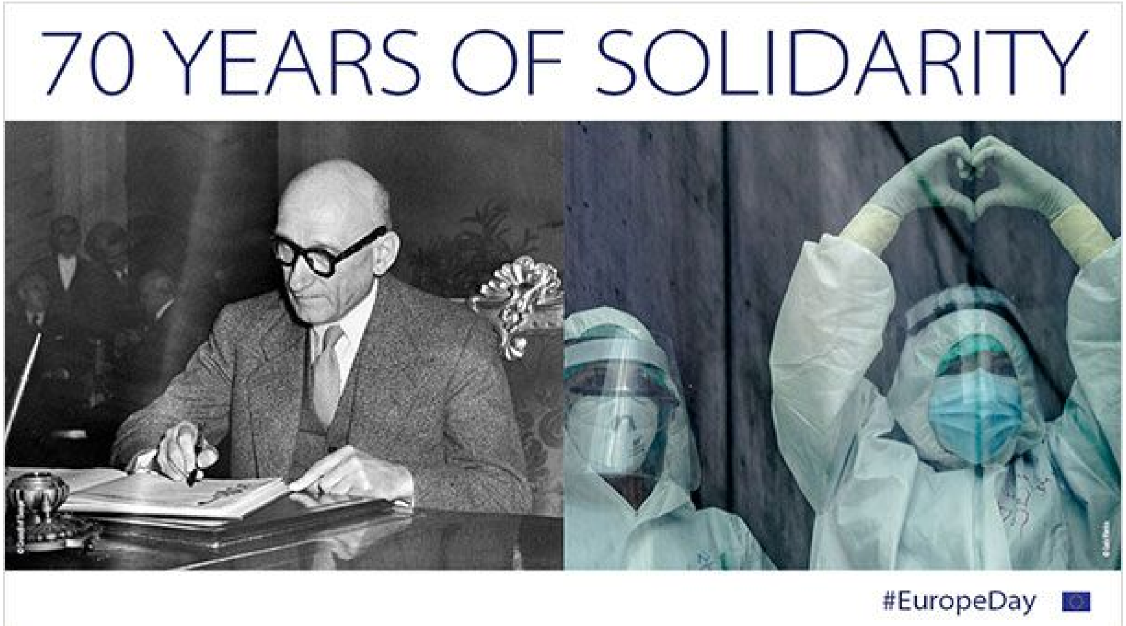
Co-funded by the
Europe for Citizens Programme
of the European Union

#changEU
E(U)LECTIONS'19
THINK DECIDE CHANGE!

1950-2020: The History of the EU



The Schuman Declaration to today

The Beginning: from Coal and Steel to the EEC

The history of the European Union begins five years after the end of the Second World War. On the 9th of May, 1950, French Foreign Minister Robert Schuman held a speech known as the Schuman declaration. In this speech, Schuman proposed Franco-German reconciliation by placing coal and steel production under a common authority. As these materials are needed to build things such as tanks, ships and guns, the communalizing of their production would make war between France and Germany "not merely unthinkable, but materially impossible".

Konrad Adenauer, chancellor of West Germany at the time, gave a positive answer to the French proposal. As Schuman made the agreement open to other countries, Belgium, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and Italy also joined and on the 18th of April, 1951, the Treaty establishing the European Coal and Steel Community was signed in Paris. As this meant that none of the participating countries could mobilize their army without the others at least knowing it, it greatly eased distrust in the post-war period.

The parties to the Treaty of Paris

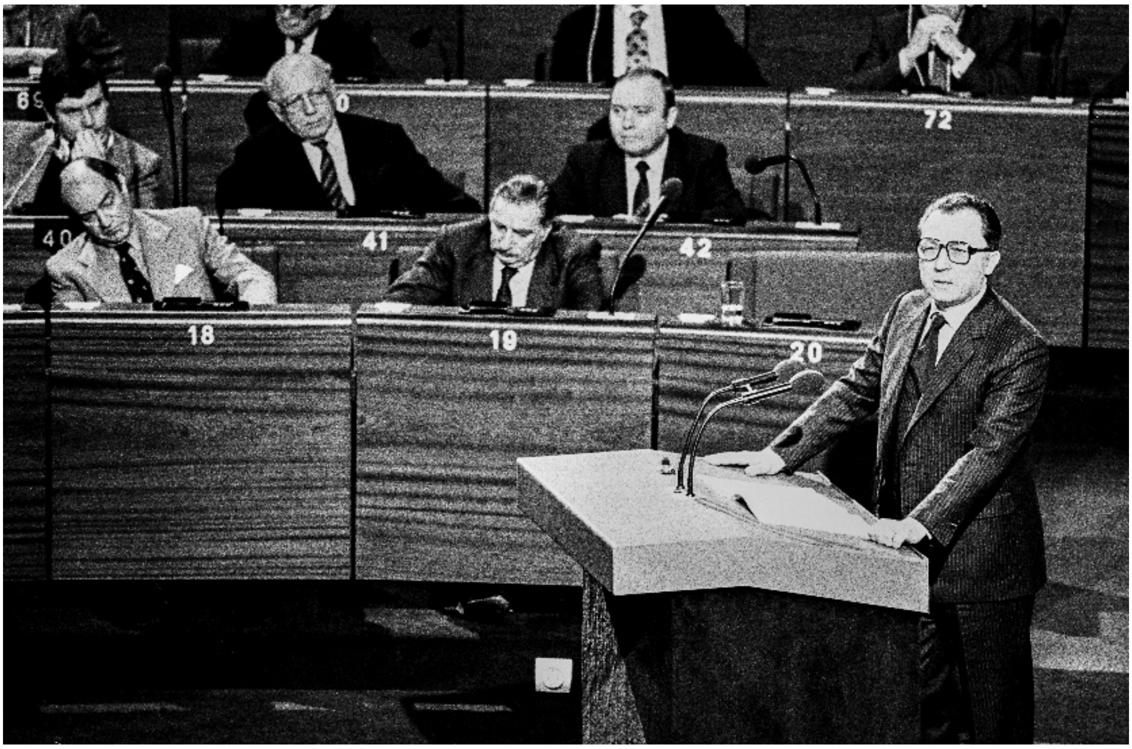
With this new-found trust in Europe, new ideas started springing up over the next years. France wanted to create an atomic energy community so the six countries could work together to generate nuclear energy for their citizens. At the same time, Germany and the BeNeLux countries wanted to create a common market. These ideas lead to the Treaties of Rome, signed on the 25th of March, 1957. These were two treaties: the Treaty establishing the European Atomic Energy Community established EURATOM, a body coordinating civil nuclear research between its signatories; the Treaty Establishing the European Economic Community and Related Instruments established the EEC, creating a customs union between the countries and thereby allowing free movement of workers and the removal of tariffs between the countries. It also defined common policies on transport, trade and agriculture. The Common Agriculture Policy or CAP was crucial. It aimed to increase productivity, establish a common, reasonable price level and to assure a fair standard of living for farmers.

Intensification: from the Merger Treaty to the European Communities

Now, there were three institutions: the ECSC, the EEC and Euratom. As they were all founded by and for the same six countries, these countries realized that the unification of these bodies could lead to increased efficiency. On the 8th of April 1965, they signed the Merger Treaty in Brussels. Through this treaty, the three institutions were merged. Furthermore, the Commission, Council, Parliament and Court of Justice were created. The commissioners were to be chosen by the heads of state of the member countries, and the role of the Commission is to propose European laws in the common interest of its members. The Council is made up of the ministers of the member states, and its role is to approve, modify or reject the proposals of the Commission. The Parliament was created to represent the people of Europe. It also gives its opinion on Commission proposals. Finally, the Court of Justice was created to rule over the legality of any decisions that are taken. Later on, in 1974 the heads of state come to an agreement to create the European Council, which is made up of the heads of state of the member states and which convenes at least three times a year to define the broad guidelines of the community. The European Parliament was elected for the first time by universal European suffrage in 1979.

After the removal of tariffs and the introduction of free movement of workers between the member states the economic situation improved rapidly. This did not go unnoticed in neighboring countries and in 1973 Denmark, Ireland and the United Kingdom acceded. After dictatorships came down in Spain, Portugal and Greece, these countries also applied for membership, which Greece would get in 1981, with Spain and Portugal acceding in 1986.

In preparation for the accession of Spain and Portugal, the member states reformed the institutions through the signing of the Single European Act, also known as the Treaties Establishing the European Communities. This is the start of the single market project. It aimed to remove all obstacles to the free movement of people, goods, capital and services between the member states. It also extended the qualified majority voting in the Council, which made it harder for a single country to veto proposed legislation and gave parliament more influence.



Jacques Delors speaking in favour of the single market

The European Union

As the countries got closer to each other, they notice that they could benefit from cooperating on more fronts than the economic one. So, the countries came together again in 1992 and on the 7th of February of that year, the Maastricht Treaty was signed. This treaty is also known as the Treaty on the European Union and established the European Union, replacing the EEC. In the European Union, there are new forms of cooperation between the EU governments, such as in defense, justice and domestic affairs. Other notable changes include the introduction of the co-decision procedure, which gave the parliament more power. While the Maastricht Treaty expanded the economic union into one which is also political, one of the main goals was to prepare for the European Monetary Union.

Three years before the Maastricht Treaty, in 1989, Germany was reunified. In the following period, the USSR collapsed and the EEC established contacts with eastern European countries.

These countries, as well as other neighbouring countries, see the benefits of the Union and a new wave of countries applies for membership. This led to the accession of Austria, Sweden and Finland in 1995, with the former USSR states still in talks at that point in time. In that same year, the Schengen agreement started to be introduced, abolishing border controls between European countries. The Schengen Agreement was incorporated in the EU through the Treaty of Amsterdam. This Treaty was the next step in the European project and was signed on the 2nd of October, 1997. It repealed the Merger Treaty and reformed the EU institutions in preparation for the arrival of future member countries. It also made decision-making more transparent.

New millennium, new member states, new currency

Around the turn of the millennium, the European Union was working on two things: preparing for the accession of the various countries who were in talks at the time, and preparing for the introduction of a common currency, to be called the Euro. The preparation for the new members was done through the Treaty of Nice. This treaty defined the new voting system in the Council, while also defining the methods for changing the composition of the commission. With these changes, the EU was prepared for the accession of 10 countries at the same time, which happened in 2004. This was the result of the collapse of the USSR, and the majority of these countries are former Soviet Union members. Two years before that, on the first of January, 2002, the Euro was officially put into circulation.

Co-funded by the
Europe for Citizens Programme
of the European Union

#changEU
E(U))LECTIONS'19
THINK DECIDE CHANGE!

The Euro was a major step in European integration

In 2004, there was an attempt at making a European Constitution. The Constitutional Treaty of Rome was signed, replacing all existing treaties with a single text. However, fearing an overly powerful European Union at the expense of national sovereignty, France and the Netherlands opposed the Constitutional Treaty via referendum. This triggered a period of reflection within the member states.

Three years later, this reflection led to the Treaty of Lisbon, signed on the 13th of December, 2007. This treaty was similar to the failed constitutional treaty of a few years before. It defined which powers belong to the EU, which belong to the member states, and which are shared. It gave more power to the Parliament, and also gave the European Council a permanent president, as well as creating a High Representative for Foreign Affairs and creating a diplomatic service. These changes were made with the aim of making the EU more democratic and better prepared to address problems with one voice, even after such an enlargement as the one in 2004. In the treaty, it is agreed that the EU's role is to promote peace, support sustainable development, fight against social exclusion and discrimination, and safeguard cultural heritage.

Co-funded by the
Europe for Citizens Programme
of the European Union

#changEU
E(U))LECTIONS'19
THINK DECIDE CHANGE!

The current situation

The Treaty of Lisbon was the last treaty for now, but this does not mean that nothing has happened. The EU has had to overcome some notable difficulties: the debt crisis, the migrant crisis, Brexit and the current COVID-19 pandemic are all severe crises which put strain on the European integration project. However, the European Union often comes out of a crisis stronger than it was before.

Currently, without counting the United Kingdom, the European Union has 27 member states, with a population of about 450 million. Negotiations are underway for the accession of new countries, mainly in the Balkan. Turkey has been in talks since 2005, but those talks have stalled. 19 countries are Eurozone members, with 6 countries having adopted the Euro without being Eurozone or EU members. The Schengen Area has 26 states, including four members outside of the EU. Cyprus, Romania, Bulgaria and Croatia are expected to integrate in the Schengen area soon.