The Europe of the five parts of the world: François Perroux on European integration

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Although seldom remembered in this respect, François Perroux exerted direct and indirect influence on the debate on European integration in the immediate post-war period in France. The theme of European integration serves in Perroux’s work as a concrete case study on which a series of his recurrent themes could be explored, such as his theory of domination, his reflection on economic spaces, development and the costs of man (“coûts de l’homme”), or even as an extension of topics from his work in the 1930s related to corporatism and communitarianism. Perroux deals with the theme of European integration fundamentally in an extensive book from 1954, "L’Europe sans rivages", but also in several others of his books and articles from the period, forming a complex and multifaceted analysis of the problematic that, nevertheless, insists in a central message: the importance of the global aspect of the European integration, thinking in a Europe of the “five parts of the world”.

This paper offers an analysis of this set of writings, connecting it to the institutional and political context of the debate on European integration in France. The goal is to situate the effective influence Perroux’s ideas and his concrete personal influence on important names of Jean Monnet entourage. Taking these general questions as a reference, the article also explores the critical thinking undertaken by Perroux, throughout the 1950s, on the institutional and political paths taken in the first years of the European integration process, approximating his analysis to other voices that critically discussed those paths, such as, for example, Gunnar Myrdal. Doing this, the paper also explores important connections, not frequently visited in the literature of the history of economic ideas, between the European integration and the field of economic development or regarding the debates on regional inequalities that took shape in the midst of the postwar European reconstruction projects.

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