

The 9th May Declaration 1950

The 9th May declaration 1950 is considered to be the founding text of European integration. Delivered by Robert Schuman, French Foreign Minister in the Salon de l'Horloge of the Quai d'Orsay in Paris, this declaration inspired by Jean Monnet, the first Commissaire au Plan, suggests the creation of a European organisation that would pool the production capabilities of the French and German coal and steel industries.

The text led to the signature of the Paris Treaty on 18th April 1951 which founded the European Community of Steel and Coal between six European States.

- Goals of Peace and Prosperity

"A united Europe was not achieved and we had war." (Robert Schuman Declaration, 9th May 1950)

Three wars in under a century tore Europe apart leaving in their wake an exhausted continent. On 9th May 1950 Robert Schuman's policy was driven forward first and foremost by a desire for peace whilst the quotas of coal and steel that Germany was allowed to produce were the subject of diplomatic conflict that were likely to end in further sanctions by the Allies.

As of 1948 Europe entered a period of Cold War. The constitution and strengthening of alliances led to two blocs which were increasingly antagonistic towards one another. The Berlin crisis in 1948-49 heralded the first confrontation between the two new giants and Western Europe realised that Europe was in danger of "becoming a small part of the Asian continent" as Paul Valéry had predicted¹

The need to come together to withstand the Soviet threat then became increasingly clear: the liberal democracies of Western Europe could not afford to fight and grow mutually weaker whilst in the East behind the "Iron Curtain" popular democracies had joined forces as one at the service of the power of the Soviet Bloc. Germany had to be brought back into the Western fold.

The human and material cost of six years of war was heavy and European economies felt this quite acutely. Apart from the human losses (60 million dead), together with the destruction of homes and infrastructure, the centres of production in North-East France and the Ruhr in Germany had also been totally destroyed.

- A Unique Method

The recovery of European economies required greater production of coal and steel. Those of Germany were under Allied control and had been restricted. Those of other European countries seemed inadequate.

... "the French Government proposes ... that Franco-German production of coal and steel as a whole be placed under a common High Authority, within the framework of an organization open to the participation of the other countries of Europe. The pooling of coal and steel production should immediately provide for the setting up of common foundations for economic development as a first step in the federation of Europe ..."
(Robert Schuman, Declaration 9th May 1950)

This cooperation was designed so that common interests between European countries would be created and that this would lead to gradual political integration, a condition for the pacification of relations between them.

"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. The coming together of the nations of Europe requires the elimination of the age-old opposition of France and Germany. Any action taken must in the first place concern these two countries."
(Robert Schuman, Declaration of 9th May 1950)

The failure of various projects for European federation put forward during the 19th and 20th centuries made post war politicians aware that European integration had to be achieved progressively.

¹ Paul Valéry, La Crise de l'esprit, 1919.

The Declaration of 9th May 1950 is based on this idea: to achieve the peaceful unification of Europe action must start – according to its authors – ***“immediately on one limited but decisive point: the French government proposes to place the entire Franco-German production of coal and steel under a common High Authority, within the framework of an organization open to the participation of the other countries of Europe”.***

“The solidarity in production thus established will make it plain that any war between France and Germany becomes not merely unthinkable, but materially impossible. The setting up of this powerful productive unit, open to all countries willing to take part and bound ultimately to provide all the member countries with the basic elements of industrial production on the same terms, will lay a true foundation for their economic unification.” (Robert Schuman Declaratio, 9th May 1950)

- New Institutions for a European Federation

“By pooling basic production and by instituting a new High Authority, whose decisions will bind France, Germany and other member countries, this proposal will lead to the realization of the first concrete foundation of a European federation indispensable to the preservation of peace.” (Robert Schuman Declaration, 9th May 1950)

The “High Authority” put forward on 9th May 1950, whose existence was made official by the Paris Treaty of 1951 as the High Authority of the ECSC introduced an innovation of primary importance in relations between States: supranationality, which became the heart of what later became known as the “*méthode communautaire*”.

The “*méthode communautaire*” was typified by the transfer of sovereignty over to Europe and therefore to institutions that enjoyed a certain amount of autonomy with regard to the Member States, notably the High Authority (that became the Commission) and a parliamentary assembly that later became the European Parliament – the only transnational institution that is elected today by direct universal suffrage.

This method is based on the superiority (the primacy) of community law over the national laws of the Member States in certain areas; its primacy is guaranteed by the Court of Justice of the European Communities whose decisions are opposable to those of the States.

Today the Declaration of 9th May 1950 is still considered to be the starting point of European integration which is why the European Parliament awarded Robert Schuman and Jean Monnet the title of “Father of Europe”.

Its content is still a reference for many political movements in Europe who legitimise their claims in relation to the initial project, as it is expressed in the declaration. Proponents of a federalist concept of European integration particularly see the legitimisation of their projects in the expression “European Federation” which is used in the declaration.

In 1985 as a sign of the historical importance of this day for Europe, the European Parliament decided to make 9th May “Europe Day” thereby celebrating the beginning of the unification of the European continent across the entire Union.

Useful Links :

- Declaration text of 9th May on the Robert Schuman Foundation website
- Declaration video of 9th May 1950 on the European Navigator website
- Robert Schuman’s Biography on the Robert Schuman Foundation website

Quotes:

- Robert Schuman, *For Europe*, 1st edition Paris, Robert Schuman Foundation – Nagel, 2010. *For Europe*, 1st edition Paris, Robert Schuman Foundation – Nagel, 2010. In German : *Für Europa*, 2nd edition Paris, Robert Schuman Foundation – Nagel, 2010.
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- POIDEVIN (Raymond), *Robert Schuman, homme d'Etat 1886-1963*, Paris, Imprimerie nationale, 1986.
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