

## Schuman Declaration: 70 years on

Aiming to secure peace in Europe after the horrors of the Second World War, the Schuman Declaration proposed cooperation among European countries in two key economic areas central to rearmament and warfare: coal and steel. As an institutional framework for this cooperation, the Schuman Declaration proposed the creation of the first supranational organisation in Europe, the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC). Established in 1952, the ECSC laid the foundations for today's European Union (EU). The Schuman Declaration is therefore seen as the EU's founding act. Presented by the French Foreign Minister, Robert Schuman, on 9 May 1950, this year marks the 70th anniversary of the Schuman Declaration.

### Europe in the mid-20th century

In the middle of the last century, coal and steel played a significant political and economic role in Europe. As essential elements in national defence industries, in the potential to wage war, and in economic growth, they were seen as indicators of state power. After the Second World War, however, coal, one of the most important energy sources for steel production, was a scarce resource. American and British intentions to lift production limits for the German steel industry from mid-May 1950 therefore put pressure on France to find a swift solution to the 'German issue'. In other words, France had to define a strategy to safeguard itself against potential German aggression and to make sure to benefit in political and economic terms from the German economic resurgence. From the end of the war, France had followed a policy aimed at preventing Germany from getting back on its feet, through territorial fragmentation and disarmament. From 1949 on, however, French foreign policy on the 'German issue' became increasingly shaped by moves towards Western European integration. Similarly, in Germany, plans for Western European integration were also discussed, as a way to abolish the Occupation Statute and to obtain sovereignty for the Federal Republic founded in 1949. The Schuman Declaration provided a simple but convincing answer as to how to secure peace in Europe by combining the difficult 'German issue' with thinking on the new political architecture of post-war Europe.

### Schuman Declaration: Monnet's supranational innovation



Robert Schuman speaks in the Salon de l'Horloge, Quai d'Orsay, 1950.  
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Jean Monnet, guiding light of the Schuman Declaration and first President of the ECSC High Authority, alerted Schuman and French Prime Minister George Bidault to the possible consequences for the French economy of an unimpeded German economic recovery, in an urgent appeal in early May 1950. At that time, Monnet was Head of the French Planning Committee and familiar with contemporary thinking on transnational cooperation in the coal and steel sectors. He worked from mid-April 1950 on the text which later became the Schuman Declaration. There are a total of [nine recognised versions](#) of the text. Its main objectives were to ensure: peace, security, European unification, modernisation of the French economy, and improvement of industrial production conditions,

especially for steel production. This was to be achieved by the establishment of a common market for coal and steel, and equivalent production conditions for France and Germany. The really innovative element of the Schuman Declaration, however, was the institutional creation of a new European political organisation. This encompassed a supranational design in the form of the High Authority (today's European Commission), equipped with real competence and independent of any direct influence from the participating Member States.

Monnet could not convince Bidault to agree to his plan. Schuman, in contrast, saw it as an opportunity for French foreign policy. Having obtained agreement in principle from German Chancellor Konrad Adenauer, Schuman presented the Declaration in a press conference at the Quai d'Orsay on 9 May 1950. As the text, marking a turning point in European history, was read out by Schuman, it was thereafter known as the Schuman Declaration.

### **Objective: Peace in Europe**

To find a way to secure peace in Europe in the post-war era was a difficult task. Nevertheless, it was precisely this task to which the Schuman Declaration attempted to find an answer. The Declaration's first two sentences made this absolutely clear. They read: 'World peace cannot be safeguarded without the making of creative efforts proportionate to the dangers which threaten it. The contribution which an organised and living Europe can bring to civilisation is indispensable to the maintenance of peaceful relations.' It is thus safe to say that the Schuman Declaration was, in essence, a peace project. This was furthermore underlined by the day chosen to present the Declaration, 9 May 1950, exactly one day after the fifth anniversary of the capitulation of Nazi Germany. Without the establishment of a common market for coal and steel, the creation of a strong supranational institution and the possibility for mutual monitoring, it is possible that the European countries might have sleepwalked into another war. The 1951 Paris Treaty founding the ECSC adopted the essence of the Schuman Declaration, putting securing peace in Europe first and foremost.

### **Negotiating the European Coal and Steel Community**

On 3 June 1950, the six participating countries – Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg and the Netherlands – announced the launch of an intergovernmental conference to flesh out the Schuman Declaration. The countries' agreement to start negotiations was due to both political and economic reasons. Politically, no country wanted to remain outside the newly developing Europe represented by the ECSC. Economically, Italy and the Benelux countries especially, sought solutions to energy issues due to the lack of coal and emerging globalisation, which put European energy sectors under pressure from cheaper energy sources coming from non-European countries.

Intensive negotiations started on June 1950 in Paris and took almost one year. For example, various changes to the ECSC's institutional form were made during the negotiations. While Monnet had designed the High Authority as a small, completely independent and highly powerful body, the Benelux countries in particular demanded the creation of various control bodies. Therefore, further entities were added to the institutional set-up, including the Court of Justice, a special Council of Ministers (equivalent to today's Council of the European Union), and the ECSC Common Assembly, the forerunner of the European Parliament. The High Authority's competences softened, the Paris Treaty establishing the ECSC is not therefore identical to the institutional framework envisaged by Monnet when preparing the Schuman Declaration. Signed on 18 April 1951, the Paris Treaty entered into force after ratification on 23 July 1952. (Concluded for a fixed period of 50 years, the Treaty expired in July 2002, although its provisions had by then largely been subsumed into the EU Treaties.)

## **Historical significance**

By creating the ECSC, for the first time in European history, participating states voluntarily gave up part of their sovereignty to an organisation at European level. The Schuman Declaration thereby allowed the establishment of the present-day EU by preparing its historical institutional framework. This included, as one of the most important Schuman Declaration achievements, the breakthrough in Franco-German reconciliation. Clearly its most important legacy, however, is that the supranational institutions for which the Declaration paved the way have contributed a great deal to guaranteeing the peaceful co-existence of European Union Member States over the last 70 years. It is therefore fitting to call the Schuman Declaration an innovative and visionary peace treaty.

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