

‘THE EUROPEAN LOBBY’: THE ACTION COMMITTEE FOR THE UNITED STATES OF EUROPE

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Abstract: Jean Monnet, ‘the Founding father of Europe’ accomplished his greatest achievement in the setting up of the European Coal and Steel Community. After the rejection of the European Defence Community by France, Monnet lost the initiative and did not really know where to continue the European journey. After the restart in Messina (1955), he found new aims to achieve and he consequently set up an Action Committee with the aim of helping realise the unity of Europe. This essay surveys the creation and the achievements of Monnet’s Action Committee.

Field of research: the life and achievements of Jean Monnet, literary translation, Shakespeare

Introduction

After the summer of 1955, Jean Monnet lost most of his direct political influence in the European political scene; he had to think about how to continue the making of Europe. In my paper, I would like to draw the lines of how Monnet translated his ideas into incentives that could possibly lead to actions, while pouring his methods and experience into a new institution, in accordance with his philosophical guideline that regarded institutions as the only possible accumulators of knowledge and experience.

1. The Coming to Life of the Action Committee

Jean Monnet resigned and handed over the chair of the High Authority of the European Coal and Steel Community to René Mayer on 10 June 1955. He returned to Paris where he installed his office in his brother-in-law’s flat. Jean Monnet was looking for an occupation but not in the public service because he was close to seventy on the one hand, and he was ‘Mr. Europe’ a symbol and embodiment of supranationalism on the other. However, there was no Europe outside the pioneer European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC). Monnet had two choices: to build up a new political background and continue the fight, or to step down entirely.

He reflected a great deal about his future and asked advice from his colleagues and acquaintances. Francois Duchene suggested that he should be a deputy in the parliament and form a ‘European party’ Monnet turned down his suggestion. Everyone knew that Monnet was working behind the scenes, yet no one knew where these scenes were. Monnet began to see the solution after discussing with two heads of the German Coal and Steel Union and with Walter Freitag, the head of the Federation of German Unions. These people revealed the following:

We are worried and do not know what to do. You stated that you would continue your work from outside politics. We saw you work in the Higher Authority two years ago, and we trust you since your actions correspond to your words. Show the way towards Europe and we will follow you. (Monnet 1978:606-607)

In a short while one could see the outlines of a committee the members of which were not certain persons but organizations. The three Germans agreed to take part in the work as delegates of their organizations.

In his records, Monnet dealt a lot with the idea of setting up this 'committee' or 'lobby' formed by leaders of political parties and unions but in no case by organizations. The invitation of employer organizations and reputable politicians to the committee was also considered. Soon the lobby got its name 'Committee for the United States of Europe' that was later altered to 'Front'. It was a process that lasted for several months till Monnet's concept took shape. The final version was a gathering of prominent people representing parties and unions not as persons but as delegates. The well-chosen and appealing name of the organization was 'Action Committee for the United States of Europe' expressing the will and personality of the founder. The basic rule of the organization was extremely simple:

It looked as though I was alone and had no means to influence the events. Yet, it was just seemingly so. In reality, I was surrounded by bona-fide people who waited for common goals that would enable them to move the political and union machinery led by them. For the satisfaction of this necessity there was no need of many facilities: an office, a telephone and a secretary were enough. (Monnet 1978:609)

Until the Messina Conference (1-2 June 1955) Monnet had not recruited members, but had manoeuvred in Europe's interest. But after setting up the programme of Messina, the dialogue between Monnet and the possible member organizations speeded up. Monnet could count on the Christian democrats and the unions. The German and French socialist party was a separate target. Monnet secretly got in touch with the members of the German Social Democratic Party (SPD) who expressed their willingness to actively contribute to the enlargement of the ECSC. After three years in the ECSC, the party was convinced about the need for further integration. Because the SPD was against nuclear arms and for the EURATOM, they joined the Action Committee in June.

The socialists were the only well-organised party in the French parliament. Once, they had been so much split over the matter of the European Defence Community that half of the group voted against the Community in order to inhibit the setting up of the German army. After the birth of the German national army, those party members had to reconsider their opinion. As a consequence the renewed party became an enthusiastic supporter of European integration and EURATOM by 1955. Monnet's relationship with Guy Mollet, the leader of the Party, was of great importance. Mollet was not against the British joining the Community, yet he had to agree with Monnet about the integration of the six member countries until the time when the British no longer wanted to be left out. Mollet and

Monnet agreed to form an alliance, where Monnet was the political mentor of the party leader.

The European Action Programme came officially to life on 13 October 1955 as a 'federative knowledge authority' (Monnet 1978:607). The presence of the SPD gave a further importance to this prominent political event declared in the six capitals at the same time. Every significant party, including the Radical Party of Mendes-France, had representatives in the European Action Committee apart from the communists, the Italian socialists led by Nenni and the French Gaullists (Fontaine 1974:35-37). The support of integration in the parliament was well over that of the 1950 level. The name of the European Action Programme included the programme and the membership promised a parliamentary majority. However, things were more difficult in practice. The weakest link was France for no one knew how the parliament would react to the treaties. Monnet's influence was increasing and he was a permanent guest in the offices of European prime ministers.

The main task of the European Action Committee was, according to Jean Monnet, 'to secure the implementation of the third Messina decision so that it constitutes a real step in creating the United States of Europe. (...) intergovernmental cooperation cannot be satisfactory by itself.' (Fontaine 1974:34-35). The main difficulty was talking France into being a supporter of integration and the Common Market. It was a great relief when 85% of the Gaullist MPs had to give up their seats as a result of the elections of January 1956. The deadlock between those who were for and against Europe came to an end when Guy Mollet was elected president.

Before the French elections, the dialogue of the six ECSC countries had only been possible in the Brussels commission led by Spaak. He carefully took into consideration the opportunities of EURATOM and the Common Market, but did not request commitment from the members. The officers working previously for Monnet in the ECSC had their lion's share in the work. Pierre Uri, who had been proposed by Monnet to Spaak, became the chief consultant of the Belgian minister. He was the one who established many of the important institutions of the new Community and converted the incredibly difficult project of EURATOM and Common Market into manageable proposals. From the setting up of the Mollet government, negotiations proceeded on various stages: first, in Brussels, second between the French and Germans, and third, there were Monnet's ambitions to guide governments with the help of the European action Committee and his American friends. In 1956 the events gained impetus. On January 18, the European Action Committee held its first session and decided about the necessity of establishing the Atomic Energy Community as soon as possible. In April, the Spaak committee published the so called Spaak Report that contained the concepts referring to EURATOM and the Common Market. The text was composed by Uri. The report was accepted as a starting point by the six member countries at the end of May and decided to start the official negotiations.

2. The European Action Committee and EURATOM

In the first phase of European integration, Monnet concentrated exclusively on the EURATOM. After Messina in the summer of 1955, he immediately started to work together with Louis Armand who had governmental connections and held leading positions in influential committees. Besides, he was an excellent lecturer. The alliance of the two became a real driving force behind EURATOM. Armand's viewpoint was that atomic energy was becoming cheaper and more competitive. On the other hand, the development was so costly that only the European countries together could afford it. However, Monnet's activity was guided by political aims as well: he wanted the atomic energy programme to become a project that inspired people's minds, not just a mere tool for producing electricity. He thought that even the USA could be overtaken in the field of atomic energy for public purposes, because America used nuclear installations mainly for military purposes. Atomic energy presented a chance for Europe to become equal partners in this field with the USA.

Monnet envisioned a EURATOM that would use atomic energy strictly for public purposes and not for atomic weapons. According to Monnet, EURATOM would control every single process in order to prevent military usages of nuclear energy. Moreover, EURATOM would be the owner and would have a monopoly in the selling and purchasing of nuclear materials. The European Action Committee accepted these basic principles at its first session on 18 January 1956. Apart from that they agreed to encourage other countries to join the organization and to support EURATOM at governmental and law-making level. Mollet signed the agreement as well as stated in his parliamentary address the necessity of preventing European countries from producing nuclear weapons and using them for military purposes. Monnet felt that his dream had come true.

Then Monnet tried to achieve the priority of EURATOM over the Common Market. In its communiqué, The European Action Committee requested the governments to submit the EURATOM treaty to the national parliaments. Europe's dependence on oil was becoming more and more obvious, which was made even clearer by the Suez Crisis. As Max Kohnstamm put it 'we had built everything on EURATOM, but the French pulled the rug from under our feet with their atomic bomb' (...) Suez was a Godly gift.' (Duchene 1994:299). Monnet dreamt of an extensive nuclear project that was not out of reach by the fall of 1956, before the signing of the treaty. During its session of September 20, the European Action Committee proposed the composition of plans, objectives and deadlines for EURATOM by a group of 'Wise Men'. The aim was a Europe self-sufficient in energy. Mollet accepted the proposal and the foreign secretaries of the six member countries appointed Etzel, Armand and Francesco Giordani 'Wise Men' On 10 December 1956, the Wise Men were invited by President Eisenhower to the United States.

After that Monnet gently directed from behind the scenes. He knew both the secretary of the Wise Men Max Kohnstamm, and their consultant the Canadian Campbell Secord. America's support was needed for the launching of the extensive plan of EURATOM. Monnet travelled to Washington in January 1957 in order to pave the way for the Wise Men who arrived in February. They were received by the president himself and everything was at their disposal.

The paper of the Wise Men entitled 'Target for EURATOM' was released in May 1957. In the paper they agreed that Europe had lost its independence in the field of energy: the members of the community would import more oil by the middle of the seventies, if nothing prevented them from doing so, than the amount of coal extracted in 1957, so 40 % of the energy supply would be secured by imports. According to the paper this kind of dependence could lead to economic catastrophe and only atomic energy could prevent that (Armand et al.1957:19).

America supported EURATOM to prevent the development of nuclear arms on the one hand, and to increase the export of reactors on the other. Nuclear materials were sold at half, and later even more cheaply, of the European prices. This made nonsense of the setting up of a European nuclear reactor. The support of the supranational EURATOM was a part of the policy that prevented the spread of nuclear energy. However, even this policy had its limits: France was allowed to possess atomic weapons. This unanimous support for the EURATOM was of great help in creating a capacity for the European atomic industry. This helped Europe as well at a time when it was uneconomical for the USA. From this point of view the European companies really overtook America.

The European Action Committee proved to be an operating organization that influenced the course of action. Its success could be partly attributed to the fact that it became a 'significant moral force' in the first years of its existence:

The history of the European Action Committee is about openness and friendship. (...) Observers are astonished to see those politicians who fight fiercely for power in their countries, sit at the same table, sign the same documents and defend them with loyalty in their national parliament or in trade union congresses. They have become a governing party from an opposition party or a majority from a minority, but their behaviour in the action Committee has not been affected by these changes. (...) In our meetings, the Christian democrats are willing to agree with the socialists who are adversaries in national politics. (Monnet 1978:619-620; 667)

Monnet led the European Action Committee in the same way as he had done with the High Authority: he and his employees were subordinated to the objectives. After the signing of the two treaties, Monnet concentrated on the rapid ratification of the two documents at the same time (at this stage he did not differentiate between the two). Everyone, including governments, appreciated the speed of the actions, because the failure of the European Defence Community was a searing memory, and they did not want to miss the golden opportunity. Mollet submitted the text to the parliament just one week after the signing of the treaty.

Monnet's Action Committee issued a communiqué in May in which it urged the finalising of the ratification before the summer break. The Action Committee thus reached its goal with the objectives of the Messina Treaty becoming a reality. So the emerging question was which way to go? Monnet asked the members of the Action Committee whether to end their activity. The answer was to carry on for a few more years. Then he asked again but the members hesitated and responded that the Action Committee was 'special in its nature', 'it

formulates concrete and precise proposals' and it presents a unique opportunity for confidential talks. In a word it has to live on.

3. The Further Activity of the Action Committee

The question was still there about what to do. For a long time, Monnet was for the partial integration urged by himself. Yet, after the Treaty of Rome, in the hope of achieving political goals soon, his favourite starting point was the Common Market. Now Monnet had the choice to build his objectives around Europe's most important goals: monetary and political union. He also engaged in finding a role for the Community in the world.

First, he brought up his favourite concept, the establishing of the European District. His idea came at the right moment at a time when three communities were working. On 25 November, (Fontaine 1974:80) the Action Committee took the decision to relocate the institutions of the three Communities to an accessible place for everyone, and to establish the District. So the first goal of the Action Committee led by Monnet was to set up the District but its location was still a question. First, the French Compiègne seemed to be a good place, but it was too close to Paris. Second, the French town of Strasbourg and the German town of Kehl came into question, but they were rejected by the other four countries. Etzel and Kohnstamm voted for Luxembourg and managed to persuade Monnet as well. Joseph Bech, the prime minister of Luxembourg, declined the proposal but still wanted to host the existing ECSC institutions. The Belgians wanted to acquire the new communities for Brussels. The course of events made it thus impossible to locate all institutions at one place.

In the beginning of January 1958, the institutions of the European Economic Community (EEC or the Common Market) and of EURATOM started to work. The EEC was chaired by Walter Hallstein, a 56-year-old German. This was a joyful event for Monnet and also a notable achievement 12 years after the Second World War. The fact that the appointment of a German caused no upset, proved the giant leap since the Schuman Plan. In January 1958, the foreign secretaries got together to decide upon the seat of the communities. They agreed with the Action Committee and came to terms with the European District, but could not make a decision about the exact place of the Communities. The new communities were thus located in Brussels 'for the time being' and the ECSC remained in Luxembourg 'for an uncertain time' Monnet never pardoned Bech. The Belgians attacked Monnet and accused him of being a French nationalist for being against Brussels. His answer was simple: 'I did not want the District to stand in Brussels' way. The people who wanted to divide the institutions between Brussels and Luxembourg, those amplified the conflict between Brussels and the District' (Fontaine 1978:82). The idea of the District seemed natural with the establishment of the new Communities. Monnet wanted to separate the centre of the Communities from the country it is situated in. Seeing the aimless argument he gave up his idea of the District.

The case of the European District ended Monnet's activity as institution organiser. From that time on, he concentrated almost exclusively on political aims. Not long after the argument about the District, Monnet well forerun everyone with his new proposal. In 1958,

he brought up the concept of a monetary union that would pave the way for political unity via eco-political harmonisation. Monnet started to deal with the idea of the monetary union during the monetary crisis caused by the war in Algeria. Felix Gaillard, first finance later prime minister, asked Monnet for advice about the handling of the crisis and also to acquire dollar-base credits to stabilize the situation. Monnet gave a characteristic answer: France's problems could only be solved in a European framework. Together with his co-workers Uri, Marjolin and Delouvrier, he drafted a proposal in which they suggested the creation of a 'European Stabilization Fund'

The new Communities had not been working for half a year when French internal politics was shaken by an earthquake: on 1 June 1958, General de Gaulle came back in to power with a legal coup d'état. The Fourth Republic incapable of solving the Algeria Crisis collapsed. Although he could only finish the war in 1962, it was clear that de Gaulle was in control in every other respect. As a consequence, the politicians supporting European integration had to retreat: 'We are not in the era where Monsieur Monnet could command' said de Gaulle to Etienne Hirsch, one of Monnet's collaborators. (Duchene 1994:315) De Gaulle's first minister Michel Debré absolutely hated Monnet and his ideas. Hardly had European integration started, when the nationalists opted for disintegration. Starting from 1958 the devotees of Europe were on the defence and control went out of their hands. They were not in a majority any more and could only influence politics indirectly.

Yet, Monnet was accustomed to changing circumstances. He actively took part in politics and public life. Moreover, he maintained a close relationship with the new foreign secretary Maurice Couve de Murville and continuously looked for new opportunities. The future of a unified Europe was uncertain. The example of the High Authority loomed in front of the Euro sceptics' eyes: the organization was no longer in control after the coal crisis of 1957-58. The Schuman Plan stated that in an 'obvious case of emergency' the High Authority can turn to the Council of Ministers to request the approval of the extraordinary regulations. However, the coal extracting and producing countries could not agree in that case. The High Authority turned to Monnet for help. Monnet advised it to calm down, to work for the common European energy policy and issue a communiqué about governments sabotaging the resolution. In May 1959, the Action Committee asked the High Authority as well as the Committees of the Common Market and EURATOM to set up an action team to formulate the underlying principles. This undertaking came to an end when the team was set up in October but was subsequently rejected by the Council of Ministers. Under different circumstances it would have been easy to prove that the main problem was the veto of the nations and the Schuman Treaty might have been modified in consequence.

4. Partnership with the USA and Great Britain

On 4 June 1962, President J.F. Kennedy stood up for the equal partnership of the USA and the uniting states of Europe. As he put it in his talk: 'The USA watches with hope and admiration Europe's great undertaking. We see our partner and not our rival in a strong and unified Europe' (Monnet 1978:703). The cooperation was of strategic importance because it could prevent de Gaulle from dividing the West on the border of the Anglo-Saxon powers and continental Europe. America secretly hoped that England would strengthen the New

World's influence on the new Europe. However, the most important thing was the necessity of creating such an institutional system capable of solving the global economic and political problems. Kennedy was not quite as interested as his predecessors in European affairs, but he was fond of Monnet and was fascinated by the European Community. The partnership was a chance for Europe to develop in agreement with America.

Monnet worked ceaselessly on the cornerstones of the American-European relations. He was looking for such fields where the support of the Community was unanimous (e.g. EURATOM) in order to strengthen the community institutions and to enhance Europe's equal partnership with America. Monnet pulled out again the plan of the European Reserve Fund that would hopefully control 20 per cent of the member states' funds, directing the member states towards forming a common monetary policy. The European Action Committee stated that the relations of the European Economic Community and Great Britain should be solved in the larger western context. Round-table discussions and the setting up of the Reserve Fund were also proposed (Fontaine 1974:91-92).

The crest of the integration wave was Kennedy's speech. Nationalistic forces seemed to lose ground. The world economy was prospering and the Common Market was well known in the 1960s. The meagre post-war years had dimmed away, confidence was growing among western countries in finding the proper answer to the challenge of the eastern block. The dark side of that was the increase of nationalism that followed economic prosperity. The forerunner of this way of thinking was de Gaulle himself who believed there to be only winners and losers in international politics. For the general, integration and partnership were equal to a disguised building of an American empire. Most people thought that the spread of de Gaulle's ideas had to be stopped.

England's request for accession to the European Community raised new problems. Monnet stated that England's accession was unavoidable. Drawing the conclusions from the previous negative experiences, Monnet urged talks and suggested that the treaty should be 'signed now, and later discussed', in other words to decide and discuss about the most important basic principles and the rest should be resolved within the Common Market (Mayne 1970:265). Later Prime Minister Macmillan agreed as well. However, the English delegates insisted on discussing the terms of accession in detail, which led to lengthy talks. At the end of 1962, Monnet decided to end the debate, but it was too late. De Gaulle slowly escaping from the burden of the Algerian War, though never stating it openly, vetoed Great Britain's EC accession. The astonishment was huge. Monnet had never been angrier. De Gaulle launched an open assault on western politics.

From that time on, de Gaulle's presidency was characterised by overt hostilities. There was a chance that he may spread nationalism to Germany and give away the west against the Soviet Union. Monnet accused de Gaulle of playing a double game against Germany. 'The time for expectation has come. (...) Nothing is chanced, but everything is delayed' Monnet wrote (1978:692). He and the Action Committee set themselves the task of maintaining Germany's devotion to the Community. On 13 January 1963, Adenauer went to Paris to sign the Franco-German treaty of amity. Monnet felt that de Gaulle wanted in reality to sabotage European integration with the treaty. Therefore, he tried to convince the

chancellor to sign the treaty only if France was willing to continue talks with Britain. Unfortunately, Adenauer did not listen to him. After that, America tried to persuade Germany to distance itself from de Gaulle's politics. The guarantees of the United States of America were more important for Germany than its relations with France. Still, they gave in only partly: the Germans ratified the treaty because they did not want it to seem as though they declined France's friendship. However, before the ceremony, they attached to the treaty a long preamble that morally denied France.

In December 1965, the presidential election was held in France. De Gaulle's attacks on the Community had done him more harm than he thought. Especially farmers voted against him. Moreover, Monnet himself officially stated that he would vote against de Gaulle. 'The politics followed by France (...) and limitation of Brussels direct us onto the outdated road of nationalism. (...) the future of France can only be Europe' (Monnet 1978:730). In the first round de Gaulle got 44 per cent of the votes, which was humiliating for him. In the second round, Monnet voted for Francois Mitterrand, who got 45 per cent of the votes and secured an unconvincing victory for de Gaulle.

Before the crisis brought about by de Gaulle, the decision was made that the institutions of the three Communities would be drawn together. This way, only a Commission and a Council of Ministers would operate in the three organisations besides the Court of Justice and the Parliament. This was, as a matter of fact, the readopting of the 1969 proposal of the Action Committee. The unification of the three Communities in 1967 signalled that the politics of the Common Market based on general economic cooperation swallowed Monnet's politics based on partial integration. The Action Committee broke every connection with de Gaulle and Couve and held its meetings in Bonn, Berlin and Brussels. Monnet was in internal exile and his telephone conversations (he suspected but paid no attention) were intercepted. Together with his team, he worked on accepting the accession of Great Britain in every parliament. He was given a standing ovation in the Bundestag. The Action Committee was successful in becoming the conscience of Europe in some respects and an unofficial opposition. No one left the alliance, but even the socialists of Pietro Nenni and the republicans of Valéry Giscard d'Estaing joined the Committee. Three of England's great parties joined the organization as well. Monnet was even surprised at that: 'We lead them from one defeat to the other and they are still here in our meetings and sign our declarations' (Duchene 1994:334).

Then, the Action Committee gained momentum again. In 1968, student riots and strikes shook the power of de Gaulle. Every sign indicated that the French had had enough of de Gaulle's ten-year reign. The payments meant to stimulate morale unleashed inflation, and the Franc, the apple of de Gaulle's eye, had to be devalued. French grandeur was useless when faced with the economic power of Germany. In 1969, the General made a desperate approach towards England: he proposed joint Anglo-French governance of a diluted Common Market. This time the British rejected the proposal. The completely isolated general resigned in April 1969.

5. The End of the Action Committee

After de Gaulle left office, Europe was given a new opportunity. Monnet resumed his role as ingenuous man. It was Willy Brandt and Edward Heath, his old comrades, who stood behind the steering wheel in Germany and England. Georges Pompidou, who followed de Gaulle in the presidential office, stood up for the 'completion, deepening and enlargement' of the Community (Fontaine 1974:191). Great Britain's way to Europe was paved now, and the monetary and political union could be continued, as well. In 1969-1970, the six member countries restarted the machine of integration in the Hague. They set themselves the task of establishing economic and monetary union by 1980.

However, the world had changed significantly. The governments and administrations, largely because of de Gaulle's influence, did not allow interference in their affairs. The age of economic wonder had come to an end and almost every country was facing financial difficulties. The Common Agricultural Policy was in ruins. Monnet was over eighty then. He came out once more with the concept of the European Resource Fund, but it was vetoed by the German Minister of Finance who said that, contrary to Monnet's opinion, it was the economic and not the financial union that had to be created first. In 1978 the Chancellor Helmut Schmidt inspired by Monnet's memoirs made a proposal to set up the European Monetary System.

The only important change was that Pompidou accepted Great Britain's accession to the Community. On 1 January 1973, England together with Ireland and Denmark became members of the European Communities. But then things went from bad to worse. In October 1973, the Yom-Kippur war broke out in the Middle East. Egypt and Saudi Arabia attacked Israel to force negotiations about the return of the lands lost in 1967. An immediate oil embargo was implemented in the hope of western pressure on Israel. This did not happen, yet a more important impact of the war was felt for a long time: the oil crisis of 1973-1974 influenced negatively the thirty-year steady growth of the European economy.

Even then, Monnet was not at rest. He proposed the establishing of an international system that would enable the distribution of oil among the countries of the Community. Germany accepted the proposal, while France and Great Britain did not. In September 1974, Monnet raised the question of the regular summit meetings of the head of governments to the new French President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing. 'What the European affairs lack the most is power. Discussions have rules, while decisions do not' Monnet wrote (1978:776). Giscard himself was thinking about a similar plan and he was finally persuaded by Monnet's arguments to take action. In the summit meeting of December he brought up three plans. The most ambitious was to organise regularly prime ministerial meetings with the name of 'European Council'. The other two were proposals with reference to the Treaty of Rome: the first about the direct universal suffrage for election to the European Parliament (since 1962 the name of the Assembly), and the second about the reintroducing of majority voting in the Council of Ministers. Great Britain was against the majority voting. The Council was not operating as successfully as one might have thought. 'Europe will be in trouble. But whoever thinks that there is progress without difficulties, that person is wrong.' wrote

Monnet. He responded to the journalists who questioned him about what to do by exclaiming: 'Continue, continue, continue!' (Monnet 1978:777).

In 1975 the European Action Committee had been operating for 20 years. In the first years, Monnet was a quasi government member and was one of the most influential specialists. After de Gaulle's coming to power, Monnet lost his influence in France but he was highly esteemed everywhere else. The Action Committee had worked for achieving one objective up to that time, but after that it worked on several projects simultaneously. It had functioned as a political lobby, but with de Gaulle stepping up it lost its active political role and could only formulate statements and proposals. The main idea of the Action Committee was the concept of the Atlantic partnership. Its most important achievement was, however, the continuous maintaining of the spirit of integration after the crisis of 1965.

In reality Monnet's wartime generation was disappearing from the political arena. In 1975 Monnet was already 87 years of age. His health and mental freshness were declining. In February 1975 he had serious pneumonia. On 9 May, at the 25th anniversary of the Schuman Plan the activity of the Action Committee came to an end. Jean Monnet thought that he had accomplished his task: 'passed on a significant part of his vital energy to the living organisation of the Community' (Monnet 1978:780). He reflected at length about his possible follower (the name of Willy Brandt came in question for a short while), then he decided not to pass the torch to anyone. Instead, he wrote a letter to every member in which he announced the end of the Action Committee.

Conclusion

What Jean Monnet achieved as leader of the Action Committee may at first sight seem meagre. His greatness lies not in completed achievements, though; by keeping the concept of Europe continuously in the public opinion, he managed to form a background for those politicians who wanted to continue to work for common European goals. He maintained his role as the 'Inspirer' of leading politicians, giving advice, warning and encouraging them. The Action committee seems to be an almost invisible but necessary complement to the political institutions of the early European communities. by doing so, the Action Committee handed its methods and influence over to the functioning Communities as a part of its own work. If there is an outstanding achievement in what Monnet has done, this is surely one of them.

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