

Together for Europe: 75 Schuman declaration
A soul for Europe in the 21st century
Finding inspiration in the Schuman Declaration

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“France takes the nations by surprise”. Headlines like this read around the world on May 10, 1950, reported the speech made by the French Foreign Minister, Robert Schuman, the evening before in Paris.

Phrases like ‘Sensational decision’, and ‘Schuman bomb’ described an audacious plan to embrace a defeated enemy as an equal, which had caught the world off guard. Never before in history had the victor stooped to pick up a fallen foe as did France to western Germany with this announcement.

This, in my estimation, was *the* defining moment in post-war European history. From that day onwards, there was a plan on the table for European integration. That basic plan produced over 75 years today’s European Union, where 450 million people from 27 nations live together in peace.

While the guns had been silent for five years, real peace had not yet been established in a Europe still suffering a severe case of post-trauma stress disorder. Scattered families, bombed cities, disrupted lives and broken futures seemed insurmountable obstacles to true peace. The Zadkine statue in Rotterdam of an anguished figure hands thrust in the air revealing a gaping hole in his torso was the image not only of that city ravaged by Hitler’s blitzkrieg but of cities all across Europe and indeed the whole continent.

What was it in the foreign minister’s three-minute speech that gave it such power? Three minutes! Can you even boil an egg or make a cup of coffee in three minutes?!

Read on one level, it was a bold but simple plan to bind former enemies, particularly France and Germany, so closely together economically that war would become ‘not merely unthinkable but materially impossible’.

It proposed pooling coal and steel production - critical industries for military power - under a shared, supranational authority, bringing the nations together in a relationship of interdependence, and mutual accountability.

It was a project for peace and inclusion through cooperation – not domination and exclusion. Yet Schuman’s project was not merely political or economic. He warned that the project must not just be economic and technological; it needed a soul.

For read on a deeper level, the Schuman Declaration reveals the project to be deeply moral, even spiritual, rooted in values of the heart. Without using religious jargon, Schuman infused the declaration with values indispensable for the rebuilding of post-war Europe.

We can go through the document and highlight those words reflecting such values, beginning with **peace, coming together, participation, pooling, common, solidarity, unification, equal, community...**

The core values of the Schuman Declaration were:

- **Peace** through cooperation, not domination.
- **Solidarity** among nations, rather than competition.
- **Supranational governance** as a new form of international order, limiting aggressive nationalism.
- **Democracy and rule of law** as cornerstones for building trust between states.

Democracy, Schuman wrote, *owed its existence to Christianity, emphasising human dignity, the freedom of each individual, human rights and the practice of brotherly love. Democracy*, he warned, *had to be Christian or it would not be; it would degenerate into anarchy or tyranny* - a process we see unfolding before our very eyes right now.

Real peace, Schuman believed, was not the absence of war, but the active construction of relationships founded on **justice** and **solidarity**. After two world wars, the task of rebuilding Europe required not only new institutions, but a moral renewal, a reawakening of conscience, a rediscovery of human brotherhood. *European unity must be rooted in 'freedom, equality and solidarity', which we have drawn from Christian teachings*, he later wrote in his book *For Europe*.

Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité – the French national motto – were not inventions of the Enlightenment, as Schuman indicated, but grew out of a deeper spiritual reality.

What were the sources of Schuman's personal spirituality?

From his youth he was schooled in the Social Teaching of the Catholic Church – as were his two colleagues Konrad Adenauer and Alcide de Gasperi.

Building on the concept of *imago Dei*, that every person was created in the Creator's image, the Catholic Church championed the solidarity of the human race and thus the concept of seeking the common good of all – not just seeking to make our own nation great.

A second source of Schuman's spirituality was the Moral Re-Armament (MRA) movement led by the Lutheran evangelist, Frank Buchman. This stressed the centrality of forgiveness and reconciliation for true peace, and that a changed world began with personal change in each one of us.

Adenauer was also deeply influenced by the MRA movement. He was among the first Germans allowed out of western Germany after the war to attend conferences in Switzerland organised by MRA in their Centre for the Reconciliation of the Nations. Forgiveness between nations, the dignity of the human person, and the primacy of the common good over selfish national interest were the foundational principles fleshed out in these gatherings which spread a spirit of forgiveness and reconciliation across Western Europe.

These were the principles of the new international order that emerged in the late 40s and early 50s: the United Nations, the Council of Europe, the ECSC, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights,

For Schuman, Europe was not just a peace project for Europeans. "We are called to accomplish a spiritual and cultural mission," he wrote. "Europe itself is only the beginning of a world organisation based on freedom, equality and solidarity which we have drawn from Christian teachings." Yet he did not envision Europe as a 'Christian club' but insisted that its humanist, democratic culture was impossible without its Christian roots.

In those three short minutes he spoke of a united, collaborative Europe being able to fulfil her responsibilities towards Africa.

The relevance and significance of the Schuman Declaration 75 years later is clear. As the international order faces fresh threats from authoritarianism, polarisation, and nationalism Schuman's message takes on new urgency. Populists and autocrats seek to tear down supranational cooperation, appealing to fear and resentment. But Schuman's values – rule of law, democratic governance, respect for human dignity and human rights, cross-border solidarity – point the way forward. The institutions he helped inspire – imperfect as they are – are defenses against a return to the politics of domination and exclusion, of fear and hatred.

May 9, 1950, was a moment of grace that enabled another moment of grace 40 years later as communism collapsed and the hated Berlin Wall came down.

It inspired what I see as a third moment of grace in February 2022 when Ukrainians stood against their imperialistic aggressor and dared to believe that truth prevails, that there are things worth living and dying for. The Ukrainians have shamed the rest of us in Europe by reminding us of these values of freedom, equality, solidarity which we so easily give lip service to and take for granted, but for which they are giving their lives.

Short memories breed shortsightedness. May our memories, our consciences, our imaginations for a future, peaceful, united and inclusive Europe be stirred afresh as we reflect on the urgent significance of the Schuman Declaration today.