

'The dawn of Europe' from Le Monde (9 May 1975)

Caption: In an article published in the French daily newspaper Le Monde on the 25th anniversary of the Declaration made on 9 May 1950, Pierre Uri, former colleague of Jean Monnet, recalls the preparations for the Schuman Plan.

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The 25th anniversary of the ‘Schuman Plan’

The dawn of Europe

9 May 1950 — ‘Today, Wednesday 9 May, at 5 p.m. in the Salon de l’Horloge at the Quai d’Orsay, the Minister of Foreign Affairs will make an important announcement.’ There, in a room bursting at the seams, a tall, frail man, speaking quietly with an eastern accent, acquainted his audience with the document that was to be relayed all over the world by telephone and wireless. Robert Schuman was rectitude and intrepid conviction personified: this was the source of that coolness which he had displayed when, as President of the Council in 1947, he had been confronted with a national strike.

In order to gauge the significance of what had just taken place, we have to think back to the period, one which the young of today have difficulty imagining. It was barely five years since the end of the most horrifying of wars. Although Germany had a government, it had not recovered its sovereignty: it required, in matters of foreign policy, the agreement of the three Allied Commissioners. The Ruhr was administered by an International Authority, on which Alain Poher was the French representative. The Saar had been placed under the protectorship of Gilbert Grandval. A conference was about to be held in London to determine the increase in the level of Germany’s steel production.

One year earlier, in Jean Monnet’s garden, an informal meeting with neither instructions nor an agenda was held between him, accompanied by Étienne Hirsch and myself, and his British counterpart, Edwin Plowden, who in turn had with him Robert Hall, Economic Adviser to Her Majesty’s Government. That Germany happened to have been forgotten was remarked upon in passing.

From that point on, Jean Monnet’s mind was never to be at rest for a moment. Then, one May Day weekend, the idea was brought into focus. With him were Étienne Hirsch and Paul Reuter, the jurist. There were three themes: Franco-German relations; coal and steel, chosen for their symbolic value as the means of war and of peace; and supranational authority. A first paper was roughly drafted. The following day, Monnet called me and showed it to me. My words were: ‘This changes everything, everything falls into place: German sovereignty, the Saar.’ As for the economic plan, one clarification was still required: the merging of markets instead of an interventionist organisation, allowing conditions to determine of their own accord the highest level of productivity. I was delegated to rewrite it. Bernard Clappier, Principal Private Secretary to Robert Schuman, joined us. He immediately appreciated the immense prospect that had opened before us, the gigantic game of double or quits in which his superior was invited to play a part.

The changes made, continuing right up to the ninth draft, which was adopted on Saturday 6 May, were limited. René Mayer had Africa added; Georges Bidault, the Prime Minister, asked for a reference to France’s constant efforts to achieve a united Europe. This became: ‘Europe has not come into being, in its stead we have had war’; the Quai d’Orsay covered itself with the allusion to Germany’s obligations, ‘as long as these remain’.

The secret had been well kept. An emissary sent to Konrad Adenauer had immediately obtained his enthusiastic support. Dean Acheson was in Paris on his way to the London Conference: he was not quite sure what to think of the paper that he was shown in confidence. The project could have been a Bidault Plan: his Principal Private Secretary, who did not care for Monnet, forgot to inform him of the meeting. We read in *Le Monde* that the President was supposed to have received the information. Two Ministers were in on it: René Mayer and René Pleven. On Wednesday morning, 9 May 1950, they helped Robert Schuman to have the project adopted by the Council of Ministers.

Acceptance by Italy and Benelux was not long in coming. What was urgent was to get to London. There, Monnet met Stafford Cripps; he asked Hirsch and me to join him. After the refusal, Robert Hall said to me: ‘Hazy fears.’

A style without precedent

The conference convened for the drafting of the ECSC Treaty had been called for 1 June. We prepared a working paper divided up into articles, which were adopted, given greater depth or supplemented by negotiation. Monnet created a style that was without precedent. No translation, no minutes. Agreement on one point was not dependent on agreement on another: in accordance with a German word that he had just learnt — *Junktim* — there was no conditionality. To cap it all, as a Dutch friend of mine has just reminded me, Hirsch and I were not afraid to argue in front of the others. It was not in order to flaunt any disagreement: it was research that we made a point of conducting openly. The most experienced negotiators were thrown by this approach: how could they put forward their national position if there were no French national position? We won exceptional credit by means of these tactics. No meeting between two delegations took place without a Frenchman participating. The French delegation played the part, which is so novel and so essential, of the catalyst, and by doing so it foreshadowed Europe.

Right in the middle of the discussions fell, like a bombshell, the unfortunate declaration by John McCloy, High Commissioner for Germany, who proposed the setting up of 12 German divisions. It was the opposite of what we were trying to do: in the quest for European sovereignty, to ignore completely the issue of German sovereignty. A response had to be improvised: the idea of a Defence Community. The team that drew up the Treaty for it simply inserted, where they had no business to be, the clauses that we had drawn up for coal and steel. When Paul Van Zeeland refused a genuine common budget by reducing it to the sum of the contributions determined by each parliament, when every decision by the Allied High Commission was made subject to the unanimous agreement of the Allied Council, I thought that we were just storing up trouble: the headlights were trained on a supranational authority, but it would be totally bereft of powers.

At the time of the preparatory work on the ECSC Treaty, Hirsch took the lead in a large proportion of the economic and technical discussions; the State Councillor, Maurice Lagrange, took charge of the legal aspects; I dealt more particularly with the social and commercial issues. But everyone dabbled in everything. Our conference was interrupted so that the French delegation could complete the drafting of a plan; it also delivered a memorandum on the transitional period: this was converted effortlessly into an agreement. A reading committee, in which I was at Lagrange's side, took care of questions that had not yet been settled, completed the final drafting of the texts and, if memory serves, accepted without changing a word the agreement on the transitional arrangements. It remained for the Ministers to agree on the seat of the institutions: this very nearly took a dramatic turn. In the end, Joseph Bech, thanks to his good nature and his skill, managed to have the Community installed in Luxembourg, France keeping the Parliament for Strasbourg.

When, on 10 August 1952, Jean Monnet took up the Presidency, the small handful of principal negotiators immediately got down to work. One day, the story will have to be told of what those first months of unremitting labour were like, of the pace at which that work was performed in order to put the institutions in place, to make contact with industries and governments and to complete all the tasks before the opening of the Common Market for coal and steel.

The same spirit held sway as had done during the negotiations: each country's difficulties were regarded as common difficulties and, as such, to be settled in common. For cooperation, in the sense of European organisation as fathered by the Marshall Plan, was not enough: it meant either standstill, or clumsy compromise, or agreement forced through by the outside power, America, who held the purse strings. It was up to Europe to find in its new style of working its own internal federator. Institutions, too, but ones set up for specific tasks and which would exclude that worst of evils: the spirit of domination, which demeans the one that dominates as much as the one that is dominated. And also this new concept of what Jacques Rueff called an institutional market, that is to say, initiative that is free but circumscribed by conditions that match it to the circumstances of our day. And, particularly, retraining, this great invention that was to protect the labour force from the costs and the risks of progress, so that any change in employment might become an opportunity for promotion.

In his retirement, General de Gaulle allowed himself to mock what he called this 'muddle of coal and steel' and to attack the person whom he described as 'the instigator', without naming him. He regarded us as naive. He did not properly appreciate the extraordinary authority which Frenchmen enjoyed, both in the

Paris negotiations and in those for the Treaty of Rome. Where is his policy of table-thumping now? History will show that, for 15 years, the greatest and most peaceful revolution of our time was halted and almost killed off. When, after the General's return to power, Adenauer overcame his reservations and met him, he did admit that he had underestimated the political significance of what had been achieved. This tardy recognition did not stop the wily politician, who proposed a Franco-German agreement of which nothing has come barring sporadic meetings, which sometimes exacerbated antagonisms, from proclaiming that Franco-German reconciliation was all his doing. Those who can remember are well aware how much the Declaration of 9 May 1950 had, in the course of a few days, suddenly changed the Franco-German tandem for ever.

Seen as a whole, the entire significance of what happened on that day lay in the changing of relations between nations. We have known subsequent crises. Jean Monnet remains the most optimistic: 'What we have made is solid; the proof is that, every time that there are crises, they are overcome.' Today, he is thinking about a task that is even more extensive and more difficult: the prohibition of the spirit of domination. This will also have to entail changing relations between men.

Pierre Uri