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18 in 1950

The European fortune of an entire generation

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On the occasion of Europe Day that is taking place on 9th May next the Robert Schuman Foundation has published a speech given by Jacques Rigaud, Honorary Advisor to the State and Deputy Chairman of the Foundation, which was given during a seminar in Athens on 27th March 2012.

Today united Europe is a fact for us, it is self-evident. Its cumbersome and complex nature annoys us more than it satisfies us with its undeniable successes. I would like to now say what it meant for all of those who, like me, were eighteen in 1950.

We belonged to the "between-the-wars" generation (a dark expression if you think about it), whose childhood is bathed in memories of the 1914-18 war, in which no French family was spared and by the sound of marching boots announcing further conflict. Eight years old in 1940, 13 in 1945: each of us has personal memories of the exodus, the arrival of the Germans (the "Boche" as we called them), of the occupation with its many deprivations and bombings. The Allied landing in 1944 and the Liberation marked us as adolescents. We wondered what the future held for us. More war?

In 1950, the reconstruction of France was not complete but it was recovering slowly. Europe, still under barbed wire, was extremely inaccessible and even less familiar. For us it was just a geographic and historic expression, with its daunting borders, its memories of war and treaties; but in a confusing way, we felt that these secular clashes, notably between France and Germany, absolutely had to be overcome. But how? That was precisely the question ...

Not only did the USA come to Europe's aid as of 1941; they helped rebuild it with the "Marshall Plan", inviting the European States to cooperate with them at the same time. The OECD was the first hesitant step towards European integration. General opinion held that the time for war was

over, but we did not know by which miracle peace in Europe could now be anything else but a time without war or a precarious interval between armed conflicts. In a speech in Zurich in 1948 Winston Churchill did speak of the "United States of Europe", but it was just a speech...

On 9th May 1950 Robert Schuman, the then Foreign Minister in the Bidault government, suggested that France and Germany, together with any other countries that wanted to join them, pool their coal and steel industries, the matrix of the weapons of war, and with this he took "an audacious, unprecedented initiative which I had never experienced before," wrote René Rémond. I can say that for myself and my friends at Sciences Po, this declaration immediately seemed, apart from its direct goal, to be the forerunner of a new period for Europe. We felt that it was going to be our future, without knowing how and at what pace. This teenage dream did however become a reality, faster than we had dared to hope.

It is the experience of a "European generation" that I would now like to recount to you.

Until 1950 international relations necessarily and exclusively concerned relations between States. The SDN and then the UN had been designed by and for the States likewise the Atlantic Alliance and its military section, NATO, as of 1949. In the same year the Council of Europe, a consultative assembly, brought the States' representatives together.

Everything changed from the "Schuman Plan" onwards. The Paris Treaty of 1952, which was its legal outcome, led to the creation of the new

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"Common High Authority" whose decisions became obligatory in the signatory countries. A Council of Ministers, a Parliamentary Assembly and a Court of Justice, which were then established, were to be become, together with the High Authority, the base of all later developments. By transferring a share of their sovereignty to a new type of organisation, a generator of standards and acts that were integrated directly into the legal orders of the signatory countries, since this organisation was subject to its own political and jurisdictional control, the Founding Members, were quite freely, creating a new legal order for themselves.

It is not an insult to the memory of Robert Schuman if we say that, whilst he foresaw future developments he undoubtedly did not imagine what his initiative would finally lead to; but it is typical of visionary minds to draw up ideas with future promise, beyond what they themselves might have imagined.

Robert Schuman's design was however ambitious in itself. As Foreign Minister in 1949 he had, on France's behalf, accepted the creation of a federal German State bringing together the three zones occupied by the Western Allies : a State under guardianship, because we were mistrustful of this Germany, which reminded people of bad times. As in 1918 we wanted to punish Germany from which France had taken the Saarland. Franco-German reconciliation was however the focus of Schuman's political design. "My personal experience stops me from dreaming when it comes to Germany," he said. He was born in 1886 in Clausen in the Luxembourg valley of Alzette in a family whose roots were in both Luxembourg and Lorraine. The Frankfurt Treaty of 10th May 1871 offered the people of Lorraine the right to choose France. The Schuman family did not choose this and therefore took German nationality. Robert Schuman spent his childhood and a good part of his youth in Luxembourg, then in Germany, and completed his higher education in Bonn, Munich, Berlin and Strasbourg. And so his education was a German one, just like that of Alcide de Gasperi, born in Trentino that was annexed to Austria at the time. Living then in Metz, where he had been a lawyer since 1912, he reasoned as if he were to remain a German; but reports by his family in Belgium slowly distanced him from Germany, its regime and its national character and its principles which led it on the path to injustice and barbarity. Although he only knew

France "superficially" as he put it, the paternal tradition, his Luxembourg childhood, led him to choose France after the Great War. His Lorraine origins also made his re-integration as a Frenchman automatic. On 16th November 1919 he was elected MP in Moselle, a position he would retain until the end of the III Republic, before taking up the post again under the IV Republic as of 1945. If I insist here on the personal fortunes of Robert Schuman it is to show that History is made on the basis of memory and human awareness with each generation that passes. The intimate and painful experience that Schuman had had of Germany, his moral imperative and his deliberate choice to be French as an adult were necessary for him to dare suggest what he did to his fellow countrymen and neighbours. As important as it was in his opinion to rise above the Franco-German conflict, which he primarily saw as being a "moral requirement", and also a "condition for sustainable European peace", Robert Schuman included this imperative in a wider and more ambitious vision of Europe, one of a united Europe which would be open to all of the countries of the continent who wanted to join. "Peace can only be based on equality. We failed to achieve peace in 1919 because we introduced discrimination and the idea of superiority. We are about to make the same mistakes again," he stressed in 1949 as he referred to the "negative peace" of the Versailles Treaty. On 2nd April 1952 during the debate over the ratification of the treaty creating the ECSC he emphasised that this treaty would provide "a stepping stone to the construction of a political Europe in which Germany would have an equal place and share in common discipline in which every participant is guaranteed mutual loyalty." In his declaration on 9th May 1950 he warned that " Europe will not be made all at once, or according to a single plan. It will be built through concrete achievements which first create a de facto solidarity." With this initiative "on a limited but decisive point" he intended to create solidarity via production "that will show that not only has any type of war between France and Germany become unthinkable but materially impossible."

The initial stages of the Schuman Plan and the ECSC teaches us a great deal. At the quai d'Orsay in 1949 Robert Schuman sought a solution to the German issue. The USA encouraged him in this direction. In a letter

dated 30th October 1949 the Secretary of State, Dean Acheson, who knew of his great knowledge of Germany, wrote to him: "the contribution made by Germany in a free world will be positive or negative. The answer will firstly lie with France. The time has come for it to take an initiative." Yes, but which should it be? It is not an insult to Schuman's memory if we note that imagination was not one of his main qualities, but everyone knew of his determination, his courage and his political experience; therefore it was naturally to him that the General Planning Commissioner, Jean Monnet turned in the second half of March 1950. As of 1943 and as the war raged Monnet understood that Franco-German reconciliation would be necessary in a European framework; he then planned for "a European duty free entity". His experience at the rue de Martignac, at the Planning Commission, convinced him that an economic and therefore real approach was necessary if political barriers were to be surmounted. It was his idea to create a European community of steel and coal. Mid-April he asked Paul Reuter, a professor in public law, to draft a project. This project that was edited by Monnet and his colleague Pierre Uri, was submitted to the Bidault and Schuman cabinets. Although there was no clear reaction from Matignon, the director of the cabinet of the Foreign Ministry, Bernard Clappier, communicated it straight to his minister. "You can tell Monnet that it's good for me": this was the solemn response Schuman gave on May 1st 1950 at the Gare de l'Est as he got off the train that brought him back from Lorraine where he had read through the famous draft. The agenda was a tight one because it was deemed vital to make a public proposal before the session of the Atlantic Council set for 10th May 1950. Everything was undertaken in the greatest secret. The President of the Republic, Vincent Auriol was told by Monnet; only two Ministers, Pleven and René Mayer, were briefed, likewise the German Chancellor Adenauer who immediately gave his agreement. It was under these conditions that Robert Schuman made his declaration to the public on 9th May, the text of which had been written by Paul Reuter.

In a time like ours when everything is choked with consultation and communication, in which summits, G8's, G20's and other such meetings are constantly taking place, delaying decisions, when there are any, to the next session, we are stupefied by the simplicity,

the speed and the discretion of this plan. They had to be audacious in choosing a method as expeditious as this: there was no consultation with professionals and unions, no more than there were with political parties, which, notably on the left, rose up against this "jump into the void" as Pierre Cot qualified it during a parliamentary debate on the ratification of the treaty. There was a real outcry but it did not prevent the process from continuing. The three Benelux countries and Italy immediately accepted to enter into negotiations, which started on 20th June 1950 and ended with the signature of the Paris Treaty, less than one year later on 18th April 1951. It was incidentally on this occasion that Konrad Adenauer travelled to Paris for the first time. The ECSC was established immediately. Several towns stood as candidates to host the High Authority: Strasbourg, Liège, Turin, The Hague. Schuman thought of Saarbrücken, Luxembourg Prime Minister Joseph Bech suggested Luxembourg where the High Authority, presided over by Jean Monnet was set up in August 1952.

How can we explain this feat of achievement? The personality of the founders is evidently the first thing we think of. Schuman, Adenauer, de Gasperi, Bech were distinguished politicians who all had enjoyed a great deal of experience in government; all had known the horrors of two world wars; the German culture and language had played a decisive role in their education; their humanism of Christian inspiration had been cruelly aggressed by Nazism which was their very opposite; they all had a moral notion of political commitment. At a time when relations between leaders was much less frequent and familiar than they are today, locked in the formalism of traditional diplomacy, they were, unknowingly, inventing a style of personal relations that was frank and direct, which their community of destiny and values had made possible.

Beyond this human aspect the spirit of the time granted new importance to the economy in undertaking public affairs. Franklin Roosevelt set the base for this with the New Deal, in the 1930's. After the war the requirements of reconstruction led European leaders to privilege this real, pro-active approach. The planned economy, the discipline of rationing, nationalisation, reconstruction and the modernisation of infrastructures influenced every aspect of public action, which was less focused

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than before on rhetoric and ideology. It was in this context that we can see how innovative Robert Schuman's initiative was in 1950 and yet it was in line with the spirit of the time.

At the same time the Korean War heralded the start of the "Cold War" which for 40 years – until the collapse of the Soviet Bloc – was to dominate international relations. One of its first effects was to raise the issue of re-arming Germany and this is how the idea for the European Defence Community was initiated, which, since it notably involved rearming Germany, gave rise to vehement controversy between the Allies and in every country- and incidentally, mainly in France. The failure of this project might have compromised the success of the ECSC and put a long term halt to European integration. Fortunately this was not the case. The impetus for European integration was irresistible as we saw during the Messina Conference in 1956, which again privileged a realistic economic approach and led to the birth of the Common Market followed by all of the other developments about which we know. The ECSC was to continue operating until 1967 when it merged with its counterparts EURATOM and the EEC, to form the Commission of the European Union.

Placed within the long term we cannot definitely conclude that the "Schuman Plan" was a prophetic initiative. It involved my generation and that of those who followed in a unique context of peace and fraternity between the peoples of Europe. Our entire existence - that of the youth of the 1950's - was part of a European framework in terms of professional commitments, cultural prospects, travel and exchanges of all kinds. This is what we owe to the "Founding Fathers" of Europe, and first and foremost, to Robert Schuman.



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