

# "Before being a military alliance or an economic entity, Europe must be a cultural community in the most elevated sense of the term"

3<sup>rd</sup> September 2013

Robert Schuman

**On the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the death of Robert Schuman on 4<sup>th</sup> September the Robert Schuman Foundation has published an excerpt from his only book "For Europe" which came out just a few days after his death. It has been translated into 20 languages. This text which is still extraordinarily topical reveals what the author really thought of the European continent. This book, published by Nagel in 1963, is available in French (5<sup>th</sup> edition), English (1<sup>st</sup> edition) and German (2<sup>nd</sup> edition) from the Robert Schuman Foundation's site.**

"The Frenchman knows how to launch major ideas, sometimes revolutionary ideas; but he does not like to break with habit. In his opinion they guarantee his freedom and his independence. He likes to say: "A man's home is his castle". This saying was valid as long as there were castles to live in. But this idyllic era is irrevocably over. It is only natural and legitimate to be jealous of one's independence. Yet, one is really independent only insofar as one does not need others, and should this independence become a cause of weakness, then we would be well advised to resign ourselves to give it up. "Splendid isolation" has become an error, an untenable claim.

That noble feeling called patriotism, which forged nations and enabled them to accomplish magnificent things, has often diverged from its original objective; it has degenerated into intolerable fanaticism and has thus become a source of insecurity and of fratricidal rifts.

We are not, and we shall never be given to deny our mother country, we shall never forget our duties towards it. But, beyond each country, we increasingly and clearly acknowledge the existence of a common good, superior to national interest, a common good into which our countries' individual interests are merged.

The law of solidarity between the peoples is a must for the modern conscience. We feel solidarity with one another to maintain peace, to fight poverty, in the respect of treaties, in safeguarding justice and human dignity, or protecting ourselves from aggression.

We are firmly convinced, as facts speak for themselves, that nations, far from being self-sufficient, feel solidarity with each other; that the best way to serve one's country is to guarantee it the support of others via reciprocal efforts, the pooling of resources.

More than ever continents and populations are dependent on each other regarding production as well as the trade in goods, the exchange of scientific research and the indispensable trade in manpower and the means of production. Political economy has to become a global one.

The consequence of this interdependence is that it is impossible to remain indifferent to the fortunate or unfortunate lot of a people. For a European with the capacity to think it is no longer possible to rejoice spitefully over his neighbour's misfortune; everyone is united for better or for worse in a common destiny.

War and the destruction it caused, together with liberating victory, were undertaken collectively. If we want peace to last and supplant war, we must take joint steps towards this, by associating everyone, including those who fought against each other in the past and who might, once more, face each other in bloody rivalries.

And so, forced by experience, after so much disaster and in the face of the terrible threat, posed by the overwhelming progress of imperious technology – in spite of the diplomatic efforts and the generosity of certain men, such as Aristide Briand - we have to fall back on

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the Christian law of a noble but humble brotherhood. Paradoxically (this would certainly surprise us if we were not Christians, maybe we are without knowing it) —we are now holding out our hand to our former enemies, not only to forgive them, but to build tomorrow's Europe together.

This policy is not inspired by vague sentimental pacifism. It is not made of mere treaties or pacts which are limited to outlawing war or to laying down quickly forgotten or broken agreements. This would prove to be another delusion. Indeed we can already imagine some arrogant remarks being uttered which we hope never to hear again.

Indeed, we need more than texts and words, more than the scars of the crimes left behind by war, more than the reminder of its horrors and of its misery.

War has to be deprived of its reason for being, so that the very temptation to undertake it is banished. It is necessary that nobody, not even the least scrupulous government finds advantage in waging war. I will go even further: we want to remove the means for any kind of war occurring. The worst type of opportunist would be rendered harmless in future.

Instead of the nationalism and the mistrustful independence of the past, we shall bind together the interests, the decisions and the destiny of this new community of formerly rival states.

This new policy is based on solidarity and progressive confidence.

It is an act of faith; not like that of J.-J. Rousseau i.e. in human goodness which has been so cruelly betrayed over the last two centuries. It is an act of good sense by the people who are finally convinced that their salvation lies in mutual, organised understanding and co-operation which is so soundly organised that no government would be able to withdraw once committed to it.

From now on let this idea of a reconciled, united, strong Europe be the motto for the young generations anxious to serve humanity, free of hatred and fear and which after so many rifts is learning what Christian brotherhood means once more.

Of course, we have to proceed with caution in areas which have been previously primed from a psychological point of view and in which specific technical means point to spectacular results. However, we are not always in control of the choices made, nor of the

order of importance of the problems we face. As an example, we can quote the EDC which was planned to prevent the creation of another German national army but it was prematurely imposed on public opinion by the Berlin Blockade and the Korean War.

We must prepare people to accept European solutions, by fighting against claims to hegemony and superiority, but we must also counter the narrow-mindedness of political nationalism, autarkic protectionism and of cultural isolationism. We shall have to replace all the tendencies inherited from the past with the notion of solidarity, that is to say the conviction that the real interest of all lies in acknowledging and accepting the interdependency of all. Egoism does not pay any more.

The European community will not reflect the image of an Empire or a Holy Alliance; it will be based on democratic equality applied to relations between nations. The right of veto is incompatible with such a structure, which implies majority decisions and excludes the dictatorial use of material superiority. This is the real meaning of supra-nationality, which we are still too inclined to consider as the abandonment of freedom, without acknowledging the authority and guarantees which are won. Incidentally it could never apply in the cultural domain because supra-nationality is respectful of all distinctive features.

These ideas must be made popular via schools and the press; no political party has a monopoly over them. It cannot be repeated enough: European unity will not be achieved exclusively or chiefly by the European institutions; the establishment of these institutions will go hand in hand with intellectual progress. Hence the importance of the free movement of opinions and men from one European country to another; the countries that refuse to admit this on principle, will exclude themselves from Europe. When expressing this idea, we are fully aware of reasonable concern for security, the temporary precautions to be taken against unemployment, the need to safeguard professional secrecy, literary and artistic property.

What we disapprove of is protectionism when it is systematically exercised to the detriment of free trade, which means competition, automatic selection and confidence.

But there is more to it than just breaking down barriers: co-operation must be organised, which presupposes a great number of personal contacts: exchanges and training courses, conferences and field trips, tours, exhibitions, young manual and intellectual workers' meetings.

Everyone should be allowed access to literary, artis-

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tic and scientific publications; their price is sometimes prohibitive. The use of public and private libraries should be facilitated. Some scientific research should be organised and funded in common when national resources are insufficient or unnecessarily dispersed.

History books have to be "cleaned up" as a priority. This is not contradictory to either freedom of thought or expression or to genuine patriotism that must be taught to young people.

Under the pretext of serving national feeling and the cult of a glorious past, the duty of impartiality and truth is often misjudged: it is believed that one must systematically try to justify acts of perfidy or the cynical exploitation of power and terror; the fault is too often attributed to the rival nation.

We should, on the contrary, teach people the underlying causes of antagonism that has torn mankind apart; we should show them the absurdity of the sacrifices that so many dynastic and ideological wars have imposed on populations which have borne the brunt of frivolous ambition and fanaticism.

In addition to this we should highlight the real community of ideas and aspirations which has always existed between nations to some extent but which has been smothered by the passions that has been aroused and exploited.

Although it is fair, in this presentation of history, to give place to national aspirations and values, notably for the requirements of national unification, we have to stop thinking that the main idea focuses on the struggle over political borders or the rivalry between races; because reducing the meaning of history down to these two ideas forcibly leads to nationalism or racism. Beyond these events and conflicts, which have so far determined the course of history, there are affinities and common interests on which we can draw for use in the future.

We do not intend to adjust history retrospectively, but we do reject fatalism which means resigning oneself to an inevitable repetition of conflict.

Education must predispose pupils to a less pessimistic and more constructive vision of the future."

Excerpt from Chapter 2 of *For Europe*

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