air Ministry, locates General Sikorski in Libourne (France) and takes him to London to Prime Minister Churchill. Nearly 35.000 Polish military men could be brought over from France.

Retinger had advised general Sikorski on the advantages for Poland of a federated Europe on the line of federal regional groupings and S. became a convinced federalist. Retinger contacts in London the Belgian Ministers Jaspar and Spaak and also Paul van Zeeland and Roger Motz.

1941 The Poles, lead by General Sikorski and in the presence of Retinger started talks in London with the Belgian Ministers Pierlot, Jaspar and Spaak about the unity of Europe on 7 February 1941. A few month later talks started with the Dutch: Prime Minister Gerbrandy, van Kleffens (Foreign Affairs) and Kerstens (Economic Affairs). With General Sikorski and Retinger participating, the first talks on co-operation between Belgium and Holland took place between Mr Spaak and Mr Van Kleffens.

- 1942- Retinger with the support of General Sikorski initiates
 1944 regular meetings of the Foreign Ministers of the Continental countries in London in the Polish Prime-Ministers Office with the idea for the unity of Europe. Retinger finds support for his ideas regarding the unity of Europe from Sir Stafford Crips, President of the British Board of Trade and later Minister. The general feeling was that with all those concerned they all agreed on the necessity for a supra-national authority.

From April till July 1944 Retinger (57 years old) is dropped by parachute in occupied Poland on a personal contact mission a.o. meets General Bor Komorowski, commandant of the Polish Underground Army, later leader of the Warsaw Rising and JHR visits his birthplace Cracow.

Shortly before being evacuated by plane Retinger was struck by paralysis from which in later years he never completely recovered, remaining crippled to the end of his life.

- 1945 Retinger is the recipient and organizer of the british welfare goods to Poland as bridges, clothing, field kitchens and the like.

- 1946 Retinger gives an address in London and writes "The European Continent" in may and august 1946. He appears afraid of continental Europe becoming a playing field for the Anglo-Saxons or the Russian Empire and states: "It would be possible for the smaller of the Western Continental Powers to initiate consultation and upon this framework a unified Continent might well be built"

At the same time Paul van Zeeland - who in 1942 in London wrote "Preliminary notes on the economic reconstruction of Europe after the war" - published an article entitled "Belgium and Western Europe" in which he focussed the European co-operation on a nucleus of France, Great-Britain, the Netherlands and Belgium.

On the 17th October 1946 Retinger, Paul van Zeeland and Pieter Kerstens who knew each other from the London war-days, together with observer Ambassador Dupuy of Canada met more or less officially for the first time in Maison Flamande in Brussels - residence of Paul van Zeeland - and decided to form an independent association with the aim to restore Europe which became in 1949 to be known as the European League for Economic Co-operation (ELEC). Paul van Zeeland became President of ELEC and Retinger General-Secretary.

1947- Retinger, Van Zeeland and Kerstens are structuring ELEC.
1951

An American Committee (disbanded after the founding of the Marshall-plan), and a British, French, Belgian, Luxembourg and Dutch Committee are formed in 1946-1949 followed by an Italian, German and Austrian Committee in 1950 and 1951. Prominent Europeans as Sir Harold Butler, Macmillan, E.Giscard d'Estaing, Serruys, René Mayer, Boël, Camu, Bentz van den Berg, Konsbruck, Hermann Abs etc. meet each other on a regular basis around ELEC-tables.

In 1947 Retinger is elected Honorary-Secretary of the International Committee of the Movements for European Unity, Duncan Sandys being Executive Chairman. This Committee initiated and prepared the Congress of Europe in the Hague in 1948, opened by Winston Churchill and Princess Juliana. This Congress lead to the establishing of the Council of Europe.

In 1949 Retinger becomes the first Secretary General of the international European Movement and, together with Duncan Sandys, is the driving force behind the first session of the Assembly of the Council of Europe on 8 August 1949 in Strasbourg.

In 1951 Paul Henri Spaak takes over the chairmanship of the European Movement, the secretariat is moved to Brussels and Retinger is going to live there.

1952- Retinger consults in 1952 Paul van Zeeland and Paul
1959 Rijkens, then chairman of Unilever, in order to form a forum on the relations between Europe and the United States, which relation was deteriorating. Retinger thinks of Prince Bernhard of the Netherlands to play a leading part in this forum and so together Prince Bernhard as chairman, they structure what is soon called the Bilderberg Meetings focussing on Atlantic Alliance.

Retinger remains as before primarily attached to European Unity.

1960 On 12 June 1960 Retinger dies. He, a son of Cracow, is buried at the East Sheen cemetery in London in a very modest grave.

Sources:

John Pomian, Joseph Retinger, Memoirs of an Eminence Grise (1972).

(John Pomian was the private secretary of Retinger from 1948-1960).

Drs M. van der Velden, The origins of the European League for Economic Co-operation (ELEC) (1995)