

The Importance of Jean Monnet For Today's Troubled World

by Mark Burdman and Michael Liebig

It has become a pressing concern in Europe, as well as elsewhere, that the nations of the Continent, growing together in the European Union, should play an effective role in the world. This concern is becoming all the greater, in light of the tragic situation in the Middle East; the debate in the United States about the possible use of pre-emptive strikes, for example against Iraq; and the problems of the world economy, linked to insufficient regulation in our globalized world.

A good reference point, for understanding and establishing an effective European role in the world, is what happened 50 years ago in Western Europe. With the support of outstanding statesmen—such as French Foreign Minister Robert Schuman, German Chancellor Konrad Adenauer, Italian Prime Minister Alcide de Gasperi, and Belgian Foreign Minister Paul-Henri Spaak—Jean Monnet, only five years after the hatred and destruction of World War II, brought together France, Germany, Italy, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg into the European Coal and Steel Community. The ECSC became a decisive factor, for the re-building and growth of Europe's war-ravaged industry; it also laid the basis for the European Economic Community, established in 1957.

A Collaborator of Monnet Reflects

We gained fascinating insights into Monnet's method and philosophy, and its implications and applications for our current troubled times, during a discussion in Belgium with Max Kohnstamm. He became a close collaborator of Monnet, first as secretary of the High Authority of the European Coal and Steel Community, later as vice president of Monnet's Action Committee for the United States of Europe. After Monnet's death, when, in the early 1980s, the process of European integration seemed to have come to a halt, Kohnstamm founded the Committee for Europe, in order to push Europe forward along the lines of Monnet's method and philosophy.

In 1938-39, Kohnstamm had, as a student, spent a year in the United States. He developed a great admiration for President Franklin Delano Roosevelt and his New Deal. Laughing, Kohnstamm told us that this had made him a life-long, non-dues-paying member of the Democratic Party. Kohnstamm confirmed that Monnet had played a crucial role in the mobilization of U.S. industry, starting in 1938, immediately after France and England abandoned Czechoslovakia to

Hitler at the Munich Conference. In that year, Monnet visited Roosevelt for the first time, at Roosevelt's home at Hyde Park, New York. After the United States had entered the war, he made a major contribution to Roosevelt's "Victory Program," which enabled the United States to become "the arsenal of democracy" that guaranteed the defeat of Nazi Germany and its Axis allies. The very term, "arsenal of democracy," used frequently by FDR, was coined by Monnet (see Jacques Chéménade, "FDR and Jean Monnet: The Battle vs. British Imperial Methods Can Be Won," *EIR*, June 16, 2000).

'Europe Must Have a Voice in the World'

Already during World War II, Monnet's strong concern was that a weak and divided Germany could become an uncertain, and therefore dangerous, bone of contention between the United States and the Soviet Union. In a note written in 1943, Monnet pointed out that the Allies had won the First World War, but had lost the peace. This time, they would again win the war, but should also win the peace. This, Monnet thought, could only be done through replacing antagonistic separate national interests and responsibilities, by the organization of common interests and responsibilities. The heavy industries of the Ruhr region of Germany, and Lorraine in northeastern France, would have to play a central role in such a process.

Did this process not imply loss of certain elements of sovereignty, and how could resistance against such loss be overcome? we asked Kohnstamm. "Part of the answer," he replied, "was the proven disastrous failure of the old way of organizing the relations between France and Germany, and among the other European states in general." To Monnet, the European Coal and Steel Community was "only the beginning of a process that would continue to organize unity, not only in economic matters, but also in matters of foreign policy, on those matters on which only common action would be able to seriously deal with the economic and political problems of our time."

Was Monnet's objective, then, to see the European Union finally become another superpower? In a speech made in London in the early 1960s, Monnet dealt with this question. "Let me cite his answer," Kohnstamm said. "One impression predominates in my mind over all. It is this: Unity in Europe does not create a new kind of Great Power; it is a method for



Jean Monnet (right), represented the French Provisional Government, at the signing of an agreement with the United States on lend-lease. Here, U.S. Undersecretary of State Joseph Grew signs the accord; on the left is French Ambassador Henri Bonnet.

introducing change in Europe, and consequently in the world. People are tempted to see the European Community as a potential 19th-Century state, with all the overtones of power that this implies. But we are not in the 19th Century, and the Europeans have built up the European Community precisely in order to find a way out of the conflicts to which the 19th-Century power philosophy gave rise. European Unity is not a blueprint, it is not a theory; it is a process that has already begun, of bringing people and nations together, to adapt themselves jointly to changing circumstances.”

Monnet, Kohnstamm continued “would, in all probability, be in favor of other regions of the world, in Latin America, Asia, and Africa, organizing themselves in the way Europe is attempting. Only then will most of these nations become able to influence their own destiny.”

For Monnet and Schuman, what was at stake in May 1950, was organizing lasting peace in Europe. To do that, the creation of institutionalized common responsibilities was essential. As a beginning of that process, they chose coal and steel—at that time, crucial areas of the European economy; and, at the same time, the symbols of power. Nearly all the functions which governments exercised over the production and consumption of coal and steel would, in the future, be exercised by a common authority. Thereby, they started a revolution in the relations between sovereign states, replacing the “balance of power” as the regulator of these relations, by the gradual building of a Community among the participating states and nations.

‘Struck Me as by Lightning’

Kohnstamm is Dutch, and had been in the Netherlands during the Nazi occupation. For some months, he was in a concentration camp; shortly after his discharge, he was arrested again, and put in a hostage camp “where we were, with the exception of those who had been shot, treated like prisoners of war.” This lasted from 1942 to September 1944. After the war, he became Private Secretary to the Netherlands’ Queen Wilhelmina. After her retirement in 1948, he served in the Dutch Foreign Office, as head of the German desk. Already in 1947, he had been part of a group, sent by the Dutch Reformed Church, to re-establish links with the German churches. When negotiations about the establishment of the European Coal and Steel Community started in Paris in the Spring of 1950, he became a member of the Dutch negotiating team.

Kohnstamm told us: “In my contacts with Germany, I had become much aware of a vicious circle my country was in. There was no chance of rebuilding the Dutch economy without accepting the rebuilding of the German economy, since our economic relations with Germany were an essential part of our economy. In practice, that meant one had to accept the rebuilding of the coal and steel industries centered in the Ruhr area. However, of what use would that be, if the Ruhr industries were again to produce bombs, to destroy Rotterdam, as had happened in 1940? How to break out of this vicious circle, became the ‘\$64,000 question.’ ”

Participating in the Allied Conference in London in 1948,

which began the transformation of the British, American, and French occupation zones of Germany into a new West German state which gradually would become independent and sovereign, Kohnstamm became more and more convinced, that “the only way to break the vicious circle, would be by some kind of integration between that new Germany and its neighbors.”

On May 9, 1950, Robert Schuman launched the Schuman Plan for the formation of a European Coal and Steel Community. Monnet had been the plan’s author; as president of the Conference which established the Treaty and later as president of the High Authority, the executive body of the Coal and Steel Community, Monnet’s vision and courage turned the Schuman Plan into a living reality.

Kohnstamm said, “In May 1950, the Schuman Plan struck me as by lightning. Here you have the solution, I thought. I then met Monnet, and was deeply impressed by him. What he intended, was revolutionary: creating binding legal links among the free nations of Western Europe. Victorious and defeated nations of World War II would participate in this European Community on equal terms. The new High Authority would oversee the development of the coal and steel industries in the Benelux countries, France, Germany, and Italy, and stimulate their growth, assuring equal access to consumers and equal rules to producers. It would, indeed, be a first step to building lasting peace in Europe.”

Kohnstamm emphasized that even such outstanding statesmen as Schuman and Konrad Adenauer would not have been able, in 1950, to conclude a peace treaty between their countries. The problem of the Saar region, on the border between France and Germany, and matters like the control of the Ruhr industries, would have made that impossible. The only way to overcome mutual hatred and fear was, according to Monnet, through the exercise of joint sovereignty, instead of national sovereignties.

A Reminder from Thucydides

In meeting Monnet, and working for and with him, Kohnstamm learned to understand the political philosophy underlying Jean Monnet’s actions. Monnet’s thinking went beyond coal and steel, beyond Franco-German reconciliation, and even beyond European states’ internal relations. Central to his thinking, was the organization of peace in this world, through a fundamental change in the structure of its international relations.

We asked Kohnstamm, what exactly he meant by “the structure of international relations.” “Let me give an example from ancient history,” Kohnstamm said. “Thucydides was the historian of the Peloponnesian war between Athens and Sparta. The island of Melos had remained neutral for several years, when Athens demanded that it become its ally—or, in reality, its vassal—or be occupied by Athens’ expeditionary force. Thucydides describes the encounter between the representatives of the people of Melos and the Athenians. The men

from Melos say that they never did any harm to Athens; why should they now be occupied? The Athenians answered: You know as well as we do that, when these matters are discussed by practical people, the standard of justice depends on the equality of the power to compel, and that means that the strong do what they have the power to do, and the weak accept what they have to accept.”

Kohnstamm asserts that whether one studies Thomas Hobbes, Immanuel Kant, or a modern thinker like France’s Raymond Aron, the definition of the structure of international relations remains the same. As Aron has written: “In their mutual relations, states are still existing in the state of nature.”

In Kohnstamm’s view, as in Monnet’s, leaving aside any moral concern, the state of nature today presents a great danger to our world. The Peloponnesian war ruined first Athens, and then all of Greece. Today America, as the only remaining superpower, is in danger of giving China, Russia, and other nations the impression that there is nothing more important than military power. Kohnstamm pointed out that when the President of the United States says that he is in favor of international law, as long as this law is in the interest of America, whatever there is of international law is dangerously weakened. Two disastrous world wars have taught Europeans that moving toward more and stronger-based structures of law, is an indispensable element toward the organization of lasting peace. In the long term, trust in the balance of power as the safeguard of peace is an illusion. That, at least, is the lesson of history. Modern weapons technology is now available in its most deadly forms not only to an ever-growing number of states, but even to individuals. This turns the organization of durable peace into the most important, but also the most difficult, challenge our world is facing today.

Monnet used to stress the dangers inherent in the human desire to dominate and to be superior to others. The competitive drive is an essential part of human nature, as is the wish and need for freedom. However, if this desire to dominate and to be superior to others, as well as the indispensable competitive drive, is not restrained by law, then there is no human community and no freedom. That is because total freedom for one person or for one state, is a constant threat to every other person or state. Kohnstamm likes to quote a famous American Supreme Court justice: “I take law very seriously, deeply seriously, because fragile as is reason and limited as law is, it is all that stands between us and the tyranny of mere will and the cruelty of unbridled, undisciplined feeling.”

This, Monnet considered true for individuals as well as for states. In Europe, states have tried to deal with the danger sovereign freedom poses, through maintaining a balance of power between them. “However,” Kohnstamm said, “this attempt to manage the anarchy resulting from the principle of sovereignty, which involves the freedom of each state to decide on peace or war, finally always fails, as it did so in Europe in 1914, and again in 1939. The balance fails because it has

one internal contradiction: For a state or an alliance to be safe, it must be just a little bit stronger than the other state or alliance. That means, that one state's or alliance's safety contains a constant danger for the other state or alliance."

Monnet and the United Kingdom

Having worked intimately with the United Kingdom in both World Wars, Monnet organized a private meeting with a few leading British civil servants, to find out whether the binding economic relations, which Monnet considered essential to the organizing of peace in Europe, could be started with the United Kingdom. The outcome of these talks was negative, and thus began the long, not-yet-ended, saga of the United Kingdom's relations with the European continent. In 1950, Britain decided not to join the European Coal and Steel Community; and when, in 1957, the European Economic Community was set up, the United Kingdom created the European Free Trade Association, as an alternative.

Kohnstamm mentioned an amusing event that took place in 1962, on one of Monnet's many trips to the United Kingdom, this time in order to discuss some of the problems that had come up during negotiations about U.K. entry into the European Economic Community. At arrival at London's Heathrow Airport, the customs officer, looking at Monnet's passport, asked, "Are we going in?" Monnet explained why, indeed, it was going to happen. The officer then looked again at Monnet, and asked, "If we get in, can we get out again?"

On the way to London, Kohnstamm recalled, Monnet said, "Sometimes I wonder whether the United Kingdom should really come in." Before I could say anything, Monnet continued: "Of course, Britain must come in. We must change that man's mind."

After French President Charles de Gaulle's veto of British membership in the EC, Monnet and his Action Committee for the United States of Europe, which had been joined by representatives of the three major United Kingdom political parties, campaigned for a new attempt toward U.K. entry into the European Economic Community. This was finally accomplished in 1972. "Alas," Kohnstamm said, "the saga, nevertheless, still goes on. Let us hope that the United Kingdom's entry into the euro-zone will one day bring the saga to a happy end!"

The Character and Personality of Monnet

During our discussions, we asked Kohnstamm, what impressed him most in Monnet's personality. Kohnstamm's response: "His openness of mind." That created an atmosphere where participants were induced not simply to negotiate, but to search together for a solution to the problem under discussion. Monnet used to say that, in negotiations, "I on this side of the table, and the other on the other side, both of us with our own positions, we may come to a compromise. But you are not sure at all that the compromise solves the problem. Only if one sits together around the problem, do you have a

chance of really finding the solution to the problem one seeks to solve."

Monnet was the exact opposite of an ideologue. He constantly searched for solutions, or at least for a process, to achieve one's objective. Often, Monnet said, "intelligence is nothing but the capacity to discover the essence of the problem under discussion." Monnet's creativity and inventiveness, Kohnstamm continued, makes it impossible to say how exactly, in the present circumstances, Monnet would have acted. However, the human person and his dignity was a constant in his thinking.

Monnet's "Socratic dialogue" approach made it possible for participants in discussions to change their minds, without losing face. Furthermore, his thinking was never parochial; on the contrary, it was always worldwide. This made it possible for him to win the trust and support, for his project of European integration, from successive American administrations—Truman's, Eisenhower's, Kennedy's.

Kohnstamm recalled, that when Monnet was president of the High Authority of the Coal and Steel Community, the door of his office was often open. When you came in, he would say, "Join us." The discussion was going on, and he made you part of it. It took a lot of your time, but you became a member of a team, and aware of the general objective to be pursued.

A Mediterranean and Mideast Water Community?

Kohnstamm is convinced that, at the present moment, with the world in grave and dangerous disarray, Monnet's "inventiveness" is needed more than ever. For the European Union, the most obvious region requiring inventive thinking is the southern shore of the Mediterranean and the Middle East, Kohnstamm said. Can we learn anything from the Schuman Plan approach to overcome the horrors and atrocities of the Israel-Palestine conflict?

"Both are imprisoned in a terrifying vicious circle of hatred and distrust. Can this circle ever be broken? Whenever the war between them, with its violence and killings, finally stops, there will remain the problem of winning the peace. Water will remain a major problem between them. Could it also be an incentive to common action? The water problem can only be solved through a massive effort to drastically enlarge the supply of fresh water. Even if nothing can be done before the mutual violence stops, it does not seem too early to start preparing to deal with the water problem. It might even help to regain some hope for the future. After all, given sufficient water, that part of the world could become a blooming garden."

We pointed out, that after the signing of the Oslo Accord in 1993, Lyndon LaRouche made a proposal for a joint Israeli-Arab water desalination program. "Interestingly enough," Kohnstamm added, "the U.S. Secretary of the Treasury, Paul O'Neill, after a tour through Africa, demanded a Manhattan

Project to deal with the water problem. That means a huge effort, over years, bringing together the most able scientists in this field, and providing them with all the means necessary. This time, it would not be a program to develop the atomic bomb in order to win the war, but a program to—once the violence is brought to an end—contribute to winning of peace.”

‘Our Philadelphia’?

To Kohnstamm, it is a crucial question, whether the ongoing European Convention, under the overall chairmanship of former French President Valéry Giscard d’Estaing, will be capable of elaborating concrete proposals, needed to enable the European Union to face up to its present formidable challenges: doubling the number of its actual 15 Member States, and dealing adequately with the internal and external security issues of our present post-Cold War world.

In 1787, the American Founding Fathers, in Philadelphia, produced a Constitution that has formed the basis on which the then-loosely connected 13 states, could begin to build what has become the United States of America. However, Kohnstamm emphasized, there are huge differences between the European Convention and the American one in Philadelphia. The European Union has to deal with, in all probability, 10 new Member States joining at the same time. These nations have been separated from the actual Union Member States, under Nazi and Communist dictatorships, for about 60 years. They have different traditions, languages, and income levels!

There is a tendency, he continued, to underestimate the difficulties the Philadelphia Convention encountered. However, the 13 states had together fought and won their war against England, and had a whole continent waiting behind them, for the gradual creation of new states that would join them. Even so, the problem of slavery, for example, could not be settled.

Will the European Union Member States have the foresight and generosity needed to arrive at enlargement, and, even more so, to make a success of it? Because, without foresight and courage, there is no chance for a positive outcome of enlargement. Necessity may provide a helping hand, because a failed enlargement would deeply wound the Union, and might even involve its unravelling.

The most fundamental decision taken at Philadelphia was the abolishing of the veto, even for the ratification of its result. Will the 15 current Member States and the 10 or more newcomers realize that, wherever the unanimity rule reigns, no decisions that may be needed on the level of the Union, will ever be taken?

Max Kohnstamm insisted that the process that, in the 1950s, began with the Schuman Plan, has given Europe 50 years of unprecedented peace and prosperity. “Let us hope,” he said, “that our present governments will not let our Founding Fathers down, and will act with the wisdom and courage present circumstances require.”