

Fathers of Europe

It is impossible to dissociate some names from the initial stages of European integration: Robert Schuman due to his Declaration on 9th May 1950, Jean Monnet, who was the latter's source of inspiration and first president of the High Authority of the ECSC, Konrad Adenauer, the German Chancellor who brought the young FRG into the project and also Alcide de Gasperi, President of the Italian Council, Paul-Henri Spaak, the Belgian Prime Minister, Johan Willem Beyen, the Prime Minister of the Netherlands and Joseph Bech, the head of the Luxembourg government. Seven founding fathers for the emerging ECSC – which was heading towards a great future – the European Union.

In the past a great number had already put forward the idea of a united Europe, notably Aristide Briand and Richard Nikolaus de Coudenhove-Kalergi, and also in a more distant past, Victor Hugo when he delivered his famous speech on the “United States of Europe” on 21st August 1849 at the Peace Congress; there was also Winston Churchill who put forward his vision of a united Europe as a remedy to nationalist passions during his speech to students at the University of Zurich in 1946.

Many others after them played key roles in European integration: German, Walter Hallstein, the first President of the European Commission in 1958, Italian Altiero Spinelli, intellectual and politician, author of the *Ventotene Manifesto* and the inspiration behind the draft treaty on European Union in 1984 and of course Jacques Delors, the charismatic President of the European Commission in the 1980's and 90's.

Each of these personalities is the bearer of a unique story, an opinion, a path; however at one time or another they all believed in the idea of European unity. Like Sylvain Schirmann, we might also then ask the question: “*How did it come about that just after the Second World War a certain number of personalities and leading Statesmen took the risk of committing themselves to the process of building a Europe which most of them saw as being a united one?*”¹

The Reasons Behind European Commitment

A joint European desire for reconciliation

The Fathers of Europe all shared the same desire for the pacification of Europe, not via a balance of power, as was the case after the Vienna Congress in 1815, but via the reconciliation of European nations.

Many of them grew up near borders – that sometimes shifted – like Robert Schuman for example who was born a German in Luxembourg but who became French after Moselle's annexation to France; or Alcide de Gasperi who started his political career in the Austrian parliament in Innsbrück but ended it as the President of the Council of Italian Ministers. Joseph Bech, Paul-Henri Spaak and Johan Willem Beyen governed the Benelux countries, a customs union that was formed to push back its members' restrictive borders. Finally Konrad Adenauer was from Cologne, a major city in West Germany, near to Saarland and the Ruhr,

¹ Sylvain Schirmann (dir.), *Robert Schuman et les Pères de l'Europe : Cultures politiques et années de formation*, Publications de la Maison Robert Schuman, Bruxelles, PIE Peter Lang, 2008, p.17

regions which were sources of conflict between the countries of Europe in the wake of the two world wars.

Moreover they had all suffered and fought against Nazi totalitarianism or Fascist dictatorship. Alcide de Gasperi was imprisoned for his opposition to Mussolini in 1927, a fate also suffered by Konrad Adenauer in the face of Nazism in 1934 and 1944 and Robert Schuman in 1940. Joseph Bech was forced into exile with his government likewise Beyen in 1940 as a consequence of his antagonistic relations with the Nazis when he was a director of Unilever.

From this period the Fathers of Europe drew one conclusion: peace would be found via the reconciliation of populations. As of 1946 Stateless Konrad Adenauer, in defeated Germany that was still divided into occupation zones, imagined the place German people might occupy in a new Europe: ***“Europe will only be possible if a community of European people is restored in which every population will provide its own irreplaceable, unique contribution to the economy and to European culture, thought, poetry and Western creativity.”*** (Konrad Adenauer, Cologne speech 24th March 1946 to the Christian Democratic Union in the British Occupied Zone). The very same idea that the unity of Europeans was a prerequisite for the upkeep of long lasting peace was key to the founding document of European integration – the Declaration of 9th May 1950: ***“The contribution which an organized and living Europe can bring to civilization is indispensable to the maintenance of peaceful relations.”*** (Robert Schuman, Declaration of 9th May 1950). As Alcide De Gasperi spoke to Italian Communist Senators who were against the project, he repeated: ***“The reason (for this project) lies in the need to quell the threat of a return to militarism by Germany and to correct the error made by Poincaré when we thought that occupying the Ruhr would be the solution.”*** (Alcide De Gasperi, speech to the Italian Senate, 15th March 1952). Finally in 1952 some weeks after the establishment of the ECSC Jean Monnet explained to the American press: ***“As long as Europe remains divided it will be weak and a constant source of conflict. [...] With the Schuman Plan and a European army², we have laid the foundations on which we shall be able to build the United States of Europe which will be free, vigorous, peaceful and prosperous.”*** (Jean Monnet, speech to the National Press Club, 30th April 1952, Washington).

A United Europe will be a Prosperous Europe

Between the wars the idea of the economic union of Europe was already a suggestion notably in industrial spheres. In the eyes of the industrialists the creation of a European customs union would provide a means for new outlets leading to increased cheaper productivity (large scale savings). The solution put forward was the organisation of international sectoral cartels such as the *Entente Internationale d’Acier* created in 1926. The idea of customs union was promoted by Belgium, Luxembourg and the Netherlands in particular which had already set up a similar system between themselves: the Belgian-Luxembourg Economic Union (UEBL) created in 1921 between Belgium and the Grand Duchy with the lifting of borders and currency parity and the Benelux, the convention of which was signed on 5th September 1944 before the end of the Second World War. Joseph Bech’s experience was of particular importance during negotiations over the Paris Treaty in 1951, and then for the Rome Treaties in 1957. Since he had had to manage the conflicts generated by technical dysfunctions within the UEBL when he was head of government during his first term in office in 1925 he sent delegations comprising those with experience and industrialists as well as diplomats to

² The treaty on the Community of European Defence (CED) was signed on 27th May 1952 and then abandoned after it was rejected by the French National Assembly in 1954 because of the negative vote by Gaullist and Communist MPs.

negotiate the treaties; the negotiations did not lose sight of companies' vital needs: a widening of the markets both for the sale of goods and for the supply of raw materials.

The diagnosis was still the same after the Second World War: protectionism was deemed responsible for economic rivalries and as one of the contributing factors that had led to war. *“We have learned that nations, far from being able to provide for themselves, stand by one another; that the best way to serve one's country is to guarantee the cooperation of others thanks to reciprocal work together and by the pooling of resources”*;³. Hence, if the rivalry for economic resources, notably in the industrial basins of the North of France and the Ruhr, had led firstly to diplomatic, and then military confrontation, their pooling would now finally lead to industrial and then political cooperation.

Finally their choice of the common market of Western Europe was almost concomitant with the establishment of the planned economy model in Eastern Europe, under the empire of the Soviet Union and exemplified by the creation of the Mutual Economic Aid Council (COMECON). The model of a centralised, planned economy served as a foil as western governments were reorganising their economies; with protectionism no longer being an option, free trade seemed to be the only viable economic model.

The Founding Fathers United by a Dominant Political Trend: Christian Democracy

The Christian Democratic parties in the various countries of Europe played a key role in the foundation of united Europe. A result of Christian universalism the idea of unification, and particularly that of Europe, is a leitmotif that runs throughout their ideas about foreign policy. Christian Democracy is an invitation to rise above everything national with the aim of eliminating the conflicts that are caused by division. Even between the wars cooperation initiatives had begun between the Christian Democrat parties of some European countries such as the International Secretariat of Democratic Parties of Christian Inspiration (SIPDIC). Between 1945-1950 Christian Democracy played a key role because it provided an answer to two threats: that of war, the painful memory of which was still felt, notably in response to the German question; and that of Communism, by standing as an alternative to socialist internationalism. At the beginning of the 1950's these assets turned the Christian Democrat parties into major political forces in the political systems of the six ECSC Member States.

It was this political power that provided the founders with their means of action: *“the founding fathers [...] were the true craftsmen of European unity in the public arena because they had succeeded in entering the magic circle of power which gave them the strength to transform political life”*⁴. We might say that the success of Robert Schuman's proposal on 9th May 1950 as a member of the MRP, whilst that put forward by Aristide Briand in 1929 had failed, was also due to the fact that he addressed his proposal to leaders, who like him, claimed predominantly to be Christian Democrats, notably Konrad Adenauer, head of the CDU and Alcide de Gasperi, founder of Italian Christian Democracy.

Apart from economic integration Adenauer, De Gasperi and Schuman, like their parties, all shared a federal vision of Europe. Hence Christian Democracy was the first political movement to have a united parliamentary group within the ECSC's Assembly thereby demonstrating the importance it gave to supranational institutions. The project for a European Defence Community provided an opportunity for the Christian Democrat leaders to take their project of political integration forwards. On 10th December 1951 De Gasperi defended a

³ Robert Schuman, *For Europe*, 1st edition Paris, Robert Schuman Foundation - Nagel, 2010.

⁴ Gérard Bossuat, *Les fondateurs de l'Europe unie*, Paris, Belin, 2001.

programme for federal, political unification as he spoke to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. This programme was supported by Adenauer and Schuman but was rejected by the Belgian and French Prime Ministers Paul van Zeeland and Georges Bidault.

“The burial of the EPC (European Political Community) and the failure of the EDC might have seemed like defeat for Christian Democracy which these Communities are identified with more than any of the other accomplishments of the 1950’s.”⁵ However the Christian Democrat leaders were to be the main players in taking up European integration again during the Messina Conference in 1955 which led to the signature of the Rome Treaties on 25th March 1957 and the creation of the European Economic Community (EEC) and the European Atomic Energy Community (EAEC or EURATOM).

Conclusion

There were many factors which brought the Fathers of Europe together in the proposal put forward by Robert Schuman on 9th May 1950. They all shared the same experience of war, the negative, perverse effects of protectionism and the political weakening of Germany exacerbated by the Versailles Treaty of 1919. They also shared the same vision of the path to follow for Europe to become prosperous again; they all shared the same political approach of universal ideals of Christian Democracy. These common experiences set the seed in the minds of these Statesmen of a common vision of Europe united by the economy as a vector of peace, of a Europe organised according to cooperation between States and populations which would one day be completed by political unity.

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⁵ Anne Dulphy, « Démocrates-chrétiens (Europe des) », in Yves Bertoncini, Thierry Chopin, Anne Dulphy, Sylvain Kahn, Christine Manigand (dir.), *Dictionnaire critique de l'Union européenne*, Paris, Armand Colin, 2008