

From reconciliation to integration

The Christian inspiration of the founding fathers of the European Union

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On October 13, 2012, the Nobel Prize Committee in Norway created a stir by awarding the Nobel Peace Prize to the European Union (EU). Instituted by the inventor of dynamite, the Swedish chemical engineer, Alfred Nobel (1833-1896), the annual the annual Nobel Prize is awarded for outstanding contributions in chemistry, physics, literature, and physiology or medicine. In his last will, dated 1895, he also made arrangements for a Peace Prize, which should be awarded to ‘the person who has made the greatest or the best contribution to the brotherhood between the nations and to the abolition or reduction of armed forces, and for the formation and the multiplication of congresses for peace.’ Whereas the other Nobel prizes are selected and awarded by the Swedish Parliament, in the presence of the king of Sweden, the laureates of the Peace Prize are designated by the Norwegian parliament. The first laureate (1901) was Henri Dunant ‘for his role in founding the International Committee of the Red Cross.’ Many other important figures have followed, such as Martin Luther King in 1964, ‘because this campaigner for civil rights was the first person in the Western world to have shown us that a struggle can be waged without violence’; West German Chancellor Willy Brandt in 1971, ‘for his *Ostpolitik*,’ i.e. the policy of rapprochement with Eastern Europe; and Mother Theresa in 1979, ‘for the work among the poor done by her and the Missionaries of Charity,’ the congregation she founded. In some years this prize has gone to an organisation, such as the United Nations High Commission for Human Rights, Amnesty International, or the International Red Cross. But never before had it been awarded to a state or a nation, let alone to a union of nations. In the hall of fame of the Nobel Peace Prize, the EU stands out as unique.

The official declaration of the Norwegian parliament summarised the motivation as follows: ‘Since the horrible suffering of the Second World War, for more than six decades, the EU has contributed to the progress of peace and reconciliation, of democracy and human rights all over Europe’¹

Indeed, the process of European integration that led to the present EU is remarkable, when we look at the profound changes it has brought. Telling the whole story would go far beyond the scope of this book. Our focus is on the relation between Christian faith and the making of the European Union. How did this process start? Who were the key persons involved? And what were the leading ideas? A closer look reveals that the construction of Europe, as it is called, owes very much to the Christian faith of its founding fathers, to values that are part of Europe’s Christian heritage, and to a Christian democratic political vision.

1 Attempts to unite Europe

The process of European integration started right after the Second World War, in 1945, when political leaders from France, Germany, Italy, Great Britain and the Benelux countries began to meet regularly to discuss how to unite the countries of Western Europe to begin with, and how to secure peace. Their ideal was not new, it is as old as the idea of ‘Europe’. As we have explained in Chapter 3, this notion of ‘Europe’ was initially linked to Christian universalism. Different peoples were united in a common religious cultural frame, called the ‘Christian world’, a sort of sacred canopy transcending ethnic,

¹ Quotes from the official texts of the awards, cf. Antoine JACOB, *Histoire du Prix Nobel*, and the an interview with this author in *La Croix*, 15 October 2012.

linguistic and political borders. Based on this awareness there have been attempts to bring these peoples together in an all-encompassing structure.

Throughout history there have been many attempts to bring about such a Europe-wide unity. They can be divided in three categories. The first one is unity through empire. Think of Charlemagne around 800, the Habsburgs in the sixteenth century, Napoleon, the Russian Czars, Hitler. However, it was in the nature of empire-builders to follow the old Roman adage: 'if you want peace, prepare for war'. This realisation has led nobles, church leaders, theologians, philosophers and political leaders to propose alternative ways of uniting the Europeans. Dozens of proposals have been made. A common thread running through all of them is a longing for a broadly defined universal peace, but the means to achieve that end could vary.

The idea that Europe ought to be united economically and politically is rooted in Christian universalism and the notion of Europe as a sort of commonwealth of Christian peoples.²

During the Middle-Ages, the proposals concentrated on the role of the Catholic Church. Dante (1265-1321) envisaged a universal empire to bring earthly peace, in which the pope would have ultimate authority. Georges Podiebrad (*Tractatus Europa*, 1464) dreamt of a permanent council of princes, presided by the pope.

The Reformation and the subsequent religious wars in the sixteenth century saw many new proposals of both Catholics and Protestants. Most of them considered that religious unity was now impossible, given the reality of a religiously and politically divided Europe. Instead, they saw reconciliation between the warring factions of Christianity and mutual acceptance as the key to peace. This should be realised through gatherings of the political rulers and through procedures of arbitration in order to settle conflicts through concertation. Some proposals want the pope to take a presiding role.

The first concrete example of this approach was the peace conference in Münster that led to the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648, putting an end to the religious wars in the German empire. During the war, Germany's population was reduced by 30% on average. In the territory of Brandenburg, the losses had amounted to half, while in some areas an estimated two thirds of the population died. The same model of the so-called concert of nations was used in the Vienna Congress of 1815, where the European states agreed on the conditions for peace, after the upheavals of the Napoleonic wars.

Permanent international structure

Some political leaders and intellectuals went further than that, by proposing a permanent structure that would guarantee peace and free commerce. Several concrete plans were written to realise this. While Catholics authors thought of a supranational structure, headed by the pope, Protestants were cautious to maintain national sovereignty. Two proposals that caught much attention at that time were the *Grand Design* of the French Protestant Duc de Sully, presented to the French king Henry IV in 1638. He foresaw a reorganisation of the peoples of Europe into fifteen states of equal power, each one with the authority to choose its national religion. Disputes should be settled by a 'Council of Princes', presided by the German emperor and the pope. The primary mechanism for maintaining peace was the 'balance of power' between the states. No one should be able to gain advantage over another. States would remain sovereign, but they would be checked by the political power of their neighbours and by the moral power of the emperor and pope.

The second proposal was from William Penn (1644-1718), an English politician, leader of the Quakers, and advocate of religious freedom. He oversaw the founding of the American Commonwealth of Pennsylvania as a refuge for Quakers and other religious minorities of Europe. In his treatise *Present and Future Peace of Europe* (1693), he proposed to create an 'Imperial Parliament' that would meet regularly to settle disputes among European states. Decisions would be based on majority votes. There would be a rotating presidency, in order to guarantee the internal sovereignty of each nation.

In the eighteenth century, Enlightenment intellectuals and other authors wrote about the specific character of the European civilisation and how to bring about peace: Voltaire, Burke, Fichte, Bentham, Constant, Saint-Simon, de Staël, Kant, Hegel, Schelling, Goethe, Comte and many others. Jean Jacques Rousseau, for instance, described the nations of Europe as a 'closely knit society'. Therefore, he argued,

² See Anthony PAGDEN (ed.) *The Idea of Europe*; Brent NELSEN and James GUTH, *Religion and the Struggle for European Union*.

‘the human spirit can think of no project that is as beautiful, as great and as useful as the project of a perpetual and universal peace among the peoples of Europe’.³

In the proposals of this time, Christianity was seen as a binding cultural force, but not as the religious foundation of unity. Most authors wanted to create supranational structure, a permanent assembly of diplomats and princes, similar to the League of Nations that would be created later, in 1919, just after the First World War. Some plans foresaw federated Europe. For example, Maximilien de Béthune, minister of the French king Louis XVI envisaged a ‘community of powers who have nothing to envy from each other since they are equal, and nothing to fear from one another because they will be in balance within a European confederation’.⁴

Emmanuel Kant wrote a treatise called *Perpetual Peace, a philosophical sketch* (1795), which has become quite influential. It describes the process by which the nations in Europe would be transformed into democratic and commercial societies and how they could form an alliance for the common good. Liberal democracies, Kant argued, do not go to war with each other, they rather seek to cooperate, because that is in the common interest of each party. Therefore, he argued, the European states should form ‘general confederation’, but he added that only republican democratic countries could be members, for ‘in a democratic republic there can be no declaration of war without the consent of the citizens.’ In his proposal, the democratic states should form an international superstructure, to guarantee free commerce between them, to regulate tensions, and to settle conflicts.

He went on to say that this process of democratisation and free commerce could also include states in other parts of the world as well, once they have adopted free commerce and European style democracy. Finally, a ‘cosmopolitan constitution’ would be possible, and that would guarantee world peace. In his view, the colonialism of Western European nations was justified as a temporary settlement, in order to facilitate the ‘progress’ of the indigenous peoples towards the level of republican and democratic governance.

However, contrary to the prediction of Kant that democratic countries would no longer wage war against each other, they did. Even so, his ideas have inspired politicians and intellectuals in the 20th century, as they endeavoured to create a European economic community, and bring about political integration. One of these ideas has become a regulative idea in Western political thinking: liberal representative democracy is the best model to promote international cooperation and prevent war.

‘United States of Europe’

During the 19th century, there was quite a movement that strove for lasting peace. French novelist Victor Hugo was an influential figure in these circles. At the opening of the Peace Congress of Paris in August 1849, he delivered a speech in which he spoke of the creation of the United States of Europe, after the example of the United States of America, finally pacified and united under one government. Here is a quote from this famous speech:

One day, the arms will fall from your hands. One day, you French, you Russians, you Italians, you English, you Germans, all ye nations of the continent, you will be melted into a superior unity, without losing your distinct qualities and your glorious individuality, and constitute the European brotherhood, as sure as Normandy, Bretagne, Burgundy, Lorraine, Alsace and all our provinces have been melted into France.

One day, there will be no other battle fields than the markets opening up to commerce, and the spirits opening up to ideas. One day, bullets and bombs will be replaced by votes, by universal suffrages of the peoples, by the venerable arbiter of a grand and sovereign Senate that will be for Europe what the parliament is for England, what the Diet is for Germany, and what the legislative Assembly is for France...

The day will come when one will see the two enormous groups, the United States of America and the United States of Europe, placed face to face, joining hands over the ocean, exchanging their products, their industry, their arts, their splendid ideas... We shall not have to wait four hundred years to bring about that day... Today, let us say all together, to the peoples: you are brothers

³ *Projet de paix perpétuelle*, 1761.

⁴ *Projet politique*, 1788.

These lines are engraved on the statute of Victor Hugo in the entrance hall of the *Assemblée Nationale* in Paris.⁵ In the minds of those who campaigned for the formation of a United States of Europe, this federation would be the first phase of a movement aimed at a worldwide understanding of all humankind, irrespective of their castes and nationalities. In that same nineteenth century, however, waves of nationalism swept across Europe. The idea of a federal European state was not powerful enough to seize neither the minds of the rulers nor the hearts of the peoples of the continent.

Having shed his nationalist illusions in World War I, Count Richard Coudenhove-Kalergi, of the dismantled Austro-Hungarian Empire, sought to rekindle the fire of European unity in the 1920s. His first book, entitled *Pan-Europa* was published in 1923, and each copy contained a membership form which invited the reader to become a member of Pan-Europa movement. Thus, Coudenhove-Kalergi is the founder of the first grassroots movement for the European unity. Members included major personalities of European culture, such as Albert Einstein, Thomas Mann, Sigmund Freud, Rainer-Maria Rilke, Salvador de Madariaga, Ortega y Gasset and Konrad Adenauer. The movement held its first Congress in Vienna in 1926. Coudenhove-Kalergi strived to bring together the superpowers France, Germany and Russia and other countries in a voluntary union, a league of free and equal nations. Yet, he excluded Britain because he considered it to be an 'Atlantic empire.' In his view, 'Europe has to unite through collaboration, unlike the East (Russia) that wants to conquer it, and unlike the West (the United States) that aims to buy it.'⁶

However, before anything of that kind could happen, the continent was to go through yet another round of devastating conflict.

2 *The time was ripe – for reconciliation*

After the Second World War, in the years following 1945, there was a strong desire to create a new order that would prevent military conflicts and safeguard a lasting peace. Looking back, we can see that it was a providential time. Within five years, the foundations were laid for the construction of Europe, of which the outcome are the European Union and the European institutions of today.

On 8 May 1945, General Keitel signed the unconditional surrender of all the German forces. This date marks the end of the cruellest and most devastating war Europe had ever known, but not the end of suffering and hardship. The continent lay in ruins, there was lack of first commodities and even famine. On top of that came the forced migration of millions of people.

The Iron Curtain

After the horrors of the Nazi-regime and its collaborators, an even more devastating spectre of sheer apocalyptic doom arose. Even before the end of the Second World War, the Russians and American allies, represented by Soviet leader Joseph Stalin, British prime minister Winston Churchill and American president Franklin Roosevelt, agreed to divide Europe into a communist sphere of influence and a Western sphere. During the notorious Conference of Yalta on the Black Sea, the line between the two was drawn right through the middle of Germany. Winston Churchill would later call it an 'Iron Curtain from the Baltic to the Adriatic Sea'. This would become a huge frontier dividing Europe in two separate parts.

Meanwhile, communist parties in several Western countries gained in numbers. Soviet leader Stalin actively supported them. There was a real possibility that they obtain the majority in elections in France, Italy, Greece. Would that lead to a communist takeover, the end of freedom?

It was in this situation that we see some political leaders in the Western part of Europe rise to the occasion, in an extraordinary way.

French-German reconciliation

The time had come to bury one of the most, if not the most harmful antagonism of European history, that between France and Germany. Both countries traced their histories to a common origin, the Frankish Empire of Charlemagne. Despite the fact that they were twin brothers so to speak, they had fought each other for centuries, in a long series of bloody wars. After the Second World War, some high-

⁵ See http://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/13/evenements/textes_victor_hugo.asp

⁶ Richard COUDENHOVE-KALERGI, *Europe must unite*, p. 139.

ranking political leaders of France and the Western part of Germany took the courageous step of reconciliation – the Eastern part of Germany was not included because it belonged to the Soviet zone of influence.

The post-war reconciliation was the key that unlocked the process of European integration. Even today, the French–German axis is of fundamental importance for the European Union. The prelude to a period of peace. Within fifty years it would encompass almost the entire continent. And with peace came prosperity, at a level which former generations would never have dared to dream.

Of course, the principle of reconciliation was not new. It is a core element of the Christian faith. For ages the message of Christ who has died to reconcile enemies with God and with each other, had been heard all over Europe. Persuaded that reconciliation was the only way out of the vicious circle of conflict that had held the nations of our continents in its grip, some politicians had the courage and the wisdom to put this principle into practice in the area of international relationships. They took up the challenge of reconciliation between enemies. In so doing they went against the grain of power politics and nationalists of all stripes.

Schuman, Adenauer and De Gasperi

The three key persons in the post-war reconciliation were Robert Schuman from France, Konrad Adenauer from Germany and Alcide de Gasperi from Italy. All three were devout Catholics. Their political ideas were derived from the principles described in what is called the social teaching of the Catholic Church. Principles such as equal opportunities for rich and poor, the responsibility of the state in guaranteeing social welfare and proper living conditions, the liberty of conscience, the freedom of intellectual and economic development, the dignity of work, the priority of labour over capital, and of people over property. In their view, the Christian faith and its values are the principal guide in matters of political governance and economy. This put them in opposition to Nazism, fascism as well as communism and socialism, but made them also critical of unbridled economic liberalism. Above all, they were convinced democrats. Democracy is the key to a just and free society. The following quotations illustrate their thinking.

Christianity is a doctrine that intends to define the moral obligation in all areas of life, at least in its general principles ... in order to protect the greatest interests of the human person: his liberty, his dignity and his development (*Robert Schuman*).⁷

To the fundamental principles of materialism, we must oppose the ethical principles of Christianity that should determine the construction of the state, the limitation of its powers, the rights and duties of individuals, economic and social life, and the relations between peoples (*Konrad Adenauer*).⁸

How can we maintain what is noble and human in our national forces? Only by giving them the common ideals of our history (*Alcide De Gasperi*).⁹

It is interesting to see the convergences between the biographies of these three men. All of them had grown up in German speaking environment, so this was their common language.

Robert Schuman (1886-1963) was born in Luxembourg. He settled as a lawyer in Metz, which was German at that time. After the First World War, Alsace-Lorraine, including the city of Metz, became French. Schuman engaged in politics, became a member of the French National Assembly in 1919. After the German occupation of France in 1940, he was arrested by the Gestapo. He escaped in 1942 and worked in the resistance until France was liberated (1944).

During the war, Schuman gave much thought to the future of the continent. He read some great theologians of the past, such as Thomas Aquinas, reflected on the social teaching of the Catholic Church laid down in the official documents *Rerum Novarum* (1891) and *Quadrogesimo anno* (1931), studied the writings of the Catholic philosopher Jacques Maritain, whose ideas on the Christian foundations of

⁷ Robert SCHUMAN, *Pour l'Europe*.

⁸ Konrad ADENAUER, at the signing ceremony of the Treaty of Rome in 1957, quoted by Gerlando LENTINI, *Aux racines chrétiennes de l'Union européenne*.

⁹ Alcide DE GASPERI, address during the annual plenary session of the Council of Europe in 1951, quoted by Isabelle DE GAULMAYN, 'Des inspireurs chrétiens du traité de Rome,' *La Croix*, 20 March 2011.

democracy made a deep impact. Moreover, he became convinced that the age-old opposition of France and Germany should be eliminated, because only then could the nations of Europe come together and form a unity.

After the war, Schuman founded the Popular Republican Movement (*Mouvement Républicain Populaire*; MRP). He served as minister of finance (1946), prime minister (1947–1948), foreign minister (1948–1952), and minister of justice (1955–56).

Konrad Adenauer (1876–1967) was born in imperial Germany. Growing up in relatively humble surroundings, he adopted Prussian values and a Christian faith that guided him throughout his life. He first took up political office in 1906, as city councillor of his home town Cologne. At the age of just 41, in 1917, he was elected Lord Mayor of Cologne. With the end of the First World War, Adenauer made efforts to promote transnational cooperation with Germany's neighbours to the West on several occasions – a progressive move at that point in time.

When, in February 1933, the newly elected German Chancellor Adolf Hitler visited Cologne, Adenauer refused to receive him – a decision that saw him removed from his position as Lord Mayor. Forced into political exile – even incarcerated at one point – he spent the following twelve years under surveillance at his home in Rhöndorf. He chose not to be involved in any subversive activities, but in July 1944, two men approached him with details of a plan to overthrow the regime. The assassination attempt failed, and Adenauer was jailed by the Gestapo for several months, escaping a transfer to the concentration camp at Buchenwald thanks to the help of close friends. He was released in October 1944.

After the defeat of Nazi Germany, Adenauer was determined to establish a political platform that would unite people around core Christian and democratic values – this became the CDU (*Christendemosokratische Union*). On this basis he was elected as the first Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany in September 1949. Throughout his 14 years as Chancellor of Germany, Konrad Adenauer remained determined to integrate Germany into a value-based European political system. Therefore, reconciliation, rapprochement and cooperation with France became the central goals of Adenauer's foreign policy, ultimately shaping German policy up to the present day.

Alcide di Gasperi was born in 1881 in Pieve Testino in the northern Italian Trentino region. It was a part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire until 1919, although most of its inhabitants were Italians. As a high school student, he was deeply influenced by Pope Leo XIII's encyclical *Rerum Novarum* (1891), which gave birth to Catholic social teaching. Working as a journalist for a daily newspaper, he became involved with the nascent Christian social movement. In 1911 he was elected as deputy to the Austrian parliament. After World War I the province of Trentino became Italian. Now an Italian citizen, Di Gasperi continued his political activity along the same lines as before. In 1919 he was co-founder of the *Italian People's Party*, which based its program on Catholic social teaching.

By 1922, Benito Mussolini's fascists came to power in Italy. While the Nazis glorified nation and race were supreme, and the communists put the working above all, the fascists deified the state. Initially, De Gasperi supported cooperation between his party and the fascists, yet as Mussolini started creating a violent statist police dictatorship and ultimately dissolved De Gasperi's party by force, the latter joined the antifascist movement. As a result, he was sentenced to prison in 1926, but was released due to the intervention of Pope Pius XI, who employed him in the Vatican Library. He spent the war fighting in Italy's antifascist partisan movement.

Shortly after the Allies liberated Rome in 1944, De Gasperi became a minister in the new Christian Democratic government, becoming prime minister a year later. He served in that capacity until 1953. Seeing the Soviet takeover of Eastern Europe and the rise of the Italian Communist Party, he strongly believed that Western Europe must unite against communism.

In the period before Second World War, Catholic politicians and intellectuals had created Christian democratic parties or movements in democratic countries with a substantial *Catholic* population: Italy, Belgium, France, Germany, the Netherlands (i.e. the southern part). They also developed relations across national borders. It was therefore logical that they resume these contacts with like-minded people after 1945. But due to the war between their countries, this was now very difficult. Nevertheless, Schuman, Adenauer and De Gasperi were convinced that political leaders at both sides of the frontiers should reach out to each other in reconciliation. They envisaged a joining together of the peoples of Europe in a new political structure. And they agreed that all of that should be deeply rooted in the Christian values that have shaped Europe.

Meeting each other

Towards the end of the war, Schuman thought about reconciliation between France and Germany. But how? Whom should he meet to discuss this? It is here that another person entered the scene, or rather the backstage; Frank Buchman, an American Evangelical evangelist belonging to the Moral Rearmament Movement. During a conversation in 1948 he introduced Schuman to their Centre for the Reconciliation of the Nations in Caux, Switzerland. Trade unionists and politicians from several countries, including Germany, attended the conferences there, in a new spirit of reconciliation and cooperation. From 1946-1950, a total of 3113 Germans took part in such meetings, including industrialists, journalists, educationalist as well as 83 government members, plus 11 members of the Adenauer family. When Schuman said that he didn't know whom to trust in the new Germany, Buchman told him: 'We have some excellent Germans in Caux.' This led to several personal meetings. As they shared their views, they recognised common spiritual convictions, learned to trust each other. Adenauer concluded that 'men like you... and myself, are filled with the desire to build the new edifice of Europe on Christian foundations'.¹⁰

Italian Christian democratic politicians including prime minister Alcide De Gasperi were also linked to the meetings in Caux. Personal contacts like this were essential. Friendships were formed, plans for the future of Europe were discussed. Jeff Fountain has done well to record this most interesting personal chapter in modern European history.¹¹

Churchill and European unity

Meanwhile, from the British side, Winston Churchill wanted his country to actively take part in the reconstruction of the continent. He was persuaded that this could only happen when the nations work together, first and foremost the two archenemies France and Germany. In a speech in the northern French city of Metz, in 1946, Winston Churchill called for Franco-German reconciliation as the basis for a united Europe. In so doing, he gave his full support to the initiative that had been taken by the man standing next to him, Robert Schuman, who presided this public meeting.

What is little known today, is that Churchill believed in a united Europe and wanted Britain to play a leading role. 'After World War II he swore to build a peace that would last', writes Felix Klos in a fascinating study. 'Together with a group of British thinkers and politicians, Churchill developed ideas to bring about European unity. They clearly envisaged a federal, United States of Europe, as the only way to secure peace.'

According to Churchill and the group around him, the project for unity should therefore include all the countries of Europe, by virtue of their common historical and spiritual background. In 1946 he wrote:

I am not attracted to a Western bloc as a final solution. The ideal should be Europe. The Western bloc as an instalment of the United States of Europe would be an important step, but the case should be put on the broadest lines of a unity of Europe and Christendom as a whole... Moreover, without Germany, however sub-divided or expressed, there is no force of nationhood in the West which could hold the balance with the Soviet power.¹²

In 1948, he declared in a public address:

When the Nazi power was broken, I asked myself what the best advice was I could give to my fellow citizens in this island and across the channel in our ravaged continent. There was no difficulty in answering the question. My counsel to Europe can be given in a single word: 'Unite!'¹³

In those years, Churchill's Conservative Party was in the opposition. In the general elections of 1945, he had been defeated by Labour leader Clement Attlee. However, he would serve a second term of prime minister from 1951 to 1955.

¹⁰ During a meeting on 23 august 1951, quoted by Jeff FOUNTAIN, *Deeply Rooted*.

¹¹ Jeff FOUNTAIN, *op. cit.*

¹² Felix KLOS, *Churchill on Europe*, p. 33

¹³ *Idem*, backcover.

The Council of Europe

In a public address to the students of the University of Zürich on the 19th of September 1946, Winston Churchill officially called for the formation of a 'United States of Europe' in the long run, and in the meantime, to begin with, the formation of a 'Council of Europe'. His initiative was welcomed by many government leaders, and this led to the creation of the Council of Europe, through the Treaty of London, signed on the 5th of May 1949. Its headquarters were situated in Strasbourg, the city that had changed from French to German rule and vice-versa several times in the past centuries! Nearly all countries on the continent became members, including the Soviet Union. Turkey was also among the signatories!

Apart from offering a structure of dialogue, the essential role of the Council was to make human rights the basis of international relations. To this end, the Council drafted the European Convention on Human Rights, which was signed by all its members in 1950. Each article of this treaty protects a basic human right. Taken together, they would allow people to lead free and dignified lives.

Surely, the Council was not able to overcome division and strife between West and East. At the same time, in April 1949, the countries of Western Europe, the United States and Canada formed a military alliance, the North Atlantic Trust Organisation (NATO). This was meant as a security shield against the communism Soviet Bloc. From their side, the communist countries in Central and Eastern Europe felt threatened by the West and so they formed the Warsaw Pact in 1955. These two alliances engaged in an arms race with nuclear weapons capable of wiping out the whole human race several times over. They confronted each other in other parts of the world where they took sides in regional conflicts: Korea, Vietnam, several African countries and most notably in the Middle East. The mutual threat of the two competing powers amounted to a situation in which any small incident could trigger a chain of reactions leading to a Third World War. It was called the Cold War. The threat of real war breaking out made the realisation of the European idea more urgent than ever.

During all those years, the Council of Europe, formed under the leadership of Churchill, has been the only structure where representatives from all over Europe, from both sides of the Iron Curtain, could meet, and continued to do so! At several occasions, this has prevented tensions from escalating into military action.

The Monnet Plan, the Schuman Declaration and the ECSC

We already mentioned the talks between high ranking German, French and Italian political leaders, since the end of the war. These contacts were the beginning of a process of reconciliation and cooperation. As mutual trust developed, the time was ripe for a historic initiative that would change the history of Europe.

In April 1949, the French minister of foreign affairs, Robert Schuman, made a decisive move. Adenauer and his fellow Christian democrats had proposed to unite the zones of Germany that were occupied by the three Western allies, France, Great Britain and the US. (The fourth zone in the east was occupied by the Soviet-Union.) In their proposal, this so-called 'Western Trizone' would regain some level of national sovereignty. For the Germans, it was vital that France accept their plan, but many French politicians were rather in favour of a continued occupation. They were not sure whether Germany should become a nation again in the new Europe. Schuman forced the hand of French diplomacy to accept the project of creating the Trizone. This was the first step towards the creation of the German Federal Republic, later that same year.

In the meantime, he was working on a plan that had initially been proposed to him by Jean Monnet. The latter had spent most of the war-years in the United States. In 1945, he was appointed at the Foreign Ministry and became a close collaborator of Schuman. A practicing Catholic, he had the same spiritual and political convictions as Schuman. He also had the same vision for a united Europe. So, the two understood each other and got on very well together, despite their difference in personality. Monnet was not a politician but a businessman, a pragmatic, a 'fixer', someone capable of getting things done that others talk about. He came up with an ingenious plan, namely, to place French and German production of coal and steel under one common High Authority. This meant giving up national sovereignty in a key area of the economy. One of the reasons was that this would prevent these nations from producing arms – coal and steel are essential for that – independently from each other. This supranational organisation would be open to participation of Western European countries. It was to be designed in such a way as to

create common interests between European countries which would lead to gradual political integration, a condition for the pacification of relations between them.

Schuman was immediately convinced of the practicality of the plan. Persuaded that the time was ripe for this, he succeeded in getting the whole French cabinet behind it, and so he could present it as a plan of his government in a speech on 9 May 1950 that has become known as the Schuman Declaration.¹⁴

His speech only lasted three minutes but it would have huge consequences. West German Chancellor Adenauer and Italian prime minister Di Gasperi responded almost immediately with a positive reply, as did the governments of the Netherlands, Belgium and Luxembourg. Within one year, on 18 April 1951, these six countries signed the Treaty of Paris. It created the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) – Europe’s first supranational Community.

A significant detail that is not generally known: just before the start of the delicate negotiations which would lead to the adoption of the Treaty of Paris, Adenauer, De Gasperi and Schuman met in a Benedictine monastery on the banks of the Rhine for a retreat of meditation and prayer. This illustrates well how Europe’s founders had put their Christian faith at the centre of their political action.

In 1985, the government leaders of the European Community meeting in Milan decided that the date of the Schuman Declaration, 9 May, is to be celebrated as ‘Day of Europe’. And so, we now have the two commemorations together: 8 May marks the end of WW II, while 9 May marks the beginning of the European institutions, exactly five years later.

3 Construction of Europe – a unique system of governance

It should be noted that Schuman in his May 1950 Declaration shared a much broader vision than just the creation of a High Authority for Coal and Steel. This, he insisted, was just the first step, towards the final goal of a united, federated Europe. ‘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.’¹⁵

The Schuman Declaration is viewed as the founding event of the current European Union (EU). Indeed, it was the beginning of a process of economic and political integration, the so-called construction of Europe. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to describe the process in detail. Here is a short summary in the treaties and the institutions.

Treaties

From 1951 onwards, the Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) monitored the reconstruction of the heavy industry in the member states: France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Belgium and Luxembourg.

In 1957, the governments of these countries signed the Treaties of Rome, which created the European Economic Community (EEC) and the European Energy Community (Euratom). The EEC took over the role of the ECSC. The members states opened their borders to form a common market for an increasing number of goods and services. And they mutualised their nuclear research and production programmes. In 1959, the Council of Europe founded the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR). Its purpose is to ensure that the European Convention of Human Rights is respected in its member countries. The ECHR is based in Strasbourg.

In 1973, Great Britain, Denmark and Ireland entered the EEC. The nine members intensified their cooperation through the creation of the European Fund of Regional Development (EFRED) in 1975. Its purpose was to stimulate the economic development of regions that lagged behind. Industrial plants, roads and railways were built in order to connect isolated zones to the economic centres, and to a Europe-wide network of infrastructure.

In 1979, elections took place for the newly instituted European Parliament. Citizens of the member states could choose their representatives through direct and universal elections. This was to ensure a more democratic basis to the decision-making process in the EEC.

In 1981, the EEC became the European Community (EC), with the intent to strengthen the political cooperation. At the same time, Greece became a member, followed by Spain and Portugal in 1986. All

¹⁴ Schuman’s speech was edited with the help of Jean Monnet and Bernard Clappier, his cabinet director. It is published on the website of the *Centre européen Robert Schuman* in Sey-Chazelles. <http://www.centre-robert-schuman.org/robert-schuman/la-declaration-du-9-mai-1950?langue=fr>

¹⁵ Quote from the Schuman Declaration, mentioned above.

three had only recently overthrown dictatorial and military regimes. Through welcoming them, the EC hoped to consolidate the young democracies. All three have largely benefited from the large-scale investments of the regional development program.

Until the end of the 1980s, the continent was divided by the 'Iron Curtain'. This situation came to a sudden end with the popular revolution movements in Central and Eastern Europe that led to the destruction of the Berlin Wall in November 1989, the downfall of one communist regime after the other, the unification of West and East Germany the following year, and finally the end of the Soviet-Union on Christmas Day 1991. From this point onwards, the construction of Europe entered into a second phase. The door was opened to the East. Several countries decided to enter the European Community and began the preparation process for membership. This meant that they needed to change the rules of their economy so as to be compatible with the common market and implement a democratic political system. Moreover, their legislation on human rights needed to conform to legislation in the European Community.

A major step was the Treaty of Maastricht, signed in December 1991. The European Community became the European Union (EU). More powers were granted to the European Parliament in order to increase the democratic quality of the Union. Cultural exchange was to be promoted; the level of higher education was to be harmonised in order that diplomas and degrees were recognised in all member states. This led to the introduction of the same bachelor/master structure in all European universities, ratified by the Accords of Bologna. 'Maastricht' also decided to open up public utility services, public transport and communication to free market competition. As a result, national companies have gradually lost their monopoly positions. And it decided to prepare the introduction of a common currency, the euro.

In 1995, France and Germany and the Benelux countries implement the Schengen Agreement which they had signed already in 1985, creating a free travel zone without custom and passport controls at the internal borders. (Schengen is a small town on the Luxembourg-German border.) Two years later, through the Treaty of Amsterdam, all the member states of the EU entered the Schengen Agreement, except the United Kingdom and Ireland. Two non-member states, Norway and Iceland also joined the so-called Schengen Area.

On 1 January 2002, twelve countries in the EU replaced their national currencies by the common currency, the euro. Since then, five more countries have adopted the euro. Together they constitute the Eurozone.

The first eastward enlargement of the EU took place in 2004 when Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, and the three Baltic states became members, followed by Romania and Bulgaria three years later, and by Croatia in 2013. This meant an enormous growth in number (28-member states) and population (around 500 million).

Meanwhile, government leaders had taken the ambitious step to design a real constitution that would define the philosophical basis and the common values of the Union, clarify its decision-making process, establish its governing structures, and ensure legal procedures. It would also introduce a European citizenship. In 2004, a draft constitution was presented for ratification to all member states. While most governments left it to the national parliament to discuss, two of them organised a referendum: the French in 2005 and the Dutch in 2006. In both cases, the majority voted against. This made other governments apprehensive of organising a referendum. European leaders decided to leave the project. Instead, they adopted a simplified version of the constitution in the Treaty of Lisbon (2008). This Treaty made the European Declaration of Fundamental Rights binding for all member states. Two new positions were created: A President of the European Council and a European High Commissioner of Foreign Affairs.

With the adhesion of Croatia in 2013, the EU reached its largest size until now. Since then there is no agreement among the EU-members whether there should be more enlargements in the short term, so the negotiations with several candidates for membership do not make much progress.

On the other hand, there came a serious setback with the referendum in the United Kingdom in 2016 on the question whether to remain in the EU or to leave. The majority voted for 'Brexit'. After a complicated process of negotiation and political decision making, an agreement about the terms of leaving the EU was reached. In January 2020, the UK formally left the EU. However, negotiations about the economic relations between the two are continuing.

Institutions

The treaties created a construct of bodies, called the European institutions:

- The *European Council*, the highest political body of the EU, consisting of the heads of state or government of the EU member states, plus an independent President of the European Council who chairs the meetings. This council defines the Union's policy agenda and gives impetus to integration.
- The *Council of the European Union* (informally known as the "Council of Ministers" or just "the Council") holds legislative and some limited executive powers and is thus the main decision-making body of the Union. Its Presidency rotates between the states every six months. The Council is composed of twenty-eight national ministers (one per state). However, the Council meets in various forms depending upon the topic. For example, if agriculture is being discussed, the Council will be composed of each national minister for agriculture.
- The *European Commission* is the executive arm of the Union, implementing the policy of the Councils mentioned above, and running the EU on a day-to-day basis. It is composed of one commissioner from each state but is designed to be independent of national interests. The Commission is responsible for drafting 'directives' and has the ability to propose new laws. It also has the duty of upholding the law and treaties.
- The *European Parliament*, seated in Strasbourg for the plenary sessions, and in Brussels for the daily work and the commission meetings.
- The *European Central Bank*, seated in Frankfurt, determines the monetary policy of the eurozone, and ensures price stability in the eurozone by controlling the money supply.
- The *European Court of Auditors*, based in Luxembourg, checks the proper implementation of the budget of the EU.
- The *European Court of Justice* seated in Luxembourg; ensures the uniform application and interpretation of European law. It has the power to decide legal disputes between member states, the institutions, businesses and individuals.
- The *European Court of Human Rights*, based in Strasbourg.

Objectives and motto

- Every treaty formulates several objectives. Usually, any new treaty takes over the objectives of the former ones, sometimes in a modified version, while adding new ones. Now, the foundational text of the EU is the Lisbon Treaty of 2007, which defines the official objectives as follows. The Union...aims to promote *peace*, the values of the EU and the well-being of its peoples.
- offers its citizens an *area of freedom, security and justice without internal frontiers*, in which the free movement of persons, goods, capital and information is ensured.
- establishes an *internal market*.
- shall combat social exclusion and discrimination, and *promote social justice* and protection, equality between women and men, solidarity between generations and protection of the rights of the child.
- shall respect the rich cultural and linguistic diversity of its member states and ensure that Europe's cultural heritage is safeguarded and enhanced.
- shall establish an economic and monetary union whose currency is the euro.
- shall contribute to peace, security, the sustainable development of the Earth, solidarity and mutual respect among peoples, free and fair trade, eradication of poverty and the protection of human rights, in particular the rights of the child. (Article 3).

In 2000, the European Parliament organised a contest among young people in all the member states, asking them to propose a motto for the EU. 'Unity in diversity' was selected as the best one and the Parliament unanimously adopted it. Unity in diversity is a key value of the EU, a cornerstone of its construction. No nation should dominate another. Linguistic diversity is maintained. Such is at least the noble objective. In reality, larger countries carry more weight than smaller ones. The so-called Franco-German couple is particularly strong. But major decisions can only be made on the basis of consensus.

Unique system of governance

The construction of Europe has led to a unique system of governance. It is a mixture of intergovernmental and supranational institutions. In certain areas, member-states remain sovereign, in other areas they have chosen to hand over national sovereignty to a European level of decision-making. Every state can decide its own policy in areas such as foreign affairs, educational system, health care, religious institutions, etc. At the same time, all member states are subject to the decisions of the European Commission when it comes to open borders, common market regulations, financial regulations, to mention a few. But even then, all the directives of 'Brussels' are based on the decisions in common accord by the government ministers of each nation.

Guiding principles, introduced by Christian Democrats

Behind this system are several principles that the founding fathers have integrated in the construction of Europe. The major background of these principles is the Christian Democratic political movement in several countries, mentioned above.

First of all, *subsidiarity*. Originally formulated in Catholic social teaching thinking, it has become a cornerstone of the Christian democratic vision of society – held by Catholics as well as Protestants. Its policies are best enacted at the most local level, and if a smaller structure can perform a function, it should perform it instead of a larger one. Therefore, the state should not overrule the civil society but leave room for private organisation. Applied to the European integration: the supranational institutions should not overrule the national governments in matters that can better be left to their competence. Subsidiarity squares with another principle dear to the founding fathers, unity in diversity. There are huge differences between the member states when it comes to health care, the place of religion in society, ethical norms, family legislation, for instance, let alone culture and language. This diversity should not be suppressed by a uniform regulation.

A second guiding principle is *solidarity*. Rich countries should share resources with poor countries, rich regions should be linked to poor regions. This can best be done through common programmes. For instance, one of the aims of the Common Agricultural Policy was to help the poorest agricultural workers in Europe. This again was a principle on which the founding fathers insisted, as it is the practical application of the Christian notion of 'carry each other's burdens'. Another term for this is mutuality – the pooling of resources in order to finance programmes to the benefit of those who would otherwise not be helped.

Speaking in Strasbourg, on 16 May 1949, Robert Schuman formulated a synthesis of these principles:

We are carrying out a great experiment, the fulfilment of the same recurrent dream that for ten centuries has revisited the peoples of Europe: creating between them an organisation putting an end to war and guaranteeing an eternal peace.... The European spirit signifies being conscious of belonging to a cultural family and to have a willingness to serve that community in the spirit of total mutuality, without any hidden motives of hegemony or the selfish exploitation of others. The 19th century saw feudal ideas being opposed and, with the rise of a national spirit, nationalities asserting themselves. Our century, that has witnessed the catastrophes resulting in the unending clash of nationalities and nationalisms, must attempt and succeed in reconciling nations in a supranational association. This would safeguard the diversities and aspirations of each nation while coordinating them in the same manner as the regions are coordinated within the unity of the nation.¹⁶

Such was the vision of the founding fathers of Europe, and its principles were shared by all those who collaborated with them and after them in the construction of Europe.

4 Founding fathers and their motivation

Which brings us back to Schuman, Adenauer, De Gasperi and Monnet. These four are often called the founding fathers of the European integration.

¹⁶ Quoted by Brent F. NELSEN, 'Religion and the Founding of the European Community,'

However, we should add a fifth key person, Winston Churchill, the initiator of the Council of Europe. Nowadays, he is often included in the group of five founding fathers of the European Union. For instance, in the educational publications of the European Parliament.

Surely, they were not the only key persons in the process, they are rather representative of many others who played important roles as well. We can only single them out *pars pro toto*. They belong to a generation of political leaders who were decidedly anti-fascist and anti-communist, determined to overcome the dangers of nationalism, and committed to democracy. Most of them were acting on Christian convictions, and many belonged to Christian democratic political parties or movements.

It would be a simplification to say that the construction of Europe was a Christian, i.e. a Christian democratic project. Politicians of other persuasions joined their forces to work for reconciliation, cooperation and unity. Conservatives, Liberals and Social-democrats – some of whom were confessing Protestants or Catholics – as well as Communists. They tended to avoid religious language and rather refer to the Enlightenment principles or to humanist ideals as their motivation. For instance, Paul-Henri Spaak (1899-1972), Belgium's most prominent post-war leader, and a Social-democrat, supported European integration 'because it is the sole way to maintain and to radiate the principles of liberty, of democracy and of human dignity which are foundations of our way of life'.¹⁷

As the process of economic and political integration progressed, the idea of a united Europe became part and parcel of the political and intellectual discourse, at least on the western side of the Iron Curtain. Politicians, intellectuals, journalists, and church authorities strongly supported it. During the first post-war decades, there was a broad consensus among the major political streams that this was the best way forward for the peoples of Europe.

Having said this, it remains a remarkable and undeniable fact that Christian politicians played a key role in laying the foundations of this process.

Historian Desmond Dinan writes that 'the beginning years of European integration were characterised by a happy combination of idealism and national self-interest'.¹⁸ Recent studies of the construction of Europe bring to light that there was indeed a 'happy combination' of political interests and religious, i.e. Christian convictions. Historian Urs Altermatt goes even as far as saying that 'the first institutions of West European integration in the 1950s were the work of Christian Democrats, whose aim was reconciliation between France and Germany... on the basis of Christian democratic foundations'.¹⁹

Looking back on their commitment to peace and cooperation, and to the initiatives they took, we would say that this an inspiring contemporary example of influencing society with the principles of God's Kingdom, like sowing small mustard seeds that have the potential to become large trees, like leaven that works all through the dough (Matthew 13:33 and Luke 13:20-21).

¹⁷ Paul-Henri SPAAK, *Face to Face with Europe* (London: Conservative Political Centre, 1967), p. 11.

¹⁸ Desmond DINAN, *Europe Recast: A History of the European Union* (2004). Quoted by Sander LUTWIELER, *op. cit.*, p. 38.

¹⁹ Urs ALTERMATT et al. *Europa: Ein christliches Projekt?*, p. 78.