

Interview with Jacques-René Rabier (Luxembourg, 8 February 2002)

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Peace was always a concern of Monnet's — these are high-sounding words, but they do correspond to certain values: peace, unity, teamwork, trust between team members and trust between nations.

Let us not forget that, during the First World War — Monnet was very young, 25 years old — during the First World War, he dreamed up — in 1916 or ... — a Franco-British supply system for provisions coming from the United States. Until then, the British had had their own convoys, the French theirs, the Germans their submarines, and the convoys had sailed separately from one another. Monnet had the idea and put it forward in 1917, I think, to the French Government of the time — this young Monnet fellow from Cognac, who had already travelled a fair bit in the world — he proposed a Franco-British supply pool. So he was already seeking unity, his aim being to pursue victory and peace after that victory.

And, in 1949 — we must place ourselves in the mindset of the period — it was the Cold War. The papers were full of the Cold War and threats of war. Now, a Cold War may well heat up: Monnet was most concerned to do something. In his opinion, and he had a lot of friends in the United States, Europe had to be a worthy negotiating partner for the United States, and the fate of Germany was one of his concerns. He had been at the League of Nations in 1920, 1922 and 1923. He had left very quickly, because he was somewhat disenchanted by the role of an institution where all the States were sovereign yet had to take decisions unanimously. And, above all, he was well aware of the mistakes made in the peace agreement imposed on the Germans following the First World War.

Then there was one idea that he had been mulling over for some time; the evidence for this can be seen in a memorandum that he sent to General de Gaulle in August 1943 in Algiers, where he said something along these lines: 'The war will end in victory, so let us start to plan how to reintegrate a de-Nazified Germany, a democratic Germany, in a European whole.' A European federation or entity. The word 'federation' already appeared in this 1943 document. So this was an idea that he never abandoned.

He had tried to interest the British — in 1947 or 1948 — in closer cooperation where planning was concerned, but that did not get very far; the British were reluctant to commit themselves, but the discussions held were fairly advanced. In 1949 and early 1950, Monnet's ideas on this point crystallised: vigorous action was necessary to influence public opinion and the political circles in France, Germany and the other European countries, including Britain, moreover; the premises must be altered and the pack reshuffled. That is how the idea matured, and the points that he wanted to concentrate on were those which were at the same time economically, politically and symbolically very important: coal and steel.

But why coal and steel? Because, in the background, there was German coal and French iron ore; there was also the International Authority for the Ruhr, which was not going to last for ever. Was full sovereignty to be returned to Germany? On what terms? Would the Russians agree? So, in this Cold War climate, he understood perfectly that Germany's position was central to the operation.

It followed, then, that France and Germany were the first targets. He put the idea to Robert Schuman — a fine man, held in high esteem and well-known in this country — whom Monnet had had occasion to approach many times when Schuman was in the Government, and without needing to go through the Quai d'Orsay — the Ministry of Foreign Affairs — where the project might well have been shelved because it was so innovative.

You see, diplomats, I do not want to run them down, but diplomats often distrust new ideas. Monnet loved new ideas, and, thanks to Schuman's colleagues and to Schuman himself, the project was finalised. Schuman gave him *carte blanche*: 'Draft a statement for me.' The statement was drafted in the last days of April and in early May 1950, and, on 8 May, if memory serves, Schuman took over the plan that Monnet had given him. Schuman sent one of his closest aides to Adenauer in order to secure his agreement. Schuman was prepared to submit the plan to the French Government only if he knew that the Germans would accept it. Now, that same morning, on 9 May 1950, Schuman's aide telephoned from Bonn: 'Adenauer agrees; accept the plan.' So Schuman submitted the plan to the French Government on 9 May

1950 and made it public in the Salon de l'Horloge in the Ministry for Foreign Affairs at the Quai d'Orsay in Paris, that same day at six o'clock in the evening. And, as they say: I was there.