

mercantile conduct of the world community were conceived at that time. No less imagination was displayed regionally in Europe and in the following years, Benelux, the Western European Union, the OEEC and the Council of Europe were all created. As time passed, however, it seemed that a dynamic ingredient was missing from these institutions: they were too restricted either geographically or in their power to respond adequately to the needs perceived by Winston Churchill. A strong current of public opinion developed in favour of more far-reaching solutions, based on the irrevocable cession of national sovereignty to a body representing Europe as a whole and encompassing the traditional continental foes. Thus the foundation was laid for what has since become the great experiment in European construction.

Most origins

The origins of this experiment were modest, but the philosophy that inspired it was novel and comprehensive. Its originator, the theorist and practician Jean Monnet and statesmen such as Robert Schuman, Paul Henri Spaak and Conrad Adenauer, shared a common goal and the conviction of a method to achieve it. In 1950 Schuman had said that Europe could not be created instantaneously but must be built laboriously. In practical terms this meant that Europe must proceed from small successes of economic organization to larger achievements. If, it was reasoned, Europe's basic industries were integrated, forces would be set in motion that would lead irrevocably towards a common market. In time, equally inevitably, this would entail the creation of an economic and monetary union — for who could conceive of complete European free trade without a common currency and fiscal policy? Ultimately, the logic of the final step, some form of political union, must prevail and Europe would have been created.

True to this notion, the Schuman Plan for the European Coal and Steel Community was adopted by the six founding members of the new Europe (France, Germany, Italy and the Benelux countries) in 1951. With equal fidelity, this first step was followed, after an abortive detour towards a European Defence Community, by the treaties signed in Rome on March 25, 1957, establishing a European Atomic Energy Community and a European Economic Community. Together with the Coal and Steel Community, these institutions formed the cornerstones of the endeavour,

which is continuing today, to create a political union in Europe.

Of necessity, the Rome treaties are remarkable for the precision and detail with which the obligations and time-table for the creation of a European Common Market are set forth. This was a necessary precaution, since economic integration on the scale contemplated must hurt many vested interests, and it was important to spell out the balance of benefits and obligations among the six member countries as they moved to implement the treaties. The result was that the process of implementation advanced relatively smoothly (the time-table was, indeed, accelerated on several occasions) and the European Customs Union was fully established by July 1, 1968, 18 months ahead of schedule. The method had, however, certain disadvantages; the treaties were fairly narrowly limited to the commercial objectives it was their ostensible purpose to promote and the further stages in the broad historical process of creating a European union were left undefined for future decision. This was not solely a matter of political caution and the notorious distaste of some European leaders for further excursions into supra-nationality. The unpredictability of history imposed an open-ended solution on the architects of the European structure — who were, in any case, confident that the momentum achieved as Europeans learned to work together would almost automatically be translated into further progress. The inner drama of the Community during the past few years has revolved round the question whether the method would produce the desired results or not.

Test of will

A test of political will in the member countries was not long delayed once the major goals of the Common Market had been achieved, and the results appeared wholly auspicious at the time. In December 1969, the heads of the six governments met at The Hague to take stock of their situation and to relaunch the negotiations for British accession to the Common Market, Britain having opted out of the first phase of the construction of Europe. This "summit" meeting, as it was called, took a decision that was intended as the key to the further development of the European Community. It called for the establishment of a plan for the achievement of an Economic and Monetary Union (EMU), expressly envisaged as an essential step on the road to a "United Europe", which was, by inference, endorsed as the ultimate objective.

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