

## **Meeting of the Wyndham Place Charlemagne Trust to mark the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Schuman Declaration on 9 May 1950**

### **Speech given at the London office of the European Parliament, 20 April 2010**

I am glad to be here today to share my thoughts on how the political aspects of the Schuman Declaration have worked out in practice, and on how they might be developed in future. I am particularly glad to do so because the words of the Schuman Declaration formed the physical backdrop to my first European job at the Parliament buildings in Luxembourg. Every day I walked or rode my bicycle over the Pont Grande Duchesse Charlotte, spanning one of the town's alarmingly deep valleys. At the approach to the bridge they had erected some steel girders on which the crucial words of the Declaration were engraved: *'L'Europe ne se fera pas d'un coup, ni dans une construction d'ensemble: elle se fera par des réalisations concrètes créant d'abord une solidarité de fait.'* As I drafted the minutes for the first Conservative MEPs, and wrote briefings for them on why they should support the first EEC environmental initiatives, I realised that I was playing a very small part in creating this de facto solidarity.

As I used to emphasise to sceptical British audiences, the Schuman Declaration triggered something – the building of the European Union – that stands as a great human achievement. For me, there is something invigoratingly spiritual in the successful creation of an organisation that looks beyond the present, which had, and possibly still has, an optimistic view of human nature, and which hopes to create a better world.

Over the last 60 years we have built solidly on the Schuman foundations. We can find in this construction many of the touchstones of Christian belief – peace, generosity towards those less fortunate than ourselves, a belief in freedom, and a strong sense of social responsibility. Today 27 countries live together in the EU at a time when there are many people still alive who remember when they were at war with each other. I once reminded the Environment Committee members when they complained about the rigours of a long vote that disagreeing with each other like this was better than killing each other on the Western Front. As I went home in the Eurostar that night and looked out on the little British war cemetery by the line near Lille, I wondered what on earth those resting there would have made of what Europe had become. I hoped they would approve.

Aside from reaching a peaceful resolution of our former disputes, we have continued and enlarged the Schuman Declaration's emphasis on using the peace and the new possibilities of free trade to help the poor and to raise living standards. How has Europe done this? – Partly through the benefits of the common market, and partly through its extensive network of redistributive funds, social and regional. With our development funds we have been able to help the third world, not just Africa, which was Schuman's typically French preoccupation. More recently in a development that would have surprised and pleased Schuman, the EU has proved a pole of attraction to the newly free Eastern European states, with more to come. In global power terms the EU now has a potential role as a sturdy yet independent ally of the US and a potential counter balance to the Asian powers. Meanwhile, in a development that

Schuman could not have foreseen, the EU is taking the lead in proposing stiff environmental targets in order to deal with climate change, a development which gives it both a moral advantage and potentially a commercial one.

Looked at like this, it would appear that there has been a smooth progression from the rather limited starting point of the Schuman Declaration to the elaborate policies, distant panoramas of further enlargements, the huge and still growing staff of the institutions, and the global aspirations of the present European Union. But there is a political fly in the ointment that Schuman would have found very troubling. In many Member States people dislike the European Union that has resulted from his words.

Let me go through the litany of complaint.

First and foremost there is clearly a popular disconnection between the peoples of Europe and the institutions that make Europe work. This is worse in the old Member States than in the new because in the new the EU is regarded as an important source of funding. In the European elections of 2009, many countries saw the emergence of anti-EU parties, and at least 10 such parties won over 30 seats in the Parliament. The European institutions are seen by many as remote, unresponsive, interfering, over-powerful, overpaid and undemocratic. Folk tales, some based on fact, abound of EU interference in the permitted composition of chocolate, the new systems of rubbish collection, and so on. In Britain the EU vies with Health and Safety as a national totem of unnecessary and restrictive interference. The passing of the Lisbon Treaty has opened up a whole new area of policies where it is now possible for the EU to play a role and make proposals that affect outcomes, from sport to space travel. In many instances, as we see from the debate over the future of financial markets, the EU risks stepping into a field where it appears naive and unwilling to face the fact that the European market that it is dealing with is part of a world-wide picture where the players will simply walk away from an over-regulated Europe.

Schuman was quite clear that he saw common foundations for economic development as a first step in the federation of Europe which itself would be indispensable to the preservation of peace. The 'F' word has dogged Europe ever since, not least because of its different interpretations. From the start, common federal institutions existed in the Commission, High Assembly of the Coal and Steel Community and the Court. Initially this was one of the main reasons why the British were opposed to membership of the EEC. Later when we wanted to join, we glossed over their implications. Now European federalism is taken by many to mean the gradual down-grading of national institutions until they can only do what federal institutions permit or do not do: this is a common complaint in right wing circles about the fate of Westminster. It doesn't help when federal European enthusiasts, who see a fully federal Europe as an obvious and desired development, answer such criticisms with weary indulgence, as to children who cannot understand some inevitable coming event.

Two aspects of the post Schuman settlement in particular, the EU budget and the Common Agricultural Policy, continue to dog any chance that Britain will regard the EU in a positive light. For many years the British were uniquely disadvantaged by the budget because we

could not benefit as much from the CAP as other countries, although we were the second largest contributor to the budget. We are still relying on the ‘Thatcher’s handbag settlement’, otherwise known as the Fontainebleau agreement, to reduce our contribution, but we are very far from securing CAP reform. The Labour party election manifesto plaintively speaks of ‘Fundamental reform of the EU budget remains necessary with further changes to the CAP on the way to ending export subsidies’ thus combining two hopeless causes in one sentence. Tony Blair was promised CAP reform by 2013. We will not get it and only a minority of EU Member States is seriously pressing for it. The unreformed CAP and the skewed budget therefore remain as the bases of very fundamental resistance to the EU itself in the United Kingdom.

Are the foundations of the Schuman construction in fact sturdy? One of the ‘givens’ in his vision was the acceptance of authority – not only in the sense of the decisions of the High Authority and whatever system of intergovernmental organisation that might emerge, but more generally in the behaviour towards the united Europe of individual countries. But in fact the EU is very far from being a law-abiding community, at ease with itself. Member States are still resisting, probably illegally, the full implications of the Common Market, for example in the restrictions on foreign takeovers. Equally importantly, Member States have a hugely varied record in how far they take seriously EU legislation, to which they have signed up. The mechanisms to ensure that they do so are lengthy, patchily applied and eventually self defeating, since poor countries that cannot afford to carry through and apply certain laws, then face being fined by the Court of Justice. This all means that there exists an atmosphere of suspicion about EU law at the popular level, as in ‘why do we always obey the law while others don’t?’ Sometimes one feels ‘poor Schuman: he didn’t know what he started’.

Let me lastly give some comments drawn from my personal experience of the European Parliament over 36 years. I worked in and around the European Parliament as a civil servant and then an MEP from the time it had 198 nominated members from nine Member States until 2009 when it has 736 elected (possibly rising to 751 when someone finds a way of doing this legally) MEPs from 27 countries. I saw it acquire its own momentum, and micro-climate. Election by proportional representation on national lists determined by party leaders spread a sort of poison of separation: continental MEPs often had no sense of close representation of the people from the area or region that they served because all they needed to do to get elected was cultivate the party leaders in the capital. In this country the regions are so large, party goodwill so weak and MEPs’ time at home so little that few of their electors can name them. Meanwhile in Brussels and Strasbourg the great ship European Parliament sails on, taking on ever more staff in ever larger buildings.

Over my 36 years the Parliament has acquired very considerable legislative powers, and is now equal as a legislator with the Council of Ministers, in amending and adopting new law. So we have an undesirable situation where unknown legislators are adopting laws that people may well ultimately dislike. Not only that but the system has become so self-absorbed and bureaucratic that the process of co-decision is frequently being shortened to allow the final text of new laws to be settled in very small private meetings between a tiny delegation of MEPs and one representative of the Council Presidency. I know because I have taken part in

this, as rapporteur on an environmental directive. Secret lawmaking is thus the order of the day as being quicker and more convenient. Schuman would no doubt have recognised that bureaucracies tend to prefer such businesslike meetings to the messiness of public debate – but I doubt that he would have approved of this development. Nor should we although, as with many things European, it is difficult to see how we can stop it.

Finally I note with some despair that over my 36 years most MEPs were eager for a constant diet of new legislation, with the prospect of rapporteurships etc, and had no interest in organising themselves so as to monitor what happened to the laws they adopted. This attitude is not going to produce a Europe where we trust each other.

So what solutions can we suggest to these gradual perversions of the Schuman ideal? I can suggest three things. First if Europe wants to break out beyond its commercial beginnings then it needs to concentrate on major areas of cooperation rather than yearning to extend EU powers with all their institutional implications. We can have a common foreign and defence policy by agreement to cooperate, rather than by pretending that we will ever reach this by eliminating the national veto completely and working fully and exclusively through the European institutions. A more modest intergovernmental policy may come into being spasmodically and on an ad hoc basis but it is a realistic project. I regard the European diplomatic service as a time-wasting red herring of a policy, because the major Member States have no intention or interest in giving up their own national foreign policies and continuing to provide the means to finance them. So I would set limits to a federal Europe and I am pretty sure that Schuman as a French politician would have set them too.

Secondly I think we have to recognise that we have lived through, and will not see again, a time when the EU institutions legislated in intense detail over a very wide field in the confident expectation that all the Member States would follow what they signed up to in every detail. With 27 countries there is too much variation in economies, national practices, and the expertise of national enforcement authorities for this to happen. Getting agreement among 27 countries on any new legislation takes ages, and in an increasingly varied EU after Balkan enlargement one size certainly will not fit all. On the contrary we do need to take up the issue of repatriation and actually see whether there is some way of returning some policies to national control, or, at the very least, building in a more effective way for national parliaments to act as a long stop than what the Lisbon Treaty offers.

Thirdly I think we should give up on the idea that all the troubles of the European Parliament's remoteness can be solved by moving its meetings from Strasbourg to Brussels. The French will never agree, and it is low on the list of national government priorities, if it appears at all. Far better to re-arrange the parliamentary timetable to give MEPs more weeks when they do not have to travel, and to make it mandatory on them to hold a certain number of forums for the public in their own countries so that their links back home are strengthened. If the participation rate at the next European election continues to sink then the credibility of the parliament is in serious trouble.

I realise that I have left till very last the theme of where Christianity figures in the European debate. In a sense, for those who are Christians, it should need no particular emphasis: the message and teachings of the church should suffuse our actions. But I know the churches have looked for more and hoped for specific references in the Lisbon Treaty. In my own experience as an MEP the influence of the Christian church, or a branch of it, has only been evident during our debates on GMOs, and on treatments for human infertility. I have to say that I found the attitudes of my catholic colleagues on these issues rather unhelpful and unsympathetic.

In fact I have to report that life in the European Parliament is an almost wholly secular experience, a short-termist treadmill existence with very little time for reflection. If they had time I think many MEPs would in fact want to examine the longer-term justifications for what they are doing, – and might perhaps want to reflect on the absence of anything very much that is spiritual in their busy lives.