

**RETURN TO NORMALCY
OR A NEW BEGINNING**

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**Concepts and Expectations for a
Postwar Europe around 1945**

Edited by
JOACHIM LUND
&
PER ØHRGAARD

**University Press of Southern Denmark
Copenhagen Business School Press**

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© Copenhagen Business School Press & University Press of Southern Denmark
Printed in Denmark by Narayana Press
Cover design by BUSTO | Graphic Design
1st edition 2008

e-ISBN 978-87-630-9952-3

Distribution:

Denmark

University Press of Southern Denmark
55 Campusvej
DK-5230 Odense M
Denmark
Tel + 45 66 15 79 99
Fax + 45 66 15 81 26
www.universitypress.dk

Rest of Scandinavia

DBK, Mimersvej 4
DK-4600 Køge, Denmark
Tel +45 3269 7788
Fax +45 3269 7789

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Preface

PICKING UP THE PIECES OF EUROPE IN 1945

Joachim Lund & Per Øhrgaard

Europe, spring 1945. On May 8, the Allies received the unconditional surrender of the German Armed Forces in Berlin. In 2005 we celebrated the 60th anniversary of the defeat of Nazism and the end of the Second World War in Europe. But VE-Day not only signified the triumph and possible reestablishment of the prewar balance of power. It was also Day One of a postwar European development in which none of the key questions regarding Europe's future were settled – except perhaps issues relating to (most) national borders and the extent of US and Soviet spheres of influence and power. The winning side represented a variety of different and conflicting political views and economic interests, the fight between democracy and dictatorship had only just begun, and economic and logistic problems of supplying the populations of Europe continued to set the agenda.

In this situation, what were the expectations for Europe's future? What were the hopes and anxieties of the Western European populations? What were the ideas and plans of politicians, intellectuals and social engineers concerning the future of Europe? The Marshall Plan and the North Atlantic and Rome treaties lay far ahead, and plans of a closer relationship between the European states at best came in the shape of visions. Some preferred quickly to revert to business as usual, some favoured the idea of a new beginning and large-scale political and economic transformations. In many ways, Europe found itself at a crossroads.

In his famous speech to the *Bundestag* on 8 May 1985, *Bundespräsident* Richard von Weizsäcker commemorated the peace 40 years earlier: “Der 8. Mai ist ein tiefer historischer Einschnitt, nicht nur in der deutschen, sondern auch in der europäischen Geschichte. Der europäische Bürgerkrieg war an sein Ende gelangt, die alte europäische Welt

zu Bruch gegangen (...) Es gab keine “Stunde Null”, aber wir hatten die Chance zu einem Neubeginn.”

A “new beginning” had already been on the agenda around the end of the First World War, but it was a controversial theme: in the USA the Democratic president Woodrow Wilson (1913-1921) and his idealistic attempt at creating a new world order was replaced by Republican Warren G. Harding (1921-1923), who won the 1920 election, promising the American voters to set a course back to the good old days, or to “normalcy”, as he mistakenly put it. On the European stage, in 1945 as well as in 1918, many Europeans asked themselves if the continent would relapse into national isolationism or develop new ways of transnational co-operation.

The book addresses this fundamental postwar question. It is based on the conference *1945 – Back to Normal or a New Beginning? Expectations and Concepts for a Postwar Europe*, which took place at the Copenhagen Business School in September 2005. The various contributions dealt with the problems, dilemmas and expectations in the Western European scenario, as experienced by governments, organizations, groups and individuals working at the time of the *Kriegsende*. The aim was to pin down essential concepts and discussions about Europe’s future, not only addressing issues that would eventually lead to the establishment of the European Union, but also embracing those that might have taken Europe in a different direction.

A revised version of the conference contributions is collected in this volume. A witness of history and a central figure in the German ‘Ostpolitik’ of the late 1960s and the 1970s, Egon Bahr looks back at the year 1945 and points out the differences between the Berlin and the West German perspective. Patricia Clavin explains the continuity of economic planning of the League of Nations from the inter-war period to wartime and postwar commissions and organizations. Jørgen Sevaldsen, Carsten Humlebæk, Morten Heiberg, Bent Boel, and Joachim Lund outline the situation in Great Britain, Spain, Italy, France, and Scandinavia in 1945, stressing the ambiguity of the impact of the war on politics and on the economy. Finally, the defeated Germany is the subject of the contributions by Axel Schildt and Per Øhrgaard.

We would like to thank Birgit Hüttmann, who assisted in organizing the conference, and Stig W. Jørgensen for technical assistance.

Copenhagen, autumn 2007

Joachim Lund Per Øhrgaard