



## **The Schuman Declaration 60 years on**

**By Richard Laming, secretary of the European Movement**

“World peace cannot be safeguarded without the making of creative efforts proportionate to the dangers which threaten it.” Those are the opening words of the Schuman Declaration, published 60 years ago on 9 May 1950 and which became essentially the founding statement of European integration.

And the proposal put forward by French foreign minister Robert Schuman, namely to abolish the fear of war in Europe by the sharing of sovereignty between France and Germany, was creative indeed.

In each of the three preceding generations, those two countries had fought bitter and destructive wars against each other. In 1871, Germany had defeated France and imposed a brutal peace settlement. After victory over Germany in the first world war, France had exacted revenge. But now, after the second world war, a different approach would be followed.

Progressively, by stages, the countries of Europe would share their economic and political power and pool their sovereignty, in a new institutional system that was both apart from and integrated within their national political systems. Such a system would enable them to rebuild their economies and stabilise their democracies without fear that a return of hostilities might tear them apart again. The old notion that countries should look out for their own interests at the expense of the others would be replaced by the realisation that their interests were increasingly shared. Truly a creative idea.

And this new Europe would be founded on consent. Rather than being based solely on agreements between government leaders, the instruments of European integration would be ratified in each country by the respective national parliaments. Not only was democracy the end that was sought, it would also be the means by which it was sought.

There was at the time a school of thought that argued that such consent could be obtained not for a progressive, staged approach towards European unity but for an instant, revolutionary transformation. Wiser heads prevailed. Jean Monnet, the principal author of the Schuman declaration, wrote that the aim was “to make a breach in the ramparts of national sovereignty which will be narrow enough to secure consent, but deep enough to open the way towards the unity that is essential to peace.”. And so, in the past 60 years, it has been.

The first step in building the new Europe, the European Coal and Steel Community, was the immediate subject of Robert Schuman’s declaration in 1950. It was not merely an instrument

for managing the coal and steel industries of the six member states, but it contained the seeds within it of political democracy, too. The central institution, the High Authority, was explicitly set up to be independent of the national governments of the member states. Policy was made by those national governments through their representatives on the ECSC Council of Ministers, but they would not prevent the High Authority from acting in the interests of all member states rather than just their own. There was a Common Assembly to ensure that the voice of parliamentarians could be heard, and a Court of Justice to adjudicate on any disputes.

Subsequent developments of the European Union have been based on this model. The High Authority has been renamed the European Commission but remains the guardian of the common European interest. More policy areas, such as trade, environment and some aspects of social policy, are now exercised at the European level, while there is now an ever greater role for the Common Assembly, since 1979 renamed the European Parliament and directly elected. And the number of member states has risen from the original six to 27, with a queue of further countries hoping to join.

All this, from the original call for creative efforts to safeguard peace. What are the lessons for today?

First, it is that peace can truly be built between formerly warring neighbours, if they are willing to take the necessary steps together. The secret lies in the identification of common interests, not divisive ones, and the creation of shared decision-making over those interests held in common. What unites our different countries can be greater than what divides them, if only we are willing to see and to act accordingly. Europe used to be a continent of conflict and turmoil, the starting point for two world wars and the Holocaust. Now it is notoriously peaceful, with tensions gone and military spending at a historically low level.

Secondly, let us think of the new threats to world peace. Perhaps they are not so much military, but they are still there. Climate change and environmental degradation; international terrorism; mass migration from the poor countries to the rich: these are challenges that the world of 1950 did not know but which we live with today. Are we helpless before them?

Not if we are willing to engage in yet more creative efforts. As we think about how to protect the environment for the benefit of future generations, as we attempt to strike a balance between security and liberty, as we seek to spread economic opportunity to those currently denied it and make welcome those new arrivals here on our own shores, we need to act creatively.

It turned out that the old notion that countries should seek to advance their own interests at the expense of others could not keep the peace. We find now that it cannot protect the environment, provide security for the citizen nor promote and spread prosperity, either.

It is sixty years since the publication of the Schuman Declaration, but its spirit is still relevant today. It was addressed then to the countries of western Europe: today, happily, it is our whole continent that can and must share in this challenge.

*May 2010. The opinions expressed are those of the author and not necessarily those of the European Movement.*