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THE NEW EUROPEAN UNION

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Today is “Europe Day,” May 9th being the anniversary of the Schuman Declaration. This Declaration is considered by many who look at European integration as one of the founding moments of the process. It is probably an incendiary document for Euro-sceptics everywhere, but for many it’s a source for rejoicing.

A number of quotations: “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 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, and will change the destinies of those regions which have long been devoted to the manufacture of munitions of war, of which they have been the most constant victims.”

Georges Berthoin, our former chairman and currently our honorary chairman, played a significant role in these times. He was of course chef de cabinet of Jean Monnet. I would like to now call him to the lectern to make a comment on the occasion of the anniversary.

The Future of the EU: “Let’s Be Realistic, Let’s Demand the Impossible”

Georges Berthoin

We also had a dream, and Mr. Chairman I thank you very much for giving me the opportunity to say a few words about the dream and the way it became the type of reality we celebrate today. By the way, this is the first time in European history that we unite without the conquest of a man, a tribe, a nation or an ideology, even through the weddings of kings and queens. This is the first time we unite on the basis of a free, democratic choice. It happened because of this strange meeting between two Frenchmen who were not very characteristic of what Frenchmen usually stand for.

Robert Schuman came from a part of France always involved among Germany and Luxembourg in a change of borders—we are in a part of Europe where we know the problem raised by frontiers and citizenship changing all the time. So, Schuman was extremely sensitive to the concept of frontiers and wanted to change them from walls into bridges. If you happen to look at Euro banknotes, you will see that all of them have a bridge. Schuman was educated in a German-speaking context and he was a local member of parliament for an area where the coal and steel industries were not only industrial powers, but also had a very great strategic and military importance in the event of a change of frontiers.

Jean Monnet was exactly the contrary, a self-made man coming from Cognac, educated to sell that sort of brandy all over the world but particularly in the English-speaking world. Monnet
spoke, besides French, only English, and he learnt the concept of space and cooperation, and understood very well the Anglo-Saxon world, in particular America.

When those two men met, a very important phenomenon took place which I think we should keep in mind today: the meeting between a man with an idea but no power and a man with power who, as a member of government, was cornered by events. An idea—and the academic world is always frustrated with this—is not taken up by politicians because it is a “good” idea, but because there is no other way out. In the case of Schuman, the foreign minister of the French government, there was the beginning of a very serious crisis between Germany and France. What is important for people of ideas and what we call today “civil society” is to know when there is a window of opportunity and come to the rescue of government, saying, "you are in trouble, but I will now give you an idea that might get you out of your impasse." This is what Monnet did when Schuman and the French government were in trouble.

Monnet, because of his American experience, saw in Canada and the United States, the American translation of a European dream that started in the 19th and 20th centuries. We must not forget that North America was partly built by Europeans that had to escape from the conditions in Europe—intolerance, racism, poverty—and they had a dream: either to make a revolution on the spot or to emigrate, with both revolution and emigration being the same thing. So, America was a result of that emigration and this American dream became a success.

Monnet and many others after him wanted to repatriate the dream in Europe. One understands what that means especially in this part of Europe, where the American dream can be found on the doorstep.

The second thing Monnet and Schuman did together was to be extremely pragmatic political engineers. They started to do a sort of political acupuncture. Select two vital sectors at the time—coal and steel—and from there start a sort of inescapable process where governments always had one choice: either back-pedal, and damage the national interest, or go forward more and more and more. We are today in a situation where in fact the governments of the 25 countries will realize that the new European Union cannot be managed without a drastic political step forward.

To conclude: the European Community system is without precedent in the international system. There are two types of authority, one having a legitimacy to represent the common interest—this is the Commission today, and one day it might be the Secretary General of the UN. There is in the case of the European Union legitimacy. The Commission is selected and appointed by governments that obtain support and by the political vote of a European Parliament elected by the citizens of the European Union—those elections will take place for the 25 countries in a few weeks time in June. This is a parliament. It can support the Commission and it can dismiss the Commission. On the other hand, the final decision, after a very complicated process, is in the hands of those representing national sovereignty. There is a constant dialogue between the two sets of sovereignty, the European sovereignty in the process of being created and the national sovereignty, which is so important for each of us. That is the contribution of the Schuman Declaration, Jean Monnet, and their successors.
As we know, in the present situation most governments are cornered, it is very difficult to find an issue on the basis of what is being done today. If we don’t, we might lose a lot, not only in the Trilateral world, but also outside. This is what was suggested 54 years ago, and might be useful to consider. But I have a feeling that there might be somewhere in this room, or outside, a new Jean Monnet, and there might be somewhere in our capitals another Robert Schuman. When these two meet, the world will change course and might avoid the catastrophe that is looming.

My conclusion will be to quote what the students of the Warsaw University used as one of their slogans in 1968: “Let’s be realistic, let’s demand the impossible.” There’s our chance.

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